



Trip Factsheet: Imperial Haute Route Ski Tour

This is a stunning ski tour that receives little traffic compared to the more trodden Haute Routes. The Imperial Crown encircles the Val D'Anniviers and includes the mountains of the Weisshorn, Zinalrothorn and the mighty Dent Blanche.

Zinal and the surrounding area

The Val d'Anniviers comprise of the villages of Zinal, Grimentz, St Luc, Chandolin and Vercorin. Together they have over 200km of pisted terrain, lifts up to 3000m and vast areas of off piste to explore. These beautiful traditional villages remain relatively unspoilt by tourism and retain much of their traditional heritage.

The skiing offers everything from high open bowls to some steep couloirs and gullies, many north and east facing, staying laden with cold powder snow. There are some classic descents to do in the area – the Moirey Dam, the north facing bowls of Orzival from the Grimentz lifts and the Chamois bowls in Zinal that gives up to 1500m of wonderful skiing. The bigger villages of Zinal and Grimentz offer a variety of restaurants, cafes and shops to explore and can be easily accessed from the Auberge using the post bus that runs regularly between all the villages.

You have made an excellent choice booking your next ski adventure in Zinal – it is definitely one of our favourite off-piste areas in the Alps!

Travel to and from the Zinal

You want to arrange to arrive in Zinal by late afternoon on the first day.

At the end of the week the course finishes after breakfast on the second Saturday and we recommend that you arrange your return/onward flight for mid to late afternoon to give yourself plenty of time to get to the airport without having to rush!

The most convenient airports are Geneva or Zurich airport from where you can take the train to Sierre (Geneva 2 hrs, Zurich 2.5 hrs). At Sierre catch the yellow Post Bus to Zinal, you may need to change in Vissoie. Train and bus timetables can be found at www.sbb.ch/en.

The last bus leaves Sierre station at 1910 so if you are going to arrive later than this then you'll need to take a taxi for this leg of the journey. The cost for the taxi is 120 CHF for 1-4 people. www.taxianniviers.ch

Alternatively you can hire a car at the airport, driving time to the Auberge is approximately 2 hrs from Geneva and 2.5 hrs from Zurich.

Want to take the train to the resort? No problem – it's possible to get to Zinal by train from the UK using the Eurostar from London St. Pancras to Paris, then the TGV to Geneva. The journey can be done in 1 day. For more information and other useful train travel details look at www.snowcarbon.co.uk

Swiss Transfer Ticket - this is a return ticket from the Swiss border or one of Switzerland's airports to your destination. The ticket is valid for 1 month, but each journey must be completed in one day and on the most direct route. The transfer ticket cannot be brought in Switzerland you must do it in advance from a sales point like the Switzerland Travel Centre in London.

You can purchase a transfer ticket from the Switzerland Travel Centre www.stc.co.uk Tel: 0207 420 4934. They need 10 days to process and post the card to you but you cannot get one more than 2 months in advance of your travel. Their website contains all the information about all the Swiss Travel Passes available.

Rendezvous in Zinal

The trip begins with a welcome meeting in the hotel at around 7pm on Saturday evening. Your guide will brief you on the itinerary and update you on the prevailing weather and snow conditions for the week. It is also an opportunity for you to ask any last minute questions.

Accommodation

We spend the first two nights and the last night in the Hotel Besso in Zinal, this is a comfortable 3* hotel in the village centre, close to the main lift. The rooms are comfortable and the restaurant serves excellent food.

The other nights you will spend in mountain huts on half board.

Guides and Group Sizes

All our ski touring trips are run by our team of IFMGA Mountain Guides. The team is led by Olly Allen, Matt Dickinson and Nick Parks. The maximum ratio for this tour is 6 skiers with 1 guide and the tours often run with up to 12 skiers and 2 guides.

Itinerary

Our itinerary starts with a warm up day around the slopes of Zinal and a short ski tour before returning to the Hotel for a second night. On day 3 we depart by road or train for Zermatt and take the lift to Schwarzee and ski tour to the Schonbielhutte. The following day we leave the hut and head for the Col Durand, from there we ski to the Grand Mountet hut. On day 5 we leave the hut and aim to traverse the Arete du Blanc from here we ski the glacier de Moming down to the Cabane d'Arpittetaz. The following day we climb to the Col de Milon and enjoy a long descent to the Cabane de Tracuit.

Our last ski day takes in the summit of the Bishorn, 4153m and a long ski back to Zinal to finish the week.

Staying in Mountain Huts

The high alpine huts are one of the big attractions to ski touring in the Alps. They allow us to enjoy the mountains with only light packs and without having to worry about meals or finding somewhere to sleep! Most huts have only very basic facilities. Sleeping arrangements are in mixed sex dormitory-style rooms with bunks; there can be up to 20 people in one room. Washing facilities are limited and generally there is no running water in any of the huts, although this can vary in some huts. There are basins in which you can use bottled water to wash the best you can and clean your teeth, but they are NOT generally in private cubicles and are mixed sex. Toilets are generally septic-tank type (so non-flushing) and again mixed sex. You

need to be prepared for simple living in the huts and appreciate they are located at high altitude and in inhospitable terrain.

