

Mountain Climbing: Client information package

The information below is applicable for our trips to Kilimanjaro, Mt. Meru and Mt. Kenya. The material in this document, and our standard itineraries, can also be sent by e-mail or delivered by diskette in most of the current word processing formats.

Acclimatization

Technical descriptions of the causes and symptoms of altitude sickness can be found in many guidebooks. It is likely that you will experience some form of mild altitude sickness on a high mountain trek. What follows below is based on practical experience rather than on detailed medical explanations.

Altitude sickness is caused by the failure of the body to adapt quickly enough to the reduced level of oxygen in the air as one gains altitude. There are many different symptoms but the most common are headaches, nausea, loss of balance, loss of appetite, tingling in the fingers and toes, and swelling of the face/ankles/fingers.

Many of these symptoms are not serious and are often short lived.

In our experience there are three key steps to achieving successful acclimatization. You will probably still suffer some mild symptoms of altitude sickness before adapting to functioning with reduced levels of oxygen.

- **Drink lots** we recommend a fluid intake of 4-5 litres daily. Fluid intake improves circulation and most other bodily functions. Fluid intake does not add to fluid leakage from the body. Our menu contains lots of opportunities to drink! You need to drink lots of water too. If your urine is clear, you are drinking enough. Drink lots during the day to avoid a broken night's sleep!
- **Walk slowly** It is vital to place as little strain as possible on the body whilst it is trying to adapt to a reducing oxygen supply. Unless there is a very steep uphill section, your breathing rate whilst walking should be as if you are walking down your street at home!
- **Walk high Sleep low** this means taking every opportunity to take afternoon excursions to a higher level before descending again to sleep. A pleasant way to train the body too! Obviously not a good idea if you already have some symptoms of altitude sickness.

Mild forms of altitude sickness are best treated by rest, maintaining fluid intake, and by aspirin tablets. Aspirin is far superior to other painkillers because it has the double effect of both relieving pain and helping acclimatization by thinning the blood. More serious forms of altitude sickness can be temporarily (but not permanently) helped by powerful diuretics such as Diamox. Some people take this drug before the climb whilst others use it only at higher altitudes. Whether you should use Diamox before and during the trip is more a personal decision than scientific as the medical causes/treatments of altitude sickness are still not fully understood. Our view is that drugs such as Diamox should not be recommended because of the dangers of masking symptoms without removing the problem, and so encouraging you to go beyond your safe medical limits. We prefer to follow the methods outlined above to treat altitude symptoms.

Serious cases of altitude sickness can only be treated by immediate descent. Our Head Guides are all experienced in dealing with the problems of altitude. It may be necessary for you to descend to a lower altitude until you recover or even to abandon the climb in the interests of safety. The decision of the Head Guide in such situations will be final.

Trekking conditions

Most of the trails on all the mountain treks are well-defined and of good quality but some forest sections are often slippery and moorland paths can be very wet. The last stages of the climbs towards the summits of Mt. Kenya, Mt. Meru, and Kilimanjaro are almost exclusively on loose scree without permanent footpaths but no technical skills are required. Snow lies permanently on the summit of Kilimanjaro and seasonally on the other mountains but no

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special equipment is required. These mountains are large volcanoes that tower above the surrounding plains. All climbs therefore require a considerable amount of ascent and descent but this is tempered by the short daily stages necessary for acclimatization. Be prepared for lots of uphill and downhill; very little walking in East Africa is flat!

Clothing and equipment; Outer clothing

All mountain treks have a wide range of temperatures so the best clothing is a lot of thin layers. Such clothing is easier to adjust as the temperature fluctuates and is also more effective insulation than a few thick items of clothing.

This equipment list only describes the necessary items for a walking trip. We recommend other equipment if you are also going on safari and/or the beach (e.g. binoculars and swimming gear).

Sleeping and carrying equipment

- 30-40 litre daypack (to ensure that all the layers of clothing and other personal kit can fit).
- Duffle bag or soft kitbag for porters to carry on the mountain (not suitcases).
- Plastic bags of various sizes to protect equipment you want to ensure is dry (e.g. sleeping bag and books) and for your day sack.
- 4 seasons's sleeping bag (especially for high camps on Kilimanjaro where the temperature can easily drop to well below zero). Consider a fleece liner if you really feel the cold.
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Drinking

- 2 x 1 litre water bottle or equivalent.
- Purification equipment. Boiled drinking water is provided but you might want to use iodine or chlorine for further purification. Bring powdered juice to take away the taste if you use chemicals! Filtration pumps are excellent though costly.

