



Experience

Climbing Mount Cameroon was the quickest multi-day mountain trek I've ever organized, putting to bed the idea that some countries in Africa are bureaucratically slow. Having pitched-up unannounced at the Mount Cameroon Inter-Communal Ecotourism (Mount CEO) Board building in Buea, and deposited some excess weight in their storeroom (legally requisite porters are only allowed to carry 15 kilos, my bag was more like 20), I've met my local guide and was on my way.

At 4,090 meters (or 13,000 feet), it may not reach the heady heights of Kilimanjaro in Tanzania, but still sees those on its slopes ascend 3,000m from sea-level over the course of three days and two nights. Locals call Mount Cameroon "Mongo ma Ndemi", the mountain of greatness.

Mount Cameroon's no longer a dormant volcano either. More than 100 cinder cones line the flanks of the typical cone-shaped main crater. The last outflow of lava occurred in 2012. The trek begins through an area of village small-holdings containing yam and maize, the staples of almost all meals, but we've entered under the shade of the trees just 200 vertical meters from Buea. The rough path doesn't faze the runner coming down the mountain, training for the annual Race of Hope mountain marathon.

The atmosphere remains close until we break through the tree line after three hours of walking on an increasingly steep path where it is sometimes hard to find obvious footholds. I don't want to move on from the thin gnarled trunk of the so-called magic tree, a 500 year old sole survivor at this altitude, but know I have to make it to the blue-grey hand-sawn clapboard planks of hut two where I'll spend the night. They are covered with the charcoal scrawling of those who have come before me.

With Samuel's help I reach the narrow flat-topped summit after just a couple of hours of walking the next morning. We made it! The sense of accomplishment is overwhelming. Tired and mildly torn, we don't stay long to celebrate this feat, as the wind is viciously cold. However, the feeling you get from achieving something like this is always reward enough!

Heading back down, the route begins on a slope of almost pure black scree leftover from the last volcanic eruptions, where I slip and slide, past blowholes stinking of sulphur, gravity doing most of the work for once. Then we come to a wide strip of loose lava stone, the land around still barren save for a few pioneer plants of vibrant green. The ground doesn't become colonized by starchy tufts of tussock grass for hours to come.

By lunchtime the following day Samuel and I are leaving the trees again, reaching the tarmac road, and are soon back in the centre of Buea, tired, happy, relieved I've made it. 'The others didn't think you would make it' says Samuel. 'I say no, you are strong. I have seen it.'

GO – Getting There

The nearest international airport is in Douala, Cameroon's largest city. Buea is roughly three hours driving time from Douala. The roads are in good tarred condition, but driving standards leave a lot to be desired. Hire cars available at the airport, and public transport in the form of minibuses, shared taxis, and private taxis.

Do – Activities & Attractions

The main highlight is going to be trekking here, though for those perhaps a little less inclined to make the trek, there are a few tourist shops in the area which can help organize day trips and sightseeing in the surrounding area. The main focus for visitors coming here, however, is climbing Mount Cameroon.

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Stay – Accommodation

Accommodation on the mountain is in a combination of (very) basic unheated huts and tents. The two most respected lodgings in Buea are the Presbyterian Church Synod Office, close to the Mount CEO office, and the Paramount Hotel. Both are basic, but used to trekkers, with single/double bedrooms that are with/without private bathrooms.



Eat – Restaurants

The Paramount has a good value bar and restaurant, and there are plenty of places on Buea's main street. Look out for ndolé, the local specialty, a spicy stew of spinach-like greens, meat, fish and peanut paste. You are responsible for your own food on the mountain. Instant noodles are easy to find in local shops.

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Time – Seasonality & Schedules

It's possible to trek all year round, but northern hemisphere winter is considered the time of year with less clouds. Many seek to avoid climbing Mount Cameroon during the heavy rains of summer, as Douala is one of the most humid places on Earth any time of year.



Safety – Possible risks

Though Mount Cameroon is a rope-less climb where no special skills are required other than a good level of fitness and strong dose of determination, trekking on any mountain is intrinsically a risky experience.

There is no major risk of theft, however, as in any developing nation muggings/thefts do occur. Be particularly careful after dark (away from the mountain), and consider using taxis in big cities at night. You need to carry photographic identification at all times in Cameroon.

Corruption is considered a problem, but this affects locals far more than visitors. I was never asked for money. Slandering the long-term president can see you imprisoned.



Pay – How much does it cost?

Costs change regularly, so this is a rough outline. This trekking package to climb Mount Cameroon costs roughly \$150. Additionally, expect to spend around \$60 a day for the basics (food, accommodation, public transport) while in Cameroon.

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Responsible Travel – Best Practices

Climb Mount Cameroon with a responsible company such as Mount CEO. The organization is a not-for-profit providing portering and guide jobs to the men of 12 villages situated in the vicinity of Mount Cameroon, while protecting the mountain from over-development. It's these guys who issue the all-important trekking permit, a piece of paper regularly checked on the hike. Leave no waste on the mountain.

A generally conservative country, dress appropriately (no short shorts for example), and always address elders and strangers with respect.

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Reality Check – Be Aware

Climbing Mount Cameroon is no stroll in the country-side. It requires a good level of physical fitness, enough to walk for 6-8 hours per day for 3 or more days over rough ground, though a porter will be responsible for carrying your bag. The lure of the mountain of greatness might just be the motivation you need to get to that level.

About the Author: [Ian M Packham](#)

Ian is an adventurer, award-winning travel writer and motivational speaker. He has circumnavigated Africa by public transport, travelled the length of the Sri Lanka's longest river, walked the coast of the Isle of Man and the length of Hadrian's Wall, and travelled through Scandinavia using a guidebook dating from the 1960s. He continues his journeys in much the same fashion which can be followed here and on [Encircle Africa's](#) website.