

Recommended Training Guide for Climbing Mount Kilimanjaro

It is important to get your mind and body ready for the journey. You will be trekking 5-10 miles / 8–16 kilometers each day. You must be in good physical condition as your body will be tested and you will need to have the energy for the multi-day trek. Many altitude climbers will confirm that mental stamina is just as important as your physical endurance, and we agree! This is extremely true of Kilimanjaro and particularly on summit night!

Below are the four different methods we recommend to help you get ready for your journey!

Aerobic / Cardio Training:

Aerobic training uses oxygen to adequately meet the energy demands of exercise via aerobic metabolism. The types of exercise that use aerobic metabolism are generally light-to-moderate intensity activities like long distance jogging, swimming, cycling and walking. This differs from *anaerobic exercise* like high intensity weight lifting and sprinting which uses anaerobic metabolism to supplement the aerobic system due to increased energy demands. Aerobic exercise builds the cardiovascular system which is key when training to climb Kilimanjaro. As a strong cardiovascular system will help you process limited oxygen in a more efficient way.

There is a flip side though. The more fit you are, the harder and faster you can push yourself, and the quicker you think you can ascend Kilimanjaro. This is a huge mistake!

Going as slow as possible, even when you are on the lower reaches and feeling great, is key to your success on Kilimanjaro. You will hear your porters say *Pole Pole*, which means Slow Slow in Swahili. This is the best advice you will get! Your body needs time to acclimate to the altitude and a strong cardiovascular system can help but not if you have pushed yourself too hard. A good recent example of how a strong cardiovascular system can trick one comes from an accomplished Australian marathon runner who collapsed at Stella Point because he had gone too fast early on in his hike.

If you are relatively unfit, I recommend setting yourself a 3-6 month training regime where you focus on long distance walking / running (4 -8 miles / 6-12 km at least three times a week). You can do this on a gym treadmill but remember to set a consistent pace and vary the slope (a slight incline is best).

For relatively fit people who already undertake a fair share of cardiovascular exercise we recommend maintaining your regime until 1-2 months before your climb. At this point we recommend increasing the duration, but not the intensity, of your exercises. Incorporating stairs into your workout is a great choice and will help you vastly with the climb.

Strength Training:

In addition to aerobic exercise, you should also be doing light strength training, particularly for your legs, core and upper body. In terms of your legs, we suggest for the following exercises:

Lunges
Squats
Front and Reverse Leg-curls (thigh muscle and hamstrings)
Step Aerobics

Building the strength of your core muscles (stomach and lower back) and upper shoulder muscles is also important as you will be carrying a lightweight pack for up to 6-7 hours a day. We recommend the following exercises:

Sit-ups
Kettle-bell rows / swings
Shoulder presses
Back and shoulder flies

Practice Hiking / Backpacking:

Climbing Kilimanjaro is in fact just one long hike. The best way to prepare for a long hike is to do a few yourself.

We recommend doing at least 2-3 long distance hikes (over 5 hours). If you can do back-to-back days that is even better. Doing a few practice hikes as part of your training to climb Kilimanjaro will benefit you greatly. You get to experience what a 5-hour hike on difficult terrain feels like, for most people going down is often more grueling as your knees and joints can take a battering.

If you can plan a backpacking trip, we highly recommend it for this is a great time to test out your gear and make sure everything is comfortable before setting on your journey. You should break in your boots before Kilimanjaro. There is nothing worse than arriving to climb Kilimanjaro in unworn boots. This can seriously affect your summit attempt as you will get blisters and sore feet early on in your hike.

Mental Stamina

Often the factor that gets climbers to the top of Kilimanjaro is their mental stamina. There will be times during summit night that you will want to give up and go back down. Being able to dig deep and pull on your mental reserves is very important. Our staff will also be the support you need as we will be working with you to achieve the summit.

However, there are activities to build your mental stamina. Most require some form of pushing your body to an extreme or to what you think your limits are and then pushing through to accomplish your goal. We recommend long distance running (trail running, half marathons, marathons), this type of activity requires one to draw on their mental reserves to get to the finish line. Most people who run marathons will tell you the last mile is all mental. If you can get in a positive state of mind at least once before Kilimanjaro then you will be perfectly prepared for the final push up the slopes of Kibo.

Conclusion: You can do it!

We truly believe most people – regardless of age or physical condition – can climb Kilimanjaro (within reason, of course!). All you need is to ensure your cardiovascular system is firing on all engines and that you have the mental strength to see the hike to the end. Over and above the importance of training to climb Kilimanjaro is having the knowledge of how the body acclimatizes to altitude. We hope this helps you in preparation for your climb.

Feel free to reach out to us via email at JamboKiliVoyage@mail.com