Footwear

- Walking boots that are worn-in and of proven quality (leather is strongly recommended).
- Thick socks and maybe also thin socks to wear under the thick socks (this often helps to prevent blisters).
- Trainers or trekking sandals to wear in camp.
- Gaiters can be very helpful in wet conditions and to stop scree getting inside your boots.

Head and face

- Warm hat or (preferably) balaclava.
- Sunhat.
- Sunglasses (essential for summit days to avoid snow blindness).
- Sun cream with a high factor. The equatorial sun combined with the altitude is a very powerful combination even if you are used to the sun.
- Lip balm, with total sun block.

Personal usage

- Towel and toiletries.
- Toilet paper.
- Favorite snacks. Snacks are provided on all treks, but you might have something special you really like.
- Head torch. This is very useful in camp and also necessary on the summit day when you depart for the summit in darkness. Remember to bring lots of batteries and to allow for evening reading.
- Camera and films. Films of reasonable quality can be bought in Kenya and Tanzania but are often expensive and not always easily available. If you have a digital camera remember to bring lots of batteries and extra memory.
- Reading material and small games or cards. The need to acclimatize means that many daily stages are no more than long mornings.

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Personal medical kit

Although all trips are equipped with a medical box, we recommend that you bring your own personal medical kit for the most basic needs.

- Aspirin for headaches and mild pains. Aspirin is particularly good because it also thins the blood, which helps acclimatization at altitude.
- Blister kits or plasters.
- Imodium for severe diarrhoea.
- Malaria tablets. Malaria is obviously not a problem on high mountains but all trips begin and end in malarial areas.

Expenses and guidelines on tipping

It is almost impossible to spend any money on a mountain trek except on the Marangu route on Kilimanjaro (where beers, soft drinks, and chocolate are available at the huts).

Although tips are optional, and should depend on the level of service provided, we would like to point out that tipping is customary in Kenya and Tanzania. Our detailed pre-trip briefing advises you on tipping for your particular trip

Our staffs are carefully briefed not to pressure anyone for tips or equipment and are salaried at a level that does not make them dependent on receiving tips or gifts.

General Standard of Services

Our mountain climbing trips offer high standards of service for food, accommodation, and staff. Whilst there might be some variations on an individual trip, please find below a general description of the level of services that we offer.

Local Staff

Our guides all know the mountains very well, speak English, and are very welcoming and helpful towards the clients. They carry maps and National Park leaflets (where available) on the mountain. When doing climbs such as Kilimanjaro, we ensure a ratio of guides to clients that does not exceed 1:3. This ensures good mountain services and is particularly important on the summit day.

In addition to our guides a specialist cook is provided to assist them. The staff take care of all the chores, including erecting and taking down the tents. Clients need only carry a day sack containing their personal effects and an extra layer of warm clothing.

Porter welfare is an important part of our staff policy. We pay a good salary and we pay it immediately at the end of the climb. We also ensure that our staff have sleeping tents on all camping routes. Porterage is the largest single cost element on mountain climbs and the temptation to reduce this cost always exists. We believe our policy to be correct in human terms, and it also has the commercial by product of removing the often unpleasant pressure on clients to tip heavily.

We pay a lot of attention to finding the right staff for our trips. We recognize that they are our biggest asset and we are currently developing a guide training program to enhance our service levels that will include further instruction in the English language, mountain interpretation skills, and first aid.

Accommodation when camping

We provide spacious two person tents of proven quality made in The USA and specifically designed for mountain use. There is plenty of personal space, an ample luggage storage area, and a separate external flysheet. A limited number of these tents are available as single tents at a supplementary charge and should be reserved in advance. Clients should bring their own sleeping bag and mat.

Breakfast and dinner are served in our communal dining tent with folding chairs, tables and lanterns. This tent is also available for communal use in the afternoon and evening; especially useful in the event of inclement weather.

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Handling of luggage

Each client should bring a maximum of 15 kg when climbing the mountain. Client luggage should be contained in a duffle bag or soft kitbag which will be carried inside a waterproof bag by a porter. Clients carry only a light day sack. Additional mountain luggage may attract a supplementary charge. Any unwanted client baggage and suitcases can be safely stored at the foot of each mountain.

