

KILIMANJARO – UMBWE ROUTE
~VIA BARAFU CAMP~
6 DAYS / 5 NIGHTS on the mountain

Route Description

The Umbwe 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 alpine terrain and a mix of hiking and scrambling. 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 you 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, which is part of what is commonly called the Machame Route, (camp #3 on the Machame Route) and continues along the remainder of the Machame Route until reaching Barafu Camp. From here we make our overnight attempt at Africa’s highest peak. Due to the steep and rugged terrain and limited acclimatization time, fitness and endurance play a huge role in the enjoyment and success of this trek. 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.

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 4x4 track until a signboard announces the 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. There is no water available at this campsite, so we must carry from the gate all the water needed for drinking, food preparation and cleaning. 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 after breakfast continue steeply through the forest. Soon the taller trees will give way to Giant Erica and Heather, and the air will become drier. The ridge line forms steeply on this day, and on either side of the trail, the terrain 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 5 to 7 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 ~ KARANGA CAMP (13,100 ft./ 3,995 mt.)

Today we trek to Karanga Valley Camp, at 13,000 feet (3,950 mt.), between Barranco and Barafu Camps. This day has proven to be very important for acclimatization. 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 for a hot lunch. Afternoon to relax or to take excursions from camp.

DAY 4 KARANGA CAMP ~ BARAFU CAMP (15,200 ft./ 4,630 mt.)

From here 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. Total trekking time is 4-5 hours, with a hot lunch upon reaching camp. The afternoon is yours to

rest and prepare for the long night ahead. Eat and drink as much as possible before retiring early to your tent for rest and sleep.

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

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 silouhetted 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, at Stella Point (at 19,000 feet (5,790 mt.)), which marks the end of the steep track. From here, there is a gentle slope about 1 hour to Uhuru Peak. 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 mt.)

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