

# “On Top of the World”

Alison Scott, Commercial Director for Elegant Resorts, recalls her climbing experience with 360 Expeditions; from the plains of Chester to the summit of **Kilimanjaro**, Africa's highest peak and the tallest freestanding mountain in the world...

Climbing Kilimanjaro with 360 Expeditions goes down as my absolute highlight for 2011. As a self-confessed 'luxury traveller', I'd never embarked on anything like this before and, I have to confess, the initial thought of it was pretty disconcerting. Weeks before the climb I spent a great deal of time getting my head around my kit list (thankfully, a comprehensive one was provided by 360) and the physical training. Fortunately (or unfortunately) for me, I was already committed to a training programme for the Chester Marathon that I was to run not long after returning from the climb. Once I arrived in Tanzania, though, and got onto the mountain, my apprehension turned to excitement and all I wanted to do was get to the very top.

Climbing Kilimanjaro should not be taken on lightly; it is one of the most underestimated summits in the world (mainly due to the celebrity publicity it has received) but, if you have a good level of fitness and are up for it (altitude sickness, dust and freezing temperatures to name just a few of the hazards that lie in wait), it is an extremely rewarding challenge and one I would not hesitate to recommend.

The most important thing you can take with you is a positive attitude; you can be as fit as a fiddle but if you let the final goal intimidate you, you'll find it hard to make it.

As I was travelling on my own, it was great to meet with a group of like-minded people, all of whom had booked 360 for their reputation for client care and safety – which is all confidently done in a laid-back, informal way. Spending six days – some under stress and tiredness – without a decent wash and living in a tent with strangers doesn't sound very appealing but we came together very quickly as a team and enjoyed our mountain week,



Alison relaxing in camp with Kilimanjaro visible in the distance

sharing the highs and lows, the good and the bad (the baby wipes, toilet paper and hand gel...!)

The whole thing was organised very well by 360 – there were no long, technical briefings or (heaven forbid) 'motivational' moments. Our Leader, Rolfe Oostra, told us everything we needed to know in nice, bite-sized chunks and delivered them as and when it was required; as the world's biggest control freak I found this a bit disturbing at first but came to appreciate that it was exactly the right way to do it.

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The Olmoti Crater en route to Kilimanjaro



Heading up to Kibo Summit

*Elegant Resorts*

Please call 01244 897 111 for more details or to book. [www.elegantresorts.co.uk/expeditions](http://www.elegantresorts.co.uk/expeditions)

360 Expeditions employs a team of highly competent local Guides, Porters and Cooks to look after their guests while on the Kilimanjaro expedition



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Alison celebrates with a well-deserved beer at the end of her climb

#### About Alison...

Alison has been in the travel business for twenty-one years and has been with Elegant Resorts for three years. She has a wealth of experience in both the Product and Marketing arenas.

360 Expeditions employed a team of over forty-seven (around the normal number) local Guides, Porters and Cooks to look after our group of ten. To the untrained eye, our camp may have looked completely chaotic, but everything ran like clockwork. I can only imagine the work that went on behind the scenes to ensure the variety of good food served every day, hot water, bags moved, tents taken down, put up again and cleaned of the mud we dragged into them every night. This smooth running made our lives so much easier and allowed us to concentrate completely on getting up the mountain. The key to it all was having a Leader who was super-experienced and knowledgeable about Tanzania and the mountain, as well as being known and liked by the locals. His team pulled out all the stops and genuinely respected him for his abilities and (I would like to think) us a little, by proxy.

There’s no way to do Kilimanjaro in total ‘pampered luxury’; the reality of climbing a mountain does not allow for it and the expedition experience would not be the same; however, there is a way to do it better and this is where 360 excels. 360 Expeditions’ ‘best of’ concept brings together their carefully thought-out routes (with 360 you don’t just march there and back again) with all the benefits a team of highly competent people can bring to the comfort aspect of this kind of travel.

What was the highlight of my trip? Reaching the top, of course! After over seven hours of climbing, it was fabulous to get to the top but it was also meeting the local team (our Guides, Porters and Cooks) – they sang us out of camp every morning and back into camp every night and always met us with a smile. They were a group of genuinely good people, whom it was a privilege to meet.



And what were the lows? Walking down! No one ever mentions that bit. A word of warning: if you’re thinking of doing the Kilimanjaro expedition yourself, be prepared that the hard work is not quite over once you get to Uhuru. But what goes up has to come down....

The last day was probably my worst; by this stage I was tired and dirty and all I wanted to do was get into a hot shower, but none of that really dulled my overall enjoyment and that wonderful feeling of achievement when it was all over.

Would I do it again? Not Kilimanjaro – I’ve done it now. I am seriously considering 360’s expedition to Everest Base Camp in the next couple of years, though. You never know, I might see you there!

#### Mount Kilimanjaro

6/7 nights from **£2,495** per person

This is a guide price based on a group of ten people, two people sharing, and includes a 360 Leader, local Mountain Guides, Porters, park fees, group climbing and cooking gear, ground transportation in the country, international flights, all scheduled accommodation and all scheduled meals. For more information about our bespoke expeditions, visit [www.elegantresorts.co.uk/expeditions](http://www.elegantresorts.co.uk/expeditions)

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