A 3-course evening meal and breakfast are served by the guardian and his team and food is usually nourishing and filling. Beer, wine, soft drinks and snacks are also available. All food and drink in the huts is delivered by helicopter and consequently prices will be high e.g. between 3-5€ or 8CHF for a 1.5litre bottle of still water.

There are a few basic hut 'rules' that you need to follow so that you (and your fellow ski tourers) have a pleasant stay:

- On arriving at the hut your skis will be left outside in the ski racks and you must take off your boots and leave these together with your ice-axe, crampons, harness and skins in the boot room. Be sure to store these carefully as the hut is likely to get very busy and you'll need to find all your kit in the morning rush, which will all look the same!
- ***Top Tip:*** *clearly name or place a small amount of coloured tape on your boots, axe, crampons, harness and skins to help you identify them amongst all the others*
- House slippers are provided and must be worn in the hut
- Your guide will register you with the guardian and will assign you your bunk
- Follow the instructions of your guide and keep requests to the guardian and his team to a minimum – they are usually very busy sorting out groups, cooking meals, keeping the hut clean
- In the morning your guide will often want to leave early – be sure to have all your kit ready to go the night before. Be organized and everything will be much easier!

What to wear in the hut - we are often asked by people what they should wear in the hut. It's a good question as you don't want to carry many or any extra clothes with you if they are not required. In the winter you will probably end up wearing your base layer thermals (top & bottom) or you can carry a lightweight pair of loose trousers to wear around the hut in the afternoons/evenings. Your base layer top is what you will probably wear on your top half or you can carry a t-shirt to wear in the hut that can double to sleep in.

Meals

Breakfasts: in the huts a typical breakfast will consist of coffee, tea, hot chocolate, orange juice, bread, butter, jam.

Evening meals: a set menu of 3 courses. Typical menu will be soup to start, a main dish of meat or pasta with mash or rice and vegetables. Dessert will be fruit or mousse. Most huts now cater well for vegetarian, vegan and gluten free diets; however you need to remember that they don't have an unlimited supply of fresh food and subsequently choice can be limited, you cannot afford to be fussy!

Lunch: huts offer a basic packed lunch which you can order the night before, this will usually consist of bread with cheese, salami and/or a sandwich plus a chocolate bar, crisps and fresh fruit if they have it available.

Drinks and snacks: the huts serve tea, coffee, bottled water, soft drinks, beer and wine. They also sell some snacks. Items sold in the huts are expensive and we do recommend you bring some of your favourite hill snacks with you on the trip.

Please note that lunches, drinks and snacks are not included in the price of the trip and need to be paid for individually.

Typical Day on the Imperial Haute Route

When staying in huts the usual wake-up time is between 6 and 7am. You'll have breakfast and be on your way by 8-8.30am. Days tend to be around 6 – 7hrs in length and so you'll arrive at the next hut by mid afternoon. You will stop a number of times to eat and drink but there is no "official" lunch stop each day. It is essential you eat and drink regularly to keep your energy and strength levels up.

When you arrive at the hut you need to store your stuff in the boot room, it's a good idea to get everything ready for the next day before you have dinner so you do not have a rush in the morning. Hot and cold drinks and food is available to order when you arrive at the hut, dinner is served around 7pm and most people will turn in to bed by 9 – 10pm. As the accommodation is dormitory style with up to 20 people in the same room, it can be noisy and ear plugs are recommended!

Preparation for the Imperial Haute Route

It is essential that you prepare yourself well in advance by taking regular aerobic exercise so you arrive on the trip as fit as you can. Ski touring and off piste skiing are physically demanding and with the big ascents, varied snow conditions and the rucksack you need to carry on this tour, you'll soon be found out if you're not in tip-top condition!

Doing sports that increase your aerobic fitness and leg strength are key. So when preparing for this trip nothing beats activities that increase your heart rate and build your aerobic levels e.g. running, cycling and swimming.

Movement skills - agility, balance, flexibility - which allow you to turn your skis and adjust to uneven terrain - are also very relevant. If time permits try to include some yoga or pilates into your training schedule.

Frames of reference:

- If you are a long distance runner (marathon or half marathon) or similar endurance sport and you're training or competing within 4 -5 months of doing this trip, then you can stop reading now, just keep up the good work!
- If you have run a few 10ks or do sprint/Olympic distance triathlons or compete or train for other similar sporting events then you will be fine too but focus on some long slow walking or running to build your endurance levels a little.
- If you have done very little apart from the occasional 30 minute jog, short cycle ride (mountain bike or road) or you occasionally go to the gym after work – then you have some work to do but fear not you can attain the fitness levels you need but you do need to increase the amount of exercise you do each week and do this well in advance of your trip (ideally 3-4 months out).

