

## Mount Kilimanjaro

Kilimanjaro was formerly known as Kaiser-Wilhelm-Spitze during the time of German East Africa and Tanganyika. It is a large mountain in north-eastern Tanzania. Kilimanjaro is the largest free-standing mountain in the world, rising 4600 m (15,000 ft) from the base, and boasts the highest peak in Africa at 5,895m (19,340 ft), providing the dramatic view from surrounding plains. Kilimanjaro is a giant strato volcano not currently active, with fumaroles that emit gas in the crater on the main summit of Kibo. Scientists in 2003 expected that molten magma is about 400 metres below the summit. Although new activity is not expected, there are fears the volcano may collapse, causing a significant eruption similar to the 1980 eruption of Mount St. Helens. Several collapses and landslides have occurred on Kibo in the past, one creating the area known as the western breach (this route is currently closed due to the danger of falling rocks released from the retracting glacier. Although there is no recorded history of eruptions, local Chaga legend speaks of activity around 170 years ago. The highest point is the Uhuru Peak on the volcano Kibo, 5,895 meters (19,340 ft). Kibo has a 1.5 mile wide crater on the top of it. As the highest point in Africa, Uhuru Peak is one of the Seven Summits. The summit was first reached by the Marangu army scout, Johannes Kinyala Lauwo, who climbed it nine times. Lauwo guided the first ascent by expatriate climbers, German Hans Meyer and Austrian Ludwig Purtscheller, on October 6, 1889. Two other peaks are: Mawenzi (5,149 metres, 16,890 ft), the third highest peak in Africa and Shira (3,962 m, 13,000 ft). Johannes' Notch suitably called after Lauwo. In 1889 Lauwo was awarded a house at Ashira Marangu by the German government in recognition of his role on the Meyer expedition. His relative, Trilas Lauwo was the first Tanzanian lady to reach the summit via the Mweka route in 1972. An ascent of Mawenzi requires rock and ice climbing skills. The ascent to Uhuru Peak is a relatively straightforward endeavour; however, time must be taken for proper acclimatization to prevent mountain sickness. The three easiest routes, Marangu, Rongai and Machame can all be climbed by a person with no mountaineering experience. Many who climb employ altitude-sickness medication and find this to be helpful in preventing the pounding headaches that plague many travellers. Those who travel on the Marangu route usually take 4-5 days to complete their climb. Huts with cooking facilities, bathrooms, and (sometimes) electricity are available at the end of each day's journey. The final part of the climb, from Kibo hut at 15,500 ft (4,720 m) to the summit, is generally undertaken at night, because the scree is frozen together, making the climb significantly easier. Gilman's Point, on the rim of the crater, but about 1 hours hike from Uhuru, is attained at 5:00 - 6:00 am; those who have the strength to continue may then hike on to Uhuru in the growing sunlight and rising temperatures. Another route is the Western Breach, which is much more technical in nature. Annually, about 15,000 people attempt to climb the mountain, of whom 40% reach the summit. Even though the volcano appears to be dormant, events on top have been drawing global attention recently. The glaciers are rapidly disappearing. Over the past 100 years, the ice cap has reduced by over 80%. In 2002, a study by Ohio State University ice core expert Lonnie Thompson predicted that ice would be gone between 2015 and 2020. Though the cause of the reduction in ice volume is in dispute, the loss of the Kilimanjaro ice fields will carry significant implications for local populations who depend on water from the ice fields during the dry seasons and rains failures. From January 2006, the Western Breach route has been closed after a rockslide which killed four people at Arrow Glacier Camp. The rockfall is believed to have been caused by frost action in an area which is no longer frozen. After the Western Breach route was closed in January 2006, many treks have instead used the Lemosho route. As the Western Breach route, this route starts to the west and goes up the Shira Ridge towards Lava Tower. For more information contact Mountain Kingdom Safaris.

## About the Author

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