

African Adventure

Kili, Safari & Zanzibar

Fall, 2006

Day 1 –In the Air

My sis gave D and I a rocking send off with a Champagne Brunch among close friends. The 30 hour trip from San Francisco to Nairobi made me realize how much I hate Heathrow's security policies and how great Kenya Airway's veggie airplane food is compared to any other airline.

Day 2 – In Nairobi

We arrived in Nairobi to find that not all of my luggage made it, correction, none of it made it because I only had one bag. But somehow BOTH of D's bags had no problem finding him.

After waiting for what seemed like forever in baggage claim hoping the bag was just running a bit late – I bit the bullet and went to the lost luggage counter to submit a search request. We then headed to our hotel at which time I realized we aren't in California anymore and hotel standards are just what I remembered a struggling developing country would provide.

Day 3 – Nairobi Sightseeing?

After a sleepless night of making a mental list of everything I would need to purchase if my luggage didn't make it – we headed out to walk off the long trip of the previous 2 days.

I asked G (Front Desk Clerk) directions to downtown at which time she gave me a crazy look when I told her we wanted to walk. She insisted on escorting us, which gave me a great opportunity to quiz her about life in Nairobi. She was a sweet girl for putting up with us and leading us to the middle of town.

From there we walked and walked and walked and realized Nairobi is not a very pretty city. I found a phone (not an easy task) and called the airport to find out my luggage was delivered to the hotel – I did the HAPPY dance! I finally get to brush my teeth!!!

Day 4 - Nairobi to Moshi

The commencement of our tour started with a little trouble. We gathered in the hotel lobby at 8 AM, and met the other couple on our tour (N and J) then waited.... waited... called the emergency contact phone... and waited.

They forgot about us and now we needed to get to Moshi in Tanzania. After having "words" with one of the tour reps who introduced himself as "Innocent" (I wasn't sure if this was his position of the situation or his actual name), we eventually were on our way in a private car.

Since we weren't going the "official route" we had to cross the border of Kenya and Tanzania by walking across and meeting our next car, it was fun and reminded me of my days traveling around Central American. We finally arrived in Moshi to a very nice oasis where we all wished we had spent most of our day (instead of wasting it waiting and driving) – oh well, that's international travel for you!

Days 5 - Kilimanjaro National Park

We finally got to start our walk up Kilimanjaro starting at the Marangu Gate. We had a short day hiking to Mandara Huts (2,750m) through a thick rainforest zone. Today was deemed "Monkey Day" – they were everywhere - crossing the trail and in the trees – AWESOME!

Day 6 – Kilimanjaro National Park

We walked through heather and moorland zone to Horombo Hut (3,720m), which lies in a valley surrounded by giant lobelia and groundsel, flora which are characteristic of this semi-alpine zone.

Everyday is a completely new scene – BEAUTIFUL!

Day 7 – Kilimanjaro National Park

The walk continued past the final watering hole and accented onto the saddle of Kilimanjaro between the peaks of Kibo and Mwenzi. The vegetation thinned out as we enter the desert-like alpine zone that resembled a lunar landscape.

We ended our walk at Kibo Hut (4,703m), where I did the daily task of registering everyone since I usually arrived first (so thankful our guide let us separate and go at our own pace... fast or slow). It was COLD on the way up with a hailstorm drenching us and then the huts being like ice boxes. We had an early dinner and were in bed by 6PM to be “rested” for the next day’s climb.

Day 8 – Saturday, 9/30/06 - Kilimanjaro Summit

Shortly after midnight, we started our climb to the summit of Kilimanjaro, the scene was AMAZING! Kili has a fresh dusting of snow that acted as a light all the way up the mountain.

We all had our own guide, which I thought was overkill but it worked out perfect. It was COLD to say the least and my guide’s main job was to slow me down with "Pole Pole" being the mantra on the mountain, which means “slowly, slowly.”

We hiked up a steep terrain that included icy rock climbing. I turned off my headlamp early on because I found it more peaceful and D's lamp behind me provided plenty of light. I had no idea how steep it really was until I came down later.

