



Trip Factsheet: Vallée Blanche Day, Chamonix

The Vallée Blanche

The Vallée Blanche in Chamonix is perhaps the most famous off-piste ski descent in the world, and for good reason! It's 22km long and has a vertical descent of over 2,700m. The descent is entirely off-piste and travels through some of the most spectacular glaciated scenery in Europe. Surrounding the glaciers are several stunning 4,000m peaks: Mont Blanc, Mont Blanc de Cheilon, Mont Maudit, Grandes Jorasses and Aiguille Verte.

The 'Vallée Blanche - Classic Route' is suitable for intermediate skiers and snowboarders. However, there are many variations for more advanced off-piste skiers, the best known being the 'Petit and Grand Envers'. It is also possible to ski the Italian side of the Vallée Blanche from the Helbronner lift station, which is accessed from Courmayeur.

Chamonix

The town of Chamonix is a busy, cosmopolitan town with lots of hotels, shops, cafés, bars and restaurants. The bustling town sits below the mighty Mont Blanc (4810m) in a spectacular valley surrounded by high glaciated peaks.

The Chamonix Valley runs for 20kms and has 5 main separate ski areas along its length, offering a variety of pisted and acres of off piste terrain. The legendary Aiguille du Midi cable car which accesses the Vallée Blanche leaves from Chamonix town centre. Its high glaciated peaks to lower tree lined skiing really does give the aspiring off piste skier the ideal environment in which it to learn.

Skiing the Vallée Blanche

The round trip from Chamonix takes from 3-5 hours.

Mostly we take our time to really enjoy the experience and do just 1 descent. However if conditions are good and the group are up for it, it is possible to do more than one descent. The cable car reservation will be made by our office and your guide will explain what time you need to be at the base station of the Aiguille du Midi cable car - generally about 30 minutes before our scheduled lift time.

Conditions on the VB can vary enormously, from powder to hard pack to moguls! The dangers of the high alpine environment are always present, especially crevasses and remoteness, this means taking a qualified Mountain Guide is essential.

The route begins from the summit of the Aiguille du Midi (3842m), which is accessed by a very spectacular cable car ride. This is a famous viewpoint and we take time to take in the surroundings, which include a great view of the summit of Mont Blanc and other ranges including the Gran Paradiso in Italy and the Monterosa in Switzerland.

We begin the journey on foot down a snow arête (sometimes wearing crampons for additional safety). This section is high and exposed and each member of the group will be equipped with a harness and roped up.

At the Col we put on skis and ski down a fairly steep slope to the first section of glacier that

leads us under the South face of the Midi and Mont Blanc du Tacul. Several kilometers of spectacular but fairly gentle skiing lead us to the Geant Icefall. This is the most difficult section which involves steeper slopes and views of huge tumbling ice falls.

Once the steepest part is behind us, we join another easy angled glacier, the Mer du Glace. Here it is possible, simply to cruise and enjoy the view. Packed lunch can be enjoyed in an area called the 'Salle a Manger' (the eating room). Alternatively we can traverse across to the Refuge du Requin which sits above the Mer de Glace and has stunning views of the séracs du Géant, the arête des Périades and the Dent du Géant.

The track down the Mer de Glace zigzags between the crevasses and covers several kilometers of ground before arriving just below the Montanvers Mountain Railway station. If there is thin snow cover, we climb the steps and take the gondola and finish the journey by train. But if there is enough snow we continue skiing down the Mer de Glace and make a turn onto forested valley sides (20 min walking section). The final 600m of descent are made on an exciting switch-back trail, eventually arriving back near the centre of Chamonix and a drink (or two) in the nearest bar!

Guides and Group Sizes

Our Vallée Blanche days are run by our team of IFMGA Mountain Guides led by Olly Allen, Matt Dickinson and Nick Parks. The maximum group size with 1 guide is 6 skiers (or snowboarders).

