

Tips for Women Hikers on Kilimanjaro

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Kilimanjaro Climb with Tusker Trail; Summit in July, 2007

1. Feminine wipes.

□ “Your local drug store will have packets of moist wipes that are suitable for women’s needs. These were so handy, my husband asked for some. So, bring a pack of general wipes to share.”

2. Mini pads.

■ “Great to bring for everyday, or for changing in the morning and evening. Easier to deal with than changing underwear all the time, especially when it is cold. Also the pads are helpful for comfort and absorption if you run out, or don’t have any toilet paper during the day. The diamox is a heavy diuretic so you will be spending considerable time behind big boulders at rest stops.”

3. Nails.

□ “If you don’t like to have dirt under your nails, be sure to use a dark nail polish to cover the dirt that is inevitable. Your cuticles will take a beating, so you might want to bring some “bag balm” or similar product to protect your hands. Be sure to trim your nails short before the hike.”

4. Women companionship.

■ “Try and bring along another female climber from home or see if Tusker can have at least another woman you can have along during the climb. Guys make excellent climbing companions-however, sometimes you need some straight forward girl talk while trekking. Guides and porters are all male, so having the right girly kindred spirit to share the experience with can be enlightening and fun.”

5. Kleenex.

■ “A must for sniffles + potty breaks behind trees during the climb. Bring the mini packs.” □ “I found that the moisture from sniffles and the dabbing with tissues was very tough on the skin around the nose, so that tin of “bag balm” could also help here.”

6. Hair.

□ “Consider having a perm or body wave to give your hair something to do when you can’t wash it for many days in a row. There are ‘water-less’ shampoos that you can try, but you may want to give it a try before you get to the mountain. Tusker provides a shallow pan of warm water in the morning and evening. I used this on two occasions to wash the front and top of my hair – which felt great and helped some. However, remember that it will get colder and colder as you increase elevation, so this option for washing only lasts a few days – unless you are very hardy.”

7. Femininity.

□ “If maintaining some sense of femininity is important to you, consider taking an item or two that reminds you of your feminine side (eg, perfume; mascara; sturdy necklace).”

8. Counting Calories.

■ “The great news about this trip is that for any calorie conscious lady, this is one of those few times when you can eat as much as you want, whenever you want in any

quantities. Have no worries, “Hakuna matata”, about adding any inches to your waistline while climbing with Tusker. Other than snacks from home, all the food served is made from scratch with no preservatives, no alcohol can be consumed and icecream is not packable. So, I guarantee you will shave a few inches off your waistline from this trip!”

9. Bras.

□ “Wear a non-cotton sports bra that is wicking. The Tusker guidelines suggest avoiding cotton and I heartily agree.”

10. Legs.

□ “If you prefer to shave your legs, there is no need to worry about skipping the shaving for the week because long pants are needed for all sections of the hike. Your prickly legs will be well-concealed. However, if your partner has a problem with the pricklies, then you will just have to sort that out on your own.”

11. The cold.

□ “If you are sensitive to being cold, then you must plan well. Make sure you follow the suggestions on layering given in the Tusker Guide. Also, take a stash of hand and toe warmers (little chemical packets to put in your shoes and gloves). Consider using a balaclava and definitely bring a warm hat for sleeping and for the summit climb. Be prepared to sleep in some of these layers – so keep some long clothing clean. The day-time temps we experienced in July were not cold during hiking - except for a few exposed sections on the way to the summit when the wind was blowing. Nights are the biggest challenge, so you’ll need to be prepared. Make sure your bag meets the rating standard for temperature, don’t get cheap on this one.”

■ “I was disappointed with the sleeping bag rented from Tusker. Once I figured out that the fleece blanket was actually a liner, and I was zipped into it rather than just under it, I stayed much warmer. If you have room in your flight bag and own a zero degree, small packable sleeping bag, bring it. Rent the pad, it was very comfortable. Also, the emergency light weight aluminum heat blanket was just a few ounces, and was great to pull over the sleeping bag. I waited to use it at crater camp and was sorry I didn’t use it earlier. I suggest start using what ever layers you have as soon as possible early on in the trip.”