My guide tried helping me up the rocks which was sketchy considering he was slipping and I had to catch him a couple of times. I decided I was better off on my own, although I think his "slips" had everything to do with the athletic shoes he was wearing (no traction). The “guides” don't have the resources to gear up the way us tourists do, in fact he didn't even have gloves!.

We made it up to Gillman's point (5,861m), the "first" summit, in 4 hours (usually it takes 5-6). My Camelbak water froze halfway up but I felt strong - so I wasn't that concerned, I knew I had reserve energy. Now we were off to Uhuru Peak (5,895m or 19,330 feet)

The guides slowed the pace A LOT, which drove me nuts because I got cold...VERY COLD, the kind of bone chilling cold you don't want to think about much less experience. The altitude didn't bother me, the physical exertion didn't bother me... but the cold was enough to drive your spirit in the ground.

D needed to stop a few times which was difficult for me because that's when I would get even colder. I finally put on another layer, which helped (for some reason I was "saving" it for when it really got cold - not sure how cold it would need to get before I put my final layer on but I never used it.).

We got to the summit at 5:30 AM, about 1.5 hours “early”. They try to time the summits with the sunrise, which is why the guides were going so slow, but my urgency squashed that plan - oops. It was dark with an orange line appearing on the horizon - absolutely gorgeous. Pictures could not possibly capture the scene - other peaks, clouds and numerous shooting stars that night. It was the closest to a spiritual entity I've ever been. I was high with the views!

We quickly took our pictures and headed down with speed (now they didn't care how fast we went). We met up with N, who had a torn ACL (same as I had back in college) and was doing the climb with a brace. He looked tired but I knew he had it in him. His wife, J turned back very early on (this wasn't her gig, she came to Africa for the animals). His water froze as well so I gave him my juice, figuring he needed it more (besides D had one we could share), took some pictures and off we went.

At Gillman's Peak our guides let D and I split up and I hauled a** down with my guide who suddenly was a speed demon. I made it back at Kibo Hut (camp) at 8:00 AM. I told J all about my morning adventure and we waited for D and N to return so we could continue the rest of our hike down that day (we had to make it to Homboro Hut which was another 3 hours down).

We waited a few hours and the guys returned - a bit rough around the edges but safe. We headed out at noon for the remainder of our hike down. That night at dinner the guys were beat but J and I had tons of energy – I was still high from the whole experience. I tried sleeping but it was useless (even with a sleeping pill), I just kept thinking about how amazing it was on the mountain and how I could go back.

Day 9 - Kilimanjaro Descent

The sunrise was AMAZING due to Homboro Huts being above the clouds, so you feel like you're in heaven. It was our last day on the mountain as we finished our decent. At the bottom we received our certificate and headed back to the Springland Hotel where we toasted with Champagne and congratulated each other!

Day 10 - Safari at Manyara National Park

First day of Safari was at Manyara Lake where we went for an evening drive and saw tons of active wildlife. It was deemed "Elephant Day."

Day 11 - Safari at Serengeti National Park

It was a LONG DUSTY day of driving to Serengeti National Park via Olduvai Gorge. We took an evening drive of the Serengeti, which boosted our spirits after inhaling dust for many hours. The camps were very rustic, with lots of warnings for us not to leave the camp due to wild animals. We had a Zebra visit the camp that night and J swears is peed on her tent... either that or one of the guys didn't want to make the trek to the pee shack (most likely).

Day 12 – Safari at Serengeti National Park

After breakfast we ventured into the corners of the Serengeti for a full day game viewing in the park. Lots of animals! J & N are turning out to be fantastic travel buddies, D & I lucked out; they are making this trip a blast!

Day 13 – Ngorongoro

We first headed to the Ngorongoro Conservation Area to visit a Maasi Village. This was the only place we were allowed to photograph the Maasi. We were welcomed by song and dance where J and D tried to jump with the natives. All I can say is "white men can't jump and Filipino princesses aren't much better."