Skiing Level

For the classic route, the minimum standard would be a competent red-run skier or snowboarder. You should be able to parallel turn on moderately challenging ground. The snowboarder must be able to hold an edge and traverse without losing a great deal of height. We recommend telescopic poles for boarders on flat sections.

Preparation for the Vallée Blanche day

The Vallée Blanche is an exciting off-piste day. The route starts at the top of the Aig du Midi, which is at about 3,500m, an elevation at which you'll notice the altitude with a slight shortness of breath. Ideally you'll have been skiing in Chamonix for a couple of days before you ski the VB so will have become acclimatized to the altitude and have got your ski legs. You should have good fitness.

Equipment

The Vallée Blanche is a full-day out in the high mountains and you need to be kitted out appropriately.

- Warm, snow-proof jacket and trousers
- Extra layer (e.g. fleece)
- Warm gloves
- Hat
- All-mountain skis that are suitable for off-piste skiing
- Small back-pack
- Goggles
- Sun-cream
- Snack food and water
- Avalanche safety equipment: transceiver, shovel and probe (can be hired)

What happens if the Vallée Blanche is closed because of adverse conditions

We hope you will have fantastic conditions on your VB day but sometimes there can be high winds or adverse conditions which mean the Aiguille du Midi cable car is closed and so we can't access the VB. Statistically there is about a 20% chance of poor conditions. On these days our guide will work out an alternative programme, which will involve skiing on one of the other ski areas in the Chamonix Valley. These are at a lower elevation and are very rarely closed.

Ski Pass

To ski the Vallée Blanche you need a 1-day Mont Blanc Unlimited ski pass. If you have purchased a Chamonix Pass for your other days in Chamonix, you can just buy a 1-day upgrade.

Price

Price for an IFMGA Mountain Guide for this activity is £395 for a group of 1 - 4 people and £420 for a group of up to 5 or 6 people.

What's included in the price of the trip

Guide fees and expenses and use of avalanche safety equipment for the day

Scheduled expenses

Lift pass

Packed Lunch

Insurance

You must have insurance that includes cover for guided off piste skiing. It must include helicopter rescue.

More information

If you have any questions or need further details don't hesitate to contact us:

Email: info@mountaintracks.co.uk

Phone: +44 208 123 2978

Skype: mountaintracks

Terms and Conditions

Booking Conditions

Bookings are to be made through our office. All bookings are subject to availability. A credit card is required to confirm all bookings. Confirmation of your booking and further details of your meeting place and time will be sent to you by our office. Full payment is due for all activities in advance of participation via credit or debit card (2% fee on credit card) or cash. All card transactions are made in Sterling.

Cancellation Policy

In the event of without exception Mountain Tracks will not give a refund in the following cases:

- If you cancel the booking within 7 days of the activity taking place, you will be charged the full amount.
- In the event of a day/activity being interrupted or not completed due to a lack of fitness or technique.
- If you are late or miss the pre-arranged meeting with the guide.

- In the event of the activity being stopped for reasons outside our control (lifts stopping or broken down, piste closure, poor weather or safety reasons etc).

We will refund the cost of the day less a £20 administration fee:

- If the guide and clients on the day mutually agree to cancel and the guide accepts no payment for the day. The guide can offer you an alternative day for the original descent if he/she is able to guide you on another day that is mutually convenient to both parties.

Weather Conditions

- Once Mountain Tracks has decided to run the activity, it will not be cancelled or postpone because of the weather nor will any refund be made.
- If a specific activity is not possible due to the weather or snow conditions then a suitable alternative is provided, no refund will be given if the guide and the clients meet at the pre-arranged point and the clients decide to cancel.
- If the weather is too poor to ski the Vallée Blanche then we will relocate to the Grands Montets or Le Tour ski area or another suitable area in Chamonix for a days off piste skiing.

Safety

All our guides will assess whether or not an activity can take place. They will consider the weather, snow conditions and the ability of all participants; their decision is final.