

As tourism spreads beyond traditional hubs, rural communities are becoming new centres of opportunity.

David, who grew up in a village a few kilometres from the park and has worked inside it for over a decade, put it plainly: “When the park was empty, the poachers were confident. They knew nobody was watching. Now there are cars, there are people and they are afraid to come.”

Twenty Kilometres from Moshi

Nshara, a small village that sits some twenty kilometers outside Moshi. From a distance, it looks like any other rural settlement in the Kilimanjaro region – low buildings, banana trees, red dirt roads, the kind of place you might pass through without slowing down. But as you get closer, something feels different. Tourist Land Cruisers with their distinctive logos of the tour operators on the sides. Groups of men in hiking gear move in organized groups. A young man balances a porter's duffel on his head, walking with the purposeful stride of someone at the start of a long job. This is not what a quiet Tanzanian village usually looks like.

Nshara is home to the headquarters of Altezza Travel, one of the largest operators of Kilimanjaro treks and wildlife safaris in the country. Before the pandemic, Altezza made a decision to leave Moshi and move its entire operation to this village. Management, logistics, staff training, equipment, vehicles – everything relocated here.

I sat with Praygod, the company's manager, in a shaded courtyard that doubles as a briefing area for climbing groups.

“The key reason why we decided to move was that the town was becoming noisier, more crowded. We wanted a working environment that was calmer, greener. And we wanted to be closer to the people who actually do the work.”

That second reason matters more than it might first appear. The men and women who carry loads up Kilimanjaro, who guide safari vehicles, who cook and clean and manage camps, most of them come from villages like Nshara. For years, they commuted to the city to meet their employers, or relocated there entirely, leaving behind the communities they had grown up in. Moving the company to the village reversed the direction of travel.

Altezza runs a hotel on the edge of Nshara. The company combined it with training and logistics facilities, and built its operation around the site. The business was eventually reregistered in the village, and today employs over 250 people there. In 2025, the company received B Corp certification, a designation given to businesses that meet verified standards of social and environmental performance. According to Praygod, the company's presence in the local community was among the criteria that contributed to that recognition.

Walk through Nshara on a weekday morning and you will find a small economy that did not exist a decade ago. Grace runs a shop near the main road, selling snacks, airtime and basic supplies. She opened it three years ago, after her husband got a job with the company.

“Before, we thought about going to Moshi,” she said, arranging a shelf of biscuit packets. “Now there is no reason. We have enough clients here.”

She is not alone. Along the same stretch of road, several small cafes have opened in recent years, serving the steady flow of porters, guides and staff



Mt Kilimanjaro porter working for a travel company in Nshara.



Local traders, selling vegetables. With companies moving to rural areas, demand grew



Assistant of the climbing facility preparing for the expedition in Nshara

who move through Nshara in the early hours before an expedition departs. They are simple places, a few plastic tables, a gas burner, a pot of tea that is never quite empty, but on a busy weekend morning they fill quickly, and the women who run them are doing brisk business by seven o'clock.

Further along, a gear shop has established itself as an essential stop on the way to the mountain – porters come in to buy rain poncho, a brimmed hat, a mountain jacket or repair boots, before a group departs. Not long ago, you would have had to go to Moshi for any of this.

This is how secondary economies grow, not through planning, but through people paying attention. Workers need to eat before dawn, fix things that break, and buy things they need. That demand creates opportunity, and opportunity brings enterprise. Nshara is, in this sense, going through a version of what Moshi went through a generation earlier – just faster, and with a mountain visible on the horizon.

For many residents, this is straight-

forwardly good. Community members I spoke to returned again and again to one thing: proximity to family. Emmanuel works at the company's mountain climbing facility, helping to sort and load equipment before expeditions depart. For four years, before Altezza moved to Nshara, he worked for an operator in Moshi, twenty kilometres away, and not an easy twenty kilometres. The journey meant walking to the

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daladala stop, waiting for a minibus that ran on its own schedule, riding into town standing up more often than not, and then covering the last stretch on foot. Door to door, it rarely took less than an hour and a half each way. Three hours a day on the road, every working day, and fares that quietly ate through a portion of his monthly wage. “You don't think about it at first,” he said. “But then you count it at the end of the month and you realise how much is gone. The time and the money both.”

