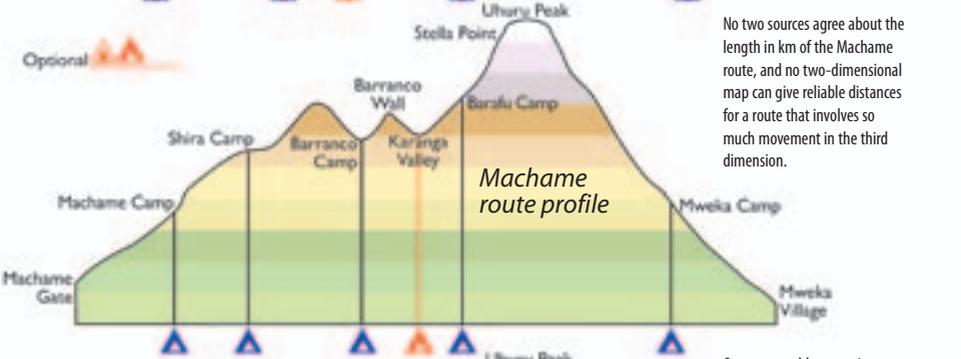
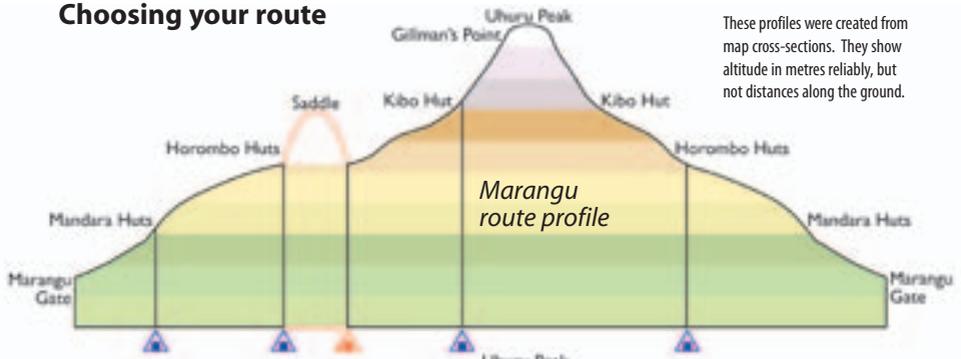


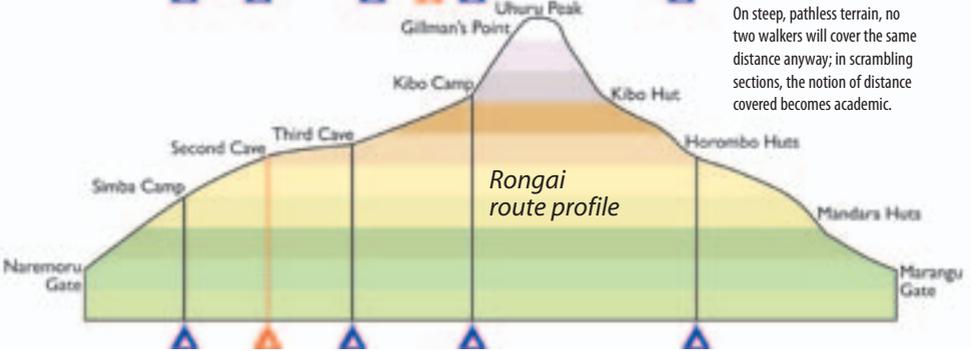
Climbing Meru is not merely for acclimatisation. It's an exhilarating volcanic hike in its own right, with dramatic views of the crater's 1500-metre cliffs and ash cone. In good conditions, the scrambling isn't difficult unless you suffer from vertigo, in which case you may settle for Rhino Point (3800 m) instead. (In icy or windy conditions the terrain can be lethal, and you might not be allowed to continue.)

### Choosing your route

These profiles were created from map cross-sections. They show altitude in metres reliably, but not distances along the ground.



No two sources agree about the length in km of the Machame route, and no two-dimensional map can give reliable distances for a route that involves so much movement in the third dimension.



On steep, pathless terrain, no two walkers will cover the same distance anyway; in scrambling sections, the notion of distance covered becomes academic.

There is a confusing plethora of route names and permutations. This book focuses on the three most popular choices: Marangu, Machame and Rongai, and explains variations such as Lemosho on page 10. For a quick overview, see the route profiles (page 7), Table 1 (page 9) and maps.

Marangu is the original and best-known route, and also the only one where you sleep overnight in bunk-bedded huts with solar-powered electricity. Nearby toilet blocks have running water. Marangu is also known as the 'tourist' or 'Coca-Cola' route, because soft drinks and water are sold. Most huts sleep up to six, except Kibo Hut which has 60 beds in five dormitories. People of either sex are allocated to bunks on arrival, so don't expect privacy. But sleeping in huts is warmer than camping, so if you tend to be cold at nights, Marangu may appeal. It is the cheapest option, and although busy, at least the number of bunks limits overall numbers. Avoid itineraries that offer Marangu as a 3-day ascent. You need an extra night at Horombo for acclimatisation, and you choose how much effort to make next day.

