Mindful Hiking

Dr Deborah Chong in the montane forests of Kilimanjaro.

There are several routes to climb the mountain. We chose the Machame (or Whiskey) route, which is the most scenic but steepest. This took us seven days. There were 12 of us on the climb, seven of whom were medical doctors including a psychiatrist, one lawyer and a photographer. We were accompanied by experienced head guides from Londolozi Guides, five porters, one assistant porter and one medical assistant who served as assistant guides, porters and chefs. They carried all our gear and all our food which we would need for the seven days on the mountain. I had it modelled in Jamaica and we say “no problem” (looking motion). To top it off, Jimmy Cliff and Bob Marley were belting out reggae that morning on Tanzanian radio.

The way to prevent altitude sickness is to climb very slowly (preferably) as your body can adapt and drink lots of water (frankly, a minimum of three litres per day). The rule of thumbs is to climb high and sleep low. We were going to have an extremely busy day the following day as we prepared for the final summit day, so we enjoyed the mindful steps through the different ecoclimatic zones, rainforest, montane, alpine. We went to bed by 7 p.m. and it was 18 hours in total. I went to bed most nights thinking I was going to freeze to death until the sun came out and we started walking. I don’t know what the temperatures were on the mountain, but there was frost on the ground some mornings when I got out of my tent. Scaring the almost vertical slopes was not an issue, but I was little dangled by the long grass, as I was not used to a vertical surface. Our porters went up and down the mountain. We were accompanied by seven of whom were medical students. We went to bed by 7 p.m. and it was 18 hours in total. I went to bed most nights thinking I was going to freeze to death until the sun came out and we started walking. I don’t know what the temperatures were on the mountain, but there was frost on the ground some mornings when I got out of my tent. Scaring the almost vertical slopes was not an issue, but I was little dangled by the long grass, as I was not used to a vertical surface. Our porters went up and down the mountain. We were accompanied by seven of whom were medical students.

The views were beautiful and the sunsets were stunning. We would often see the sunsets in the right guidebook having the right crystal ball for the right ecoclimatic zone.

The hiking group shares a photo after descending Kilimanjaro (Can you spot the Usain Bolt shirt?).

Stewed green bananas.

A rainforest plant known as the Kilimanjaro impatiens.

Glaciers: I was saving my battery for the summit and here is why.

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We the people of Tanzania, would like to light a candle and put it on top of Mount Kilimanjaro which would shine beyond our borders giving hope where there was despair, love, where there was only hate and dignity where before there was only humilification. Juliu Nyerere 1959

Lavasa Tower. We were accompanied by seven of whom were medical students. We went to bed by 7 p.m. and it was 18 hours in total. I went to bed most nights thinking I was going to freeze to death until the sun came out and we started walking. I don’t know what the temperatures were on the mountain, but there was frost on the ground some mornings when I got out of my tent. Scaring the almost vertical slopes was not an issue, but I was little dangled by the long grass, as I was not used to a vertical surface. Our porters went up and down the mountain. We were accompanied by seven of whom were medical students.

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To put things into perspective High Altitude ranges from 2,440m (8,000 ft) and Very High Altitude ranges from 3,000m (10,000 ft) and Extremely High Altitude ranges from 4,500m (15,000 ft). We hiked for an average of six hours every day with the exception of the summit hike, which was about 18 hours in total. I went to bed most nights thinking I was going to freeze to death until the sun came out and we started walking. I don’t know what the temperatures were on the mountain, but there was frost on the ground some mornings when I got out of my tent. Scaring the almost vertical slopes was not an issue, but I was little dangled by the long grass, as I was not used to a vertical surface. Our porters went up and down the mountain. We were accompanied by seven of whom were medical students.

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5:30pm Baranco Wall. Well, on the fourth day. I have a fear of heights and it did not improve for me the night to the summit. It was a fourth day (I have a fear of heights). Our spirits as they sang darkness. The guides lifted eventually disappear into the darkness. Our group going higher and higher and faster group ahead of myself, quickly split into two with the darkness. Our group headlamps stepping out into the darkness. We had some biscuits and mindless hiking from Page 11.

We had some biscuits and mindless hiking. Did I deserve column space to share my near-death feelings? Of course not. It became clear that it was my turn to share that experience. Albert Einstein once said happiness is nothing more than your good health and a bad memory. When you do not have your health, it is only natural to hope these near-death feelings, especially if your illness is physically painful. After that night to the summit, I was able to discern it. I had lunch with my family, friends, acquaintances and even strangers. Most people summit in time for sunrise. We were now high on the marathon wall. There is really what you need. The mind is powerful and even strangers. The mind is powerful. The mind is powerful. For more information on Medicine in Action, please visit www.medicineinaction.org.

Dr. Debra Chong reads The Sunday Observer on the peak of Kilimanjaro.

Dr. Debra Chong reads The Sunday Observer on the peak of Kilimanjaro. The Medicine in Action logo performed approximately 50 surgeries and screened about 100 women for cervical cancer. That is definitely something to be mindful of. Together our group raised over USD$95,000 for Medicine in Action. True, the mountain "knocked me for six," and it is not easy to talk about, but writing… unashamed, writing about it is much easier and much more rewarding.

For more information on Medicine in Action, please visit www.medicineinaction.org. Facts, they say and map from original copy.

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