

KILIMANJARO – UMBWE ROUTE
~VIA THE WESTERN BREACH~
6 DAYS / 5 NIGHTS on the mountain

Route Description

The Umbwe Ridge Route is without question the steepest approach route on Kilimanjaro, and for that reason, seldom used. Stemming from Umbwe village on the south side of the mountain, the path leads through thick forest onto a steeply climbing ridge, with the vast Barranco Valley dropping down just off the trail to the right. It is only suitable for those in excellent physical condition, and only for experienced hikers. The first night is in the forest, and on the second day, once we rise into the moorland, the trail offers stunning views of the glaciers and the summit which make it appear “overhead”. At the end of day two, the trail reaches Barranco Camp, where you’ll experience magnificent moorland scenery. From here, the trail continues up the Great Barranco Valley to Lava Tower, a rock formation at a mountain pass at 15,100 ft. (4,600 mt.). The next day continues steeply up to Arrow Glacier, which lies at the foot of the Western Breach Wall. At midnight we scramble up the steep Western Breach route, and by dawn reach the crater edge near the summit of Kilimanjaro. We’ll walk past the retreating vertical ice walls of the Furtwangler Glacier, then continue 1 to 1-1/2 hours to the summit. The trek up the Breach Wall is done on slopes of about 45%, with sections of scrambling and occasionally some snow and ice. Overall, this is one of the most seldom-travelled combination of routes. 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 all camps.

Important notes:

The steepness and terrain of this route combination makes it only suitable for homogenous groups (where every member has similar fitness levels and experience). All those who plan to attempt this must have prior experience scrambling on steep slopes. There is significant danger of rockfall on this route. We provide helmets to all climbers, guides, and porters. No-one has the medical condition “vertigo” will be allowed to climb this route.

Daily Itinerary

DAY 1 UMBWE GATE ~ UMBWE FOREST CAMP (9,500 ft./ 2,900 mt.)

The climb commences at the small gate above Umbwe Village, then for an hour winds along a gentle 4 x 4 track until a signboard announces a small steeply rising trail called “Umbwe”. Six hours ascending through the dense forest of rubber trees and giant fig trees, scrambling up steep sections of roots and rock will bring you to a forested campsite, with some caves nearby. Arrive to a hot dinner in your mess tent.

DAY 2 UMBWE FOREST CAMP ~ BARRANCO CAMP (12,950 ft./ 3,950 mt.)

You will be woken with a steaming cup of tea or coffee at around 6am, and then continue steeply through the forest. Soon the taller trees will give way to Giant Erica and Giant Heather, and the air will become drier. The ridge line forms steeply on this day, and on either side of the trail, the ground drops away steeply. At some point the forest and the clouds will part to give you a fabulous view of Uhuru Peak, seemingly “overhead”. After lunch, you will encounter giant groundsels, seemingly guardians of untouched treasures. After 6 to 8 hours of trekking and scrambling, you reach camp. There are numerous tiny waterfalls around camp, fed by streams coming down the Great Barranco Valley. Hanging glaciers glint in the sunshine above, amidst an eerie landscape of groundsels (Senecio Kilimanjari), and the uniquely endemic Giant Lobelia.

DAY 3 BARRANCO CAMP ~ LAVA TOWER CAMP (15,000 ft./ 4,570 mt.)

Proceed up the steep walls of the Barranco Valley, through a forest of giant groundsels and then into the alpine desert to Lava Tower. The trek is about 4 hours. The campsite is set at the base of Lava Tower. There’s an option to scramble to the top of Lava Tower for fabulous panoramic views, and a different perspective of your campsite.

DAY 4 LAVA TOWER CAMP ~ ARROW GLACIER CAMP (16,100 ft./ 4,905 mt.)

A 1.5 to 2 hour-trek up a steep, boulder-strewn path bring us to Arrow Glacier camp, at the foot of the great Western Breach. From this campsite rises the steep trail up to the crater. The massive headwall of the breach glows a warm red in the afternoon sun, while you rest in camp in preparation for the most challenging day ahead.

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

An 11:30pm wake-up call begins the trekking day, and after a hot breakfast we begin to ascend the Western Breach just after midnight, which will take approximately 5 to 8 hours. Upon reaching the crater rim at dawn, we'll be treated to a stunning view of the Northern Icefields, the Furtwangler Glacier, and Uhuru Peak itself. We'll walk about 30 minutes across the flat, soft sands near the retreating vertical ice walls of the Furtwangler glacier. From here we'll continue to the summit, which will take another hour. After a short time at the summit, descend the steep scree trail to Barafu Camp (15,100 ft. / 4,600 mt.) for lunch, then continue the descent into the Heather Zone to Mweka Camp for the night. The trekking time from Uhuru Peak to Mweka Camp will be from 5 to 8 hours, and the total trekking time on this day is 11 to 17 hours.

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

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