

KILIMANJARO – SHIRA ROUTE
~VIA THE SOUTHERN CIRCUIT/BARAFU CAMP~
6 DAYS / 5 NIGHTS on the mountain

Route Description

The Shira route is one of the least used initial ascent routes on Kilimanjaro, partly because of its remote location. The trailhead is at high elevation, and thus we start slow and easy on this route. We begin our trek in the heather zone, bypassing the wet forest behind, and immediately find ourselves on the first day of the trek on the Shira Plateau. We begin the hike at Morum Barrier Gate at nearly 12,000 ft. (3600 m). The first day is short, to begin the acclimatization process. The next two days are spent hiking across the plateau, which is said to be one of the most stunningly beautiful hikes in Africa. The trail merges on day three of the trek with the Machame Route, and from this point all three trails continue to Lava Tower, and then down into the Great Barranco Valley, where the Umbwe route joins steeply from the south. From here, the trail circumvents counter-clockwise around the upper slopes of the Kibo massif, over the high-desert ridges to the Karanga Valley, then to an exposed campsite set on a high ridge; Barafu (meaning literally “ice” in Kiswahili). From Barafu Camp we make our overnight attempt at Africa’s highest peak...an experience that few ever forget. The route as per this itinerary is the longest distance to trek up Kilimanjaro, so fitness certainly plays a role in the enjoyment and success of this trek. We start slow, and gain altitude slowly for the first four days, then the physical and mental demands increase. The trek from Barranco to Barafu and then the overnight trek to the summit is a serious challenge due to the short amount of time to rest before the overnight summit attempt. Overall, the distance covered and the intensity of the final few days make this trek a good choice only for the experienced hiker. The many changes of scenery and spectacular hike across the Shira Plateau make this trek truly special. There are no huts on this route; the accommodation is in mountain tents and dining is in our mess tents. Toilet tents with convenient and sanitary portable flush toilets are set up at each camp.

Daily Itinerary

DAY 1 MORUM BARRIER GATE (12,362 ft./ 3,768 mt.) ~ SHIRA 1 CAMP (12,200 ft./ 3,720 mt.)

Departure from Arusha will be at around 7:30am for Londorossi gate, about 4 hours, where you will complete entry formalities. Then continue up by car to Morum Barrier Gate (another hour to reach the trailhead). Upon arrival at trail-head, eat lunch, then commence through heather and moorland which lead to the first camp, (which is a descent) only about 1-2 hours of trekking. The view of Kibo from across the plateau is stunning.

DAY 2 SHIRA 1 CAMP ~ SHIRA 2 CAMP (12,600 ft./ 3,950 mt.)

Full day exploration of the Shira plateau; Trek east toward Kibo's glaciated peak, with the option to visit the ancient collapsed Shira cone, the oldest of Kilimanjaro's three volcanoes. Arrive at Shira 2 camp (Fischers's Camp), at 12,600 ft. Shira is one of the highest plateaus on earth, averaging 12,500 feet. Trekking time without the optional excursions is about 3 hours.

DAY 3 SHIRA 2 CAMP ~ BARRANCO CAMP (12,950 ft./ 3,950 m)

Proceed steadily upward over expansive ridgelines of high desert to Lava Tower, for lunch. The trek is about 4 hours. Lava Tower, a 300 foot volcanic plug, marks an exposed pass at 15,000 feet. In the afternoon, descend the steep track into the Great Barranco Valley. Barranco Camp is set in a valley enclosed on three sides with the massive valley walls and the Kibo massif itself. Hanging glaciers glint in the sunshine above, amidst the eerie landscape of plants such as the giant groundsels (Senecio Kilimanjari), and the uniquely endemic Giant Lobelia. Trekking time is 6-7 hours.

DAY 4 BARRANCO CAMP ~ BARAFU CAMP (15,200 ft./ 4,630 m)

The day begins with a scramble up the steep 'Barranco Wall', then traversing up and down the slopes of valleys which have carved their way into the mountain's southern face. Kibo's glaciers loom above to your left and the jagged peaks of Mawenzi jut into the African sky at just under

17,000 feet straight ahead. We reach the Karanga Valley after 3-4 hours of trekking to find a hot lunch served. In the afternoon the trail turns steadily uphill. The temperature will grow colder and the landscape more sparse as we near Barafu Camp. Barafu Camp is set on a small, exposed flat area on a ridge, acting a base camp from which you will make your summit attempt at midnight tonight. Eat and drink as much as possible before retiring to your tent for rest and sleep.

DAY 5 BARAFU CAMP ~ UHURU PEAK (19,340 ft./ 5,895 m) ~ MWEKA CAMP (10,200 ft./ 3,110 m)

The steaming hot drink will arrive very early on this momentous day. A midnight wake-up call is the start of a juggernaut (12-17 hours of trekking). You begin trekking at 1am. The temperatures range from just below freezing at midnight, to between 10 deg. F (-12 deg. C) to -10 F. (-23 deg. C) just before dawn at the summit. The winding path of endless switchbacks will take form and shape in the shadows of the Ratzel and Rebman glaciers at early dawn, and behind you the spires of Mawenzi will be silouhettted against the red glow of the sun from beneath the clouds. After about 6 hours of walking, you will come to the edge of the crater; Stella Point, at 19,000 feet (5,790 m) on the crater rim is the end of the steep track. From here, there is a gentle slope about 1 hour to Uhuru Peak. The strength it takes to ascend this final 340 feet is for many monumental. After a short time at the summit, descend the steep scree trail back to Barafu Camp for some rest, then summon your strength again for further descent to Mweka Camp for the night.

DAY 6 MWEKA CAMP ~ MWEKA GATE (6,000 ft. /1,830 m)

Descend straight to the gate (2-3 hours), where you'll have lunch and will be awarded climbing certificates.