When he heard that Altezza had opened a facility in Nshara, he applied for a position and got it. Now he cycles to work in fifteen minutes. The money he used to spend on fares stays in his pocket. The hours go to his family. “It sounds like a small thing,” he said. “But it is not a small thing.”

The financial concerns are also important: housing in Nshara costs roughly a third what a comparable place runs in Moshi. Food from local markets is cheaper. The informal support networks of rural communities and neighbors who help with childcare, family land that supplements income, cushioning the cost of living in ways that city life rarely offers. A salary that felt stretched in Moshi goes further here.

But not everyone in Nshara speaks about these changes without hesitation.

Joseph, an older farmer I met near the village road, has a straightforward complaint: the village is getting loud. It did not use to be. Nshara was, for most of his life, the kind of place where the loudest thing on a weekend morning was a rooster. That is no longer the case. Kilimanjaro expeditions depart in groups, and the porters, sometimes a hundred or more for a single busy weekend, each climb requiring a small army of people to carry food, tents, oxygen and gear – gather near the company's premises before sunrise. The sound carries – boots on gravel, bags dropped and re-sorted, voices calling out names for the register, engines turning over in the dark.

But Joseph is not entirely without sympathy for what has arrived. “I will tell you one thing. That noise – it is our children making it. My daughter's husband works in one of the cafes there, serving the porters before they leave. He used to be in Moshi. Now he is here.” He looked back toward the road, where another group was assembling in the morning sun. “So what can I say, life goes on. Nshara changes, and it is good for our youth.”

Tobias, twenty-six, grew up partly in Germany and partly in Nshara, where his grandparents have lived their whole lives. He completed his degree in Hamburg last spring and came to visit them shortly after. It was his first time back in four years, and the change surprised him.

“I knew things were developing, but I did not expect this,” he told me, sitting outside his grandparents' house. “The last time I was here, this was a very simple place. Now there are cars everywhere and the people I don't recognise.”

He was thinking about what it meant. In Germany, he said, the distinction between village and city has largely collapsed. Prices in the countryside are not dramatically lower than in Munich or Hamburg. The shops sell the same things. The roads look the same. Young

Germans of his generation, he told me, often romanticise the idea of a simpler life in the village without ever having access to one that actually feels that way. Tanzania, and Nshara specifically, had always represented that for him. A place that had stayed itself.

“In Europe, a village is just a small town,” he said. “Same shops, same roads, just fewer people. Here it is still something different, something real. I believe the development, if it is careful, can help keep it that way. Give people work, give them reasons to stay. A village with people in it does not disappear.”

For generations, Nshara looked more or less the way it always had – settled into itself. The people who grew up here and stayed were not staying because they had no choice. Many of them, by their own account, were simply content. The village gave them a life that moved at a human pace, surrounded by people they had known since childhood.

Whether that will still be true in a generation, if the trend continues, is something nobody in Nshara can answer with confidence. And that uncertainty, more than the noise, may be the most honest measure of what is at stake.

What is clear is that the direction of movement is slowly changing. For a long time, Tanzania's tourism economy pulled people toward a handful of cities and a few famous parks, leaving the rest of the country to watch from a distance. Now, in a small village on the road outside Moshi, porters are waking their neighbors before sunrise. And in Mkomazi, a lodge built in a park that barely registers on the tourist map is turning away from the Serengeti crowd and finding, quietly, that there were people willing to follow.

Neither story is finished. But both suggest that Tanzania's tourism map may be starting, slowly, to redraw itself.

There are those who worry about what that redrawing will bring. The concerns are not unreasonable – rising prices, noise, the gradual erosion of a way of life that survived precisely because it was left alone. But there is another way to read what is happening in Nshara and Mkomazi. Tanzania's villages were once self-reliant, sustained by farming, by communal land, by economies that did not need much from the outside world. That world no longer exists. The broader economy has reached everywhere, and a village that cannot participate in it does not stay preserved. The young leave, the old remain, and in a generation the place exists in memory more than in fact. That has been the story of rural communities across the developed world for decades, and we don't want that to happen in Tanzania.

What tourism offers is a reason to stay – work that pays well, close to home, in a place worth living in. In Tanzania, where the industry is large enough and growing fast, it is the most realistic tool available for keeping rural communities alive. The critics are not wrong to ask hard questions about how that growth is managed. But in the villages around Mkomazi, and on the road outside Moshi, high-paying jobs are appearing in places that never had them before. For the people living there, that is the difference between staying and leaving.