12. Constipation.

■ “A topic most people do not like to discuss, but here it goes. I was so concerned about diarrhea (which I never encountered) that I never assumed the opposite could happen. My diet is typically full of lots of high fiber foods, salads, whole grain breads, brown rice, yams, oatmeal, raw veggies, apples etc. Most of the food served in Africa was white bread, white rice, melons, cooked veggies, potatoes. I suggest bringing high fiber bars if possible, dried fruit, maybe an over the counter medicine or prescription med just in case. A few instant oatmeal packs to mix with hot water for some mornings-could be helpful.”

13. Pit stops for potty breaks.

□ “Women are at a disadvantage when hiking with a group of men, but this disadvantage has nothing to do with strength, endurance or fitness. This disadvantage stems from the tendency to need more privacy during potty breaks on the trail. Given the necessity for drinking lots of fluids, all hikers need to take several bathroom-less

bathroom breaks between camps. When the group stops for a break, hikers need to find a spot that suits their privacy standards. Men seem to secure this spot quickly with little risk of exposure or embarrassment. Women, however, often prefer to find a more secluded location. This often means walking much further from the trail than the men; therefore, women waste valuable resting time finding just the right spot. For example, when given a 10 min break to pee, drink, eat and rest, I used about half of this time selecting and using that sufficiently secluded spot. So, let your guides and fellow hikers know if you are not getting enough time for *all* of the important break-related activities. In the mean time, perhaps someone will invent a special device to help women preserve privacy yet empty their bladders more efficiently.”

Tips for Everyone Hiking up Kilimanjaro

Fanny Pack.

■ “Of course my daughters would not go out in public with me, with one of those around my waist. However, I used mine every day of the climb-and for the rest of our trip. Great for keeping purell and a small camera close at hand. I found a spray purell that I preferred to the gel kind. Convenience reigns over fashion in Tanzania.”

Camel Back.

■ “I suggest a 3 liter water sack, that fits right into a knap sack that has a hole for the valve to come out. I just purchased a water sack (I prefer the clear brand because the plastic has a less weird aftertaste). Also bring 2 carabiners so you can dangle at least one nalgene bottle for summit day, and for crater camp when the nozzles freeze. Neoprene covers do not work on the hoses at the summit, so don’t purchase. I suggest 2 nalgene bottles along with the water sack.” □ “I concur heartily with this advice, I did not have a camelback and getting enough water was a challenge. It is hard to drink from a nalgene while moving, and also hard to make myself drink so much during short breaks.”

Waterproof Baseball cap.

■ “Great for the bright sun. I also had 2 weights of head bands in fleece for underneath. Good combination for most days. Could easily take of the head bands once you get warmed up and wrap around your wrist with out stopping. My fleece hat was for nighttime, summit day and crater camp.” □ “I used a wide brim, crushable waterproof hat that worked great for the sun.”

Mittens.

■ “Down. Much warmer for sleeping, summit day and crater camp than gloves. Also be sure to pack thin liner gloves for evenings and mild temps. A medium weight glove is good for one of the days, where there is some rock scrambling to protect your fingers.”

Artic Weight Socks.

■ “I suggest a new pair of socks and liners for each day. I used the heaviest weight sock 5 of the 9 days with liners. I also purchased wider hiking boots so my toes had lots of room to breathe. Normally my toes never stay warm. On this trip it was hardly an issue except at night time. I think a boot with some room to wiggle my toes helped with my circulation, which kept my tootsies in good shape the whole time.”

Flip Flops/Camp Shoes.

- “Back a pair (takes up almost no space) so you can slip on in the middle of the night to exit the tent without having to lace up, for a quick pee.” □ “My recommendation is a little different, given the cold temps at night, you might want to use those lightweight water shoes – these cover the whole foot, but are very easy to pack and can be purchased inexpensively. Plenty of hikers used running shoes as their camp shoes.”

General Hygiene.