Medical equipment

Group medical kits with instructions are provided on all climbs. Clients are asked only to provide their most basic personal needs. We pay special attention to avoiding altitude sickness by maximizing acclimatization. We do carry oxygen cylinders.

Hygiene

We always ensure that the clients have a bowl of hot washing water in the morning and again after the walk at an agreed time in the afternoon. The only exception is the highest overnight on Kilimanjaro (Kibo hut or Barafu or Arrow camps) where there is no running water and so all water must be carried from a lower level by porters.

Hand washing water treated with dettol is available with soap before all meals, and clients are strongly advised to make use of it.

Long drop toilets are available at most of the campsites and huts used on mountain climbs.

We very much encourage a policy of 'bum and bury' on all other occasions to avoid littering the mountains and issue all clients with matches. We do not provide toilet tents as experience shows clients often refuse to use them but they are available on request.

Food and drink

We choose the ingredients carefully to ensure that the food prepared by our team is tasty, easy to digest at altitude, and has high energy content. We also cater for vegetarians, ensuring that their meals are varied and inviting

The sample menus below have a high liquid and carbohydrate content; the two important elements for successful climbing. Meat does feature heavily in our menus due to client demand but is unimportant for mountain fitness on such short climbs.

At higher altitudes, stimulants (such as coffee) and less digestible foods (such as meat) are almost totally absent from the diet. The evening meal at the highest overnight on Kilimanjaro is a combined soup/stew as experience shows this to be the best preparation for the summit day.

Boiled water is offered to the clients each evening for their water bottles and is readily available at other mealtimes too. A wide selection of hot drinks (tea, coffee, drinking chocolate, Milo) is also available at meals and soup is served twice daily. Soft drinks and beers are not available except on the Marangu route on Kilimanjaro.

Bed Tea

Tea or coffee served in your tent or bunk

Breakfast

- Eggs with bacon/sausage and tomato.
- Muesli and/or corn flakes and/or porridge
- Seasonal fresh fruit (mango/banana/watermelon)
- Toast with margarine, jam, and honey
- Tea, coffee, Milo or drinking chocolate

Snacks

Energy snacks are provided for the daily walk such as biscuits, bananas, and flapjacks or chocolate bars.

Lunch

This is either a packed lunch on longer days or, more usually, a hot lunch served in camp by a small team who have raced ahead of the clients.

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A packed lunch typically consists of

- Sandwiches with cheese and jam or meat
- Fresh fruit, an egg, and cake
- Hot soup and tea provided on the trail.

Peanuts or popcorn plus hot drinks are served as soon as camp is reached.

A hot lunch typically consists of-

- * Soup (chicken/minestrone/different vegetables)
- Bread (often toasted) or pancakes Cheese, tinned fish, jam, and peanut butter
- A salad (tomatoes, cucumber, carrots, onion)
- Peanuts or popcorn plus cake or biscuits
- A variety of hot drinks

Tea

In late afternoon, tea, coffee, and drinking chocolate or Milo is served. Whatever was not provided at lunch of cakes/biscuits and peanuts/popcorn is served now. A pleasant eating experience, and a good opportunity to make the clients drink lots!

Dinner

Dinner is the main meal of the day and always consists of three courses (soup followed by a main dish of several elements and then by a dessert).

- Soup (chicken/ broth/ vegetable)
- Chicken/beef/ fish. It can be roasted or prepared in a sauce.
- Fresh vegetables, such as carrots, beans, peas, cauliflower, peppers, tomatoes.
- A variety of carbohydrates (potatoes/chips/ rice/ macaroni/spaghetti)
- Fruit salad or pancakes and biscuits and more hot drinks!

Environmental concern

All cooking is done on kerosene or gas stoves wherever possible, and all non biodegradable rubbish (both from the camp and the clients) is carried off the mountain. We aim to follow the Sierra Club motto "Take nothing but photos, Leave nothing but footprints".

Hire of equipment

We have a limited amount of personal camping equipment available for hire. Please contact us in advance to ensure availability.

Special Note

Serious cases of altitude sickness can only be treated by immediate descent. The decision of the senior guide in such situations will be final. Any client refusing to accept this decision will be deemed to have abandoned the climb. No further responsibility will be taken except to ensure their safe descent and a porter will be provided to escort them to the nearest road head.

Disclaimer

The information contained herein is given in good faith and covers the average range of conditions likely to be found on these trips. High altitude mountain climbs are subject to unexpected changes and abnormal conditions can prevail at any time.

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