

 Kilimanjaro, by any name, is a metaphor for the compelling beauty of East Africa. When you see it, you understand why. Not only is this the highest peak on the African continent; it is also the tallest free-standing mountain in the world, rising in breathtaking isolation from the surrounding coastal scrubland ♦ elevation around 900 metres ♦ to an imperious 5,895 metres (19,340eet). Kilimanjaro is one of the world's most accessible high summits, a beacon for visitors from around the world. Most climbers reach the crater rim with little more than a walking stick, proper clothing and determination. And those who reach Uhuru Peak, the actual summit, or Gillman's Point on the lip of the crater, will have earned their climbing certificates. But there is so much more to Kili than her summit. The ascent of the slopes is a virtual climatic world tour, from the tropics to the Arctic. Even before you cross the national park boundary (at the 2,700m contour), the cultivated foot slopes give way to lush montane forest, inhabited by elusive elephant, leopard, buffalo, the endangered Abbot♦s duiker, and other small antelope and primates. Higher still lies the moorland zone, where a cover of giant heather is studded with otherworldly giant lobelias. Above 4,000m, a surreal alpine desert supports little life other than a few hardy mosses and lichen. Then, finally, the last vestigial vegetation gives way to a winter wonderland of ice and snow ♦ and the magnificent beauty of the roof of the continent.

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