- “I suggest packing lots of baby wipes, plan on using at least 10 a day. The first thing to when you enter camp is to wipe down with baby wipes and get into clean clothes and socks for the next day. If you have any half-days that are sunny, do a small laundry first and hang your clothes up to dry while the sun is out. A great thing to have to hang laundry from inside or outside the tent to dry.” □ “Another thing to consider is taking along some clothes pins or diaper pins. I washed two sets of socks and underwear and pinned them to my backpack on sunny hiking days. (You might want to think about which pair of underwear is suitable for display.)”

Mini Ipod.

- “Bring one loaded with music, and a battery pack charger back up (or cd player with premixed music). We tried a solar charger, which did not seem to work. I found it extremely helpful to listen to tunes a few nights when I had problems sleeping. The songs were soothing and helped pass the time.” □ “I had not brought any music because I thought it would be a distraction and a hassle (why pack more?), but now having completed the trek, I think that I would have enjoyed the music for the challenging summit trek – and for that after dinner hour spent trying to fall asleep at 9pm.”

Stuff Sack.

- “Make sure you have one big enough for your winter coat. I purchased a gortex coat with a synthetic liner by “mountain gear”. It was a great coat for evenings, sleeping and summit day. If you have a sack, it is easy to stuff the coat into the sack summit day for the porters if you get too warm. Most days I wore 3 layers of thin long sleeved shirts, a fleece vest, fleece jacket and a gortex waterproof shell. Layering is definitely the way to go.” □ “I concur. These stuff sacks are a great way to keep organized. I used about 4 of them of various sizes. Having to sort and shuffle through your stuff each morning and evening, you’ll appreciate having to spend less time finding stuff and more time enjoying your companions and the mountain.”

Crater Camp.

- “Avoid if you can. After summiting....I suggest the 3 hour walk back to Barafu Camp, where there is plenty of oxygen and warmer temps. After the summit (we arrived at 2:45, stayed 30 min). Crater Camp was rough for everyone in our group. No air and freezing temps. The views were spectacular though.”

Fleece Pants (thin ones for layering).

- “One pair is a must for sleeping and summit day, under waterproof pants.”

Snacks.

- “I suggest a variety. Avoid bars totally covered with chocolate because they melt and are very messy. I had one bar a day, most people probably have 2 or 3, if you are trying to figure out what to bring. Any cliff or power bar is fine. The balance bars were problematic because of the chocolate coating. Also, the jelly beans with energy boosts

(sold in most running stores and camping stores) were great for a quick sugar rush. Gu was good for energy when you are not really hungry. The caffeine can have an adverse effect, so try flavors other than chocolate. Hard candies are good too, because you can easily pop them in your mouth along the trail with out stopping. Be sure to bring plenty to share. Also, there are some Gatorade pills that can be added to water. They are easy to use and do not take up much space. I preferred straight h2o.”

Diamox.

■ “For altitude sickness. Check with Tusker regarding what to bring. Our travel medicine group did not recommend enough for the trip, so we had to purchase additional medicine in Moshi. Better to come with your own.” □ “If you read up on this, you will note that there are different approaches to using this medication. Tusker strongly recommends its use beginning at the first camp. However, I preferred to wait until several days in until my body was challenged.”

Herbal Tea.

■ “Never saw any during the trip. They had plenty of regular tea, but you may have a negative effect from the caffeine. So pack a few for the cold evenings for sipping.”

Fleece Jackets.

■ “I wore one and used the other as a pillow and back up. Fleece vest a must. □ Fleece makes a great pillow, but keep in mind you might end up wearing your fleece so plan for a pillow if you know you like to have one.”

Pens.

■ “Lots of kids were asking for pens. I suggest stopping at staples superstore and loading up on 500 to bring over.”

Small bills (generally a good idea for most of the trip).

■ “Bring lots of ones, for tipping and small purchases.”

Picture taking.

□ “There are a great many philosophies and preferences when it comes to taking photos, but I’d strongly recommend thinking ahead of time about what you’d like remember about the trip in the months or years afterwards. For example, I’d taken a fairly detailed written log of the daily activities, but neglected to take pictures of each campsite. Had I considered ahead of time what I would want to remember, I would have been more strategic in my selections. On the other hand, it is very likely you’ll get to share photos later with your fellow hikers, so someone else is likely to take that shot you missed.”