



History

Kilimanjaro - one of the world's seven summits and the highest point in Africa (5895m) - is instantly recognized by people all over the world. This almost perfectly shaped, snowcapped volcano rises sheer from the plains, and is one of Africa's most magnificent sights.

For many years, Kilimanjaro's white peak was a mystery to the local people to whom snow and glaciers were unknown. The first recorded sighting of the mountain dates back some seven hundred years when a Chinese fisherman wrote of a white peak on the African coastline. The outside world knew nothing about the mountain before 1848 when the Swiss missionary Johannes Rebmann became the first European to lay eyes on Kilimanjaro. He reported his discovery of a snow-peaked mountain in East Africa to the Royal Geographical Society in London, but nobody believed him. In 1897, the German explorer Hans Meyer and his Chagga guide, John Lauwo, became the first recorded people to successfully summit Kilimanjaro. One hundred years later a celebration was held to mark the centenary of this event - the guest of honor was the original local guide. He was 118 years old!

After Tanzania achieved its independence in 1961, Kilimanjaro was transformed into a National Park. Covering some 7,500 square kilometers, it is now listed as a World Heritage Site. Currently, about 24,000 people a year attempt to climb Kilimanjaro. Official records state that about 15% make it to the summit.



Mount Kilimanjaro National Park - <http://www.tanzaniaparks.com/kili.htm>

Kilimanjaro. The name itself is a mystery wreathed in clouds. It might mean Mountain of Light, Mountain of Greatness or Mountain of Caravans. Or it might not. The local people, the Wachagga, don't even have a name for the whole massif, only Kipoo (now known as Kibo) for the familiar snowy peak that stands imperious, overseer of the continent, the summit of Africa.

Kilimanjaro, by any name, is a metaphor for the compelling beauty of East Africa. When you see it, you understand why. Not only is this the highest peak on the African continent; it is also the tallest free-standing mountain in the world, rising in breathtaking isolation from the surrounding coastal scrubland – elevation around 900 metres – to an imperious 5,895 metres (19,336 feet).

Kilimanjaro is one of the world's most accessible high summits, a beacon for visitors from around the world. Most climbers reach the crater rim with little more than a walking stick, proper clothing and determination. And those who reach Uhuru Point, the actual summit, or Gillman's Point on the lip of the crater, will have earned their climbing certificates. And their memories.

But there is so much more to Kili than her summit. The ascent of the slopes is a virtual climatic world tour, from the tropics to the Arctic. Even before you cross the national park boundary (at the 2,700m contour), the cultivated footslopes give way to lush montane forest, inhabited by elusive elephant, leopard, buffalo, the endangered Abbot's duiker, and other small antelope and primates. Higher still lies the moorland zone, where a cover of giant heather is studded with otherworldly giant lobelias.

Above 4,000m, a surreal alpine desert supports little life other than a few hardy mosses and lichen. Then, finally, the last vestigial vegetation gives way to a winter wonderland of ice and snow – and the magnificent beauty of the roof of the continent.

About Kilimanjaro National Park

Size: 755 sq km (292 sq miles). Location: Northern Tanzania, near the town of Moshi.

Getting there: 128 km (80 miles) from Arusha. About one hour's drive from Kilimanjaro airport.

What to do: Six usual trekking routes to the summit and other more-demanding mountaineering routes. Day or overnight hikes on the Shira plateau. Nature trails on the lower reaches. Trout fishing. Visit the beautiful Chala crater lake on the mountain's southeastern slopes.

When to go: Clearest and warmest conditions from December to February, but also dry (and colder) from July-September.

Accommodation: Huts and campsites on the mountain. Several hotels and campsites outside the park in the village of Marangu and town of Moshi.

NOTE: Climb slowly to increase your acclimatization time and maximize your chances of reaching the summit. To avoid altitude sickness, allow a minimum of five nights, preferably even more for the climb. Take your time and enjoy the beauty of the mountain.