For any ski touring trip you will be doing exercise that requires you to operate for long periods of time at a relatively low intensity. You will be carrying a rucksack which will mean you may have to adapt your skiing but it's a lot easier if you have strong core muscles (stomach and back).

It's best to get prepared in plenty of time, not by trying to pack in as much training in the last 2-3 weeks as it takes about this length of time for the body to adapt to an increase in exercise. Don't think that you will get fit during the programme you won't and don't think that simply going to the gym to run on the treadmill for 40mins twice a week will be enough – it won't! In the last 2 weeks you can decrease the amount and intensity of the exercise you do; so you arrive fresh and ready for the challenge.

Good fitness will make your trip overall much more enjoyable and you will get more out of it!
For more information contact us and we'll send you our 12 week training guide.

Snow Conditions and Climate

Ski touring in the high mountains is very dependent on the weather and snow conditions. You are likely to encounter lots of different snow types during the route, everything from fresh powder to crusty, wind-blown snow. Often when the weather is poor (heavy snow, high winds and high avalanche risk) the tour can be delayed or the route changed and you need to accept this as part of being in the mountains and trust your guide to do the best he or she can with the conditions at the time.

During the ski touring season, typically the mornings will be cold and in fine weather the days can be hot. Sometimes the temperature change can be in the region of 20°C through the course of the day, so it's essential that you have a good clothing layering system.

Ski Passes

During the trip you may need to purchase some day ski passes depending on the exact itinerary. Your guide will advise you on what you will need to buy.

What's included in the price of your holiday?

- 6 full days guide fees and expenses
- 3 nights B&B accommodation in the Hotel Besso
- 4 nights half board accommodation in mountain huts

Scheduled expenses

- International travel
- Airport transfers
- Uplift costs and local transfers
- Lunches and drinks – 25 - 35CHF per day depending on consumption
- Equipment hire
- Personal Insurance

Spending Money

You should bring an allowance for lunches, drinks (including bottled water) which is brought in huts and can be expensive. We suggest around 200 - 250 Swiss Francs should be sufficient to cover all personal expenses. There are cash point facilities in Zinal and Grimentz and all major towns and villages.

Equipment and Kit Hire

A copy of our recommended ski kit list can be found on our website or you can call or email us and we will send you a copy.

Essential items you need to have:

- Skis with ski touring bindings (Diamir Fritschi or similar)
- Skins that are cut to fit your skis and couteaux (crampons for your skis)

NOTE You cannot hire skins or couteaux on their own! If you are bringing your own skis you must purchase skins that are cut to fit and couteaux that work with your bindings.

- Ski touring boots
- Ski poles

- Boot crampons
- Ice axe
- Harness with karabiner, sling and prussic loop
- 35 – 40 litre rucksack with straps on the side for carrying your skis
- Avalanche transceiver, shovel and probe.

If you need to rent skis or boots can be arranged with a hire shop in Zinal, please send the details of what you need to rent to our office by email.

Food

We suggest you bring with you or buy in resort snack food that you can take out on the hill with you each day. Things like cereal bars, dried fruit and nuts, chocolate, sugary sweets or your favourite hill snacks. When you're staying overnight in huts its best to take supplies for the days you are away. Huts do sell food but it's expensive and sometimes stocks run low.

If you have any food allergies or dietary requirements especially if you are a Coeliac (Gluten free) or have a dairy allergy we recommend you bring some food with you so you can supplement your dinners. Most huts now cater well for vegetarian, vegan and gluten free diets; however you need to remember that they don't have an unlimited supply of fresh food and subsequently choice can be limited, you cannot afford to be fussy!

The huts can provide a small basic packed lunch of bread, salami, cheese and chocolate that you can buy each day but it's important that you don't rely on this option only. You do need to carry some snack food for each day.

You will also generally stop for short breaks each hour where you should eat something each time so you maintain your energy levels throughout the day.

Insurance

You need to have personal insurance that covers you for off piste skiing and the cover must include helicopter rescue.

For UK & European residents we recommend the Ski Club's insurance. For more details and to purchase a policy online visit <http://www.skiclubinsurance.co.uk/> If you need assistance with arranging insurance please let us know.

You should bring a copy of your insurance certificate with you to the Alps.

For EU residents we recommend that you also obtain the European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) prior to travel and take this with you in addition to your personal insurance.

See <https://www.gov.uk/european-health-insurance-card>

What happens next?

We will contact you 8 weeks before your arrival date to request the final balance payment. Around 2-3 weeks before your arrival date we will email you final joining instructions with relevant contact details for your guide(s), hotels, etc.

More information

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

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