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Machame Route Itinerary

The Machame Route is the second most popular on Kilimanjaro and is indeed one of the most scenically beautiful routes up the mountain, offering the adventurous hiker a stunning scenic "slide show" over 6 days from the stunning late afternoon sunsets at Shira, the misty revelations of Kibo and the great Barranco Wall.

Machame is also known as the Whisky Route - the trail being both longer and slightly more challenging than its sister route Marangu. Machame is therefore better suited to the slightly more adventurous hiker who wishes more of a challenge and is comfortable with tented camping.

The Machame route is normally completed in a minimum of 6 days. There is an added benefit to this, as you are afforded the most valuable commodity on the mountain – acclimatization - ‘walking high and sleeping low’, every day. Because of this approximately 80% of hikers on the Machame route achieve their dream of standing on the roof of Africa, Uhuru Peak (5895m).

Duration: 6 Days / 5 Nights

DAY 1: Machame Gate (1490m) - Machame camp (2980m)

Hiking time: 7 hours

Distance: About 18 km's

Habitat: Montane forest

On your first day you will be collected early from your Hotel in Arusha or Moshi and driven up through the beautiful, scenic village of Machame passing many banana and coffee plantations. On your arrival at the National Park Gate you will be asked to sign the register and check you have everything you need for day 1. You will also have a little time to watch the vibrant, business of Machame Gate as the porters and guides make their final preparations for your trek.

The start of your route is through rain forest and as the name suggests, there is a possibility that it may actually rain! Please make sure that along with sun screen and a hat you also have waterproofs in your day rucksack – just in case! Walking Pole Pole (slowly slowly) allows your body to acclimitise as you gain altitude. It also enables you to conserve much needed energy, and most importantly enjoy the environment and the company. You will arrive at Machame Camp in the late afternoon. Your porters (arriving at the camp site long before you) will have erected your tent and prepared afternoon tea and snacks. In the evening the porters will boil drinking and washing water and the cook will prepare dinner, before you retire to your tent for the night. Night temperatures can already drop to freezing point at this campsite.

DAY 2: Machame camp (2980m) - Shira camp (3840m)

Hiking time: 6 hours

Distance: About 9 km's

Habitat: Moorland

You rise early at Machame camp and after breakfast you climb an hour or so to the top of the forest, then for 2 hours at a gentler gradient through the moorland zone. After a short lunch and rest, you continue up a rocky ridge onto the Shira plateau. By now you will be able to see in an easterly direction over to the Western Breach of Kilimanjaro with its stunning glaciers. You are now due west of Kibo and after a short hike you will reach the Shira campsite at 3,840m. The domestic routines are the same each day and your porters will have everything ready for your arrival at camp.

The night at this exposed camp will even be colder than the previous night, with temperatures dropping to well below freezing. Wrapping up warmly before the temperature drops quickly helps your body to retain heat and lets you also enjoy the splendor of sunset and the dark evening sky illuminated by millions of stars.

DAY 3: Shira (3840m) - Lava Tower (4630m) - Barranco camp (3950m)

Hiking time: 7 hours

Distance: About 15 km

Habitat: Semi desert

The route now turns east into a semi desert and rocky landscape surrounding Lava Tower, where you reach an altitude of 4630m. Many people say this is the toughest day so far because it is now that the effects of altitude begin to be felt. This descent to Barranco camp (3950m) takes about 2 hours and provides fabulous opportunities to take photographs of the Western Breach and Breach Wall.

Your camp is situated in a valley below the Breach and the Great Barranco Wall –the Wall being your route for the following day.

DAY 4: Barranco camp (3950m) - Barafu camp (4550m)

Hiking time: 7 hours

Distance: About 13 km

Habitat: Alpine desert

On day 4 you will be presented with the relatively steep Barranco ‘Breakfast’ climb, a 257 meter scramble up the Barranco Wall. Be prepared to use all four limbs as you slowly traverse the wall to the top of the Karanga Valley and are rewarded by Topping out just below the Heim Glacier, with stunning views above the clouds.

From here you follow a path that meanders through the Karanga Valley over intervening ridges and valleys to Karanga Camp (3,960 meters).

Barafu (4,680m) is your final ascent camp. On arrival you will be guided to rest in the shade of your tent before dinner then sleep as much as possible prior to being awoken around 11pm for a hot drink and light snack before beginning your summit attempt at midnight.

It is always a good plan to be organised with all your clothing to hand and your head-torch and camera and spare batteries kept warm.

Day 5 – Barafu Camp (4,680 meters) to Uhuru Peak (5,895 meters) and then Mweka Camp (3,100 meters)

Distance: 4.5km / 3 miles ascent and then 11km / 7 mile descent

Trekking time: 6-8 hours to the summit and then 5-8 hours to Mweka

Zone: Glacial zone and the all preceding zones

Day 5 starts at midnight with a long upwards zigzagging hike with the stars above you and the heavy scree of Kibo under your feet. The going now is very slow, rough and tough. You will need to dig deep and ensure you maintain a consistent pace to push yourself up to the crater rim. Pole pole (slowly slowly) is the mantra!

After around 6 hours you will reach Stella Point (5,739m.) where you will rest, have some drinks and snacks as you watch the dawn light up the sky and the sun rise over the spectacular mountain landscape. We recommend you have your camera ready at this point to record the sun rising on your achievement so far. From Stella Point it is another 1-2 hours of a steady climb onto the crater rim and along to Uhuru Peak (5,895m.).

NOTE: Over 60% of climbers stop at Stella Point but most can make it to the summit if they are able to find the mental strength to push through. Your guides are looking after you every step of the way and want you to reach the summit as much as you do – however, if you are experiencing severe AMS symptoms you should descend immediately.

Due to the altitude your stay at Uhuru Peak will be necessarily short, but long enough for you to celebrate, savour and record the moment. You will then start heading back via Stella Point to Barafu where you will rest for a short time before beginning the descent to Mweka Camp (3,100m.).

In total you will be trekking between 12-16 hours on day 5.

Day 6 – Mweka Camp (3,100 meters) to Mweka Gate (1,640 meters)

Distance: 9km / 6 miles

Trekking time: 3-5 hours

Zone: Rainforest

The final day on the mountain is a short one, but nonetheless tiring as your body will be exhausted. You will walk slowly down through the wonderful rainforest scenery towards your finish point at Mweka Gate (1,640 meters).

At the gate you will need to sign-out with the authorities and here you will also receive your certificate of achievement, either for Stella Point or for Uhuru Peak.

NOTE: It is customary to pay your tips to the trekking team in the morning at either Mweka Camp or at Mweka Gate before you depart back to Moshi or Arusha.

Should you wish advice on the tipping system please ask.