It was an awakening glimpse into a dying culture. Although the Maasi ensured we had a great time (and captured hysterical footage of us trying to dance), it was saddening to see basic needs not met. Like typical tourists, we were then off to our next sight before our hearts weighed to heavy (lots of distractions).

Next up was the Ngorongoro crater where animals go in but they don't come out – hence why we got to see so much. Today was "Lion Day" and "Elephant Encounter Evening"... lots of wine later.

Day 14 - Ngorongoro – Moshi

Luckily no one had a hangover for our little walk with the Ranger. After several days of being kept in a mobile cage we needed a walk which was only allowed with a Ranger who had a gun (we weren't sure if it was for the animals or for us). It felt great to get out and head back to our Oasis in Moshi – where we ventured out to a great restaurant on a roof with a perfect night sky and a wonderful evening that ended with African drums.

Day 15 – Zanzibar

We took an early flight to Zanzibar where we relished in the shopping and beautiful scene of the tropics. Zanzibar was settled by Arabs, Indians and Africans which meant yummy food and beautifully hand carved buildings and doors. But the best part about Stonestown was the shopping and opportunity to barter – it was a blast! That night we found a beach restaurant with a gorgeous view and delicious food... I was in heaven!

Day 16 – Zanzibar

I headed out early for a morning walk and managed to find D a REAL coffee shop! When I brought everyone back later in the morning (not sharing where we were headed) - I don't think I saw that big of a smile on D's face the entire trip... the boy likes his coffee! The rest of the day was spent relaxing on the beach!

Day 17 – Zanzibar Spice Tour

We took a tour of the spice plantations of Zanzibar where we tasted the exotic foods and spices. I fell in LOVE with the fruit – “sour bread” – YUMMY! It tastes like pineapple and mushy bananas. Then we headed off to the north beach where we swam and hunted down the lobster to feast on that night. We managed to catch an awesome show that made the day even more perfect. It was our last night with N & J – its sad to leave them; they really made this an awesome trip!!!

Day 18 – Ras Nungwei Resort

We transferred hotels to Ras Nungwei Resort so we could spend the next few days relaxing in leisure and SCUBA diving. This place was... WOW! We soaked up the sun and enjoyed an amazing dinner. I can't believe the trip keeps getting better!

Day 19 - SCUBA diving in Zanzibar

Fantastic day! We saw 9 giant green turtles on our second dive and tons of beautiful fish – does it get any better? Yet another amazing dinner!

Day 20 - Dar Es Saalam

We left our oasis of luxury in search of a new adventure - a trip to Dar Es Saalam. We took the ferry from Zanzibar to Dar Es Saalam which was interesting when we got off and had to negotiate the “helpers” who just want to grab your bag. But I managed to negotiate a price (\$4) for a porter/taxi/escort through customs... D's still not sure how I did it. We relaxed in the hotel and viewed our first African TV (nothing on there either).

Day 21 – Dar Es Saalam

Another city we could forego seeing – but that's how you find these things out. We spent a day walking all of Dar Es Saalam's downtown, a couple of times. We never managed to find souvenir shopping or anything to do – so we just hung out. D was disappointed (he really wanted an American burger and coke) the Hard Rock Café closed – I guess the town's “hip days” are over. We hopped on a flight at midnight after much delay and headed home with a 30-hour journey.

A few tips when traveling to Africa...

- There is NO brewed coffee – if instant is unacceptable, pack your own (this was almost the demise of D)
- We had a tough time verifying if the toilets flush the opposite direction in the Southern Hemisphere due to the toilet water not circling but just going straight down. Another mystery of the world goes unsolved.
- If you have public bathroom “germophobia” this is not the country for you, “Lodge Safari” helps (we roughed it, which I don't recommend). Regardless ALWAYS bring your own TP and wet wipes.

- If you go during Ramadan and are female, pack more than one skirt or travel with someone that won't notice (or care) if you are wearing the same thing daily.
- If you choose a wine off a wine list – expect to get whatever they feel like bringing you.
- Bring LOTS of extra stuff for the kids and porters (candy, gloves, etc).