Marangu is the only route on which you return the same way as you ascend. If you prefer variety and don't mind camping, choose Rongai or Machame. You sleep normally two to a tent, relying on your head-torch for lighting. The latrines (toilets) are generally more primitive and further away than on Marangu.

On Rongai, you use Marangu for descent, camping near the huts and making a complete traverse of the mountain. You also have the choice between direct and indirect alternative: see page 58.

On Machame, you descend by a more direct route, normally via Mweka Camp. It's more strenuous than the other two, because

- you walk further, with more ascent and descent
- the terrain is tougher so the hiking takes more effort.



*Latrine at Barafu Camp, Machame route*

To summarise, if you dislike camping, choose Marangu. Otherwise, choose Rongai, which is both easier and more flexible than Marangu, with more variety and fewer people, albeit with a longer journey before beginning your hike. If you relish the challenge of some easy scrambling and are confident of your fitness, choose Machame. It is the most scenic route, and although it can be crowded, you can avoid most of the crowds by starting your hike mid-week. If you find the choice difficult, read Part 3 carefully and visit our website (see page 61) for links to first-hand diary accounts.

How does route choice affect your chances of summiting? Overall, 'success' rates for Marangu are about 40-50%, although some operators claim 70% or more. The average is depressed by low-budget, minimum-stay tourists who omit the extra night at Horombo, a false economy because most people suffer altitude sickness as a result. Higher percentages are quoted for Machame and Rongai, but this doesn't mean you improve your personal chances by avoiding Marangu. Fit, experienced hikers are attracted to the camping routes, and are more likely to succeed on any route.

The evidence is that exertion is a major risk factor in altitude sickness. If your main aim is to maximise your chance of reaching the summit, choose Rongai or Marangu, which have only one seriously taxing day. On Machame, your summit attempt comes after four strenuous days of trekking, and is immediately followed by a prolonged descent. Reaching the summit, however, is not everything, and there are good reasons why many people prefer the longer, more scenic Machame route, which can be made less tiring if extended by an overnight in Karanga Valley.

**Table 1: Summary of routes**

Route	Book sections	Map panels	Number of days	Grade*	Comment
<b>Marangu ascent</b>	3-1-3-4	2, 3	5	B	[4 days only if pre-acclimatised]
<b>Machame ascent</b>	3-5-3-9	4	5/6	C/B	the most scenic route; involves some easy scrambling
<b>Rongai ascent</b>	3-10, 3-11a, 3-12a	1	5	A/B	direct route [4 days only if pre-acclimatised]
	3-10, 3-11, 3-12b		5	A/B	indirect route [4 days only if pre-acclimatised]
<b>Descent (all routes)*</b>	3-13	1, 3, 4	1	A/B	all descent is by Marangu or Mweka, with one overnight after summit day descent

\* excluding summit day which on all routes is very strenuous (D/E) and includes the first 2000-3000 m of descent



*Lonely campsite in the Reusch Crater*

## **Other routes, variations and prices**

Other trekking routes include Umbwe, Lemosho and Shira. Umbwe is a tough, steep ascent from the south. It joins the Machame route at Barranco Camp (after an overnight at Cave Camp, 2850 m): see map panel 4. It is much less crowded than Machame, but the altitude gain is too rapid for most people.

The Lemosho and Shira routes approach from the west, starting with a long drive to register at Londorossi Gate. Lemosho is a variation of the seldom-used Shira route on which a 4x4 vehicle drives you to the Shira Plateau at 3500 m. On Lemosho, you take 3 days to walk up from Lemosho Glades (2100 m), via Big Tree Camp (2650 m) and Shira 1 (3600 m), to Shira Camp (3850 m). From there, you follow the Machame options. Lemosho adds a day or two, plus extra travelling and expense, but it's a much less crowded and more varied ascent.

From Barranco Camp, the normal ascent is indirect via Barafu. A challenging variation is to scramble up the Western Breach via Lava Tower (4600 m) and Arrow Glacier Camp (4800 m). This has exposed, steep sections, and after snowfall you'd need crampons and ice axe for the last bit. The Western Breach option may be combined with any Barranco Camp route, but is suitable only for climbers with experience.

A final variation is to visit the Reusch Crater itself (or even, at huge expense, to camp overnight in the crater). There is a faint path from the top of the Western Breach, and in theory it can be reached from Stella or Gillman's Points, but a crater excursion would have to be negotiated ahead of time. In practice, the guides are keen to start the descent as soon as you reach the summit.

Overall, Marangu is the cheapest route, with Rongai/Umbwe next, then Machame, and Shira/Lemosho the most expensive. This mainly reflects the time spent on the mountain, because Park fees and wages are charged per diem. But the longer your trek, the greater your chances of summiting enjoyably.