



Trip Factsheet: Mont Blanc Ski Tour

A brilliant week's ski touring topped off with the ski ascent and descent of Mont Blanc, the highest point in Western Europe.

Chamonix

Chamonix has some of the best off piste skiing and ski touring in the world. The bustling town sits below the mighty Mont Blanc (4810m) in a spectacular valley surrounded on all sides by high glaciated peaks.

The town of Chamonix itself is a busy, cosmopolitan town with lots of shops, cafés, bars and restaurants to sample during your stay.

The Chamonix Valley runs for 20kms and has 5 main separate ski areas along its length, offering plenty of piste skiing plus acres of off piste terrain. The Aiguille du Midi cable car which accesses the Vallee Blanche leaves from Chamonix town centre and takes skiers up to almost 4000m. For advanced level skiers seeking big mountain skiing, Chamonix and Mont Blanc is an absolute must.

Travel to and from Chamonix

You want to arrange to arrive in Chamonix by late afternoon on the first Saturday.

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 morning onwards to give yourself plenty of time to get to the airport without having to rush!

The most convenient airport is Geneva and from here the transfer time up to Chamonix by road is just 1 hr 15mins. To travel between the airport and Chamonix we recommend you reserve a seat on one of the many commercial shuttle buses. Mountain Tracks can book this for you and the usual prices from £40 per person one-way. Please supply your full flight details to us so we can make the reservation.

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

Rendezvous in Chamonix.

The tour begins with a welcome meeting in Chamonix at around 7pm on Saturday evening. Your guides will brief you on the itinerary, update you on the prevailing weather and snow conditions for the week and carry out an equipment check. It is also an opportunity for you to ask any last minute questions.

Accommodation

Our preferred accommodation in Chamonix is Chalet Les Pelerins, which is a comfortable, privately owned chalet run by David Robertson and his team. They provide excellent food and the chalet has a comfortable lounge area, computer/Wifi access, TV and freesat. The rooms are

clean and comfortable and are booked on a twin share basis, unless you wish to have a single room (supplement). Some rooms have private facilities others share with the next door room. You are provided with breakfast, tea and a 3-course evening meal each day except on the chef's night off (usually Tuesday or Wednesday) when you will eat out at your own expense in a local restaurant.

You will spend at least 2 nights out in mountain huts during your stay as part of the acclimatisation. In the huts you are provided with breakfast and a simple 2 or 3 course dinner in the evenings.

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 the first 4 days of this trip is 4 skiers with 1 guide. For the 2 day Mont Blanc ascent/descent the maximum guide ratio is 2 skiers per guide.

Itinerary

Our itinerary is kept flexible depending on the prevailing weather and ground conditions. It usually starts with a warm up ski day in Chamonix on the Sunday on the Grands Montets - this is an opportunity to brush up on any skills and also to have a refresher of avalanche rescue practise. The next 3 days will be spent ski touring in and around the Mont Blanc Massif with 1 or 2 nights spent in a hut as acclimatisation. Days 5 & 6 are the summit days and we prefer to use the route via the Grand Mulets hut, ascending towards the Vallot hut before the summit ridge. The descent will be back via the Grands Mulets hut to the lift at the Plan d'Aiguille.

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

Usually you will leave the chalet in one of our minibuses around 8.45am each morning, returning to the chalet at the end of the ski day around 5.30pm.

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, 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 Ski Mont Blanc

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) days 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

In Chamonix its best to buy day passes, your guide will advise you on the most suitable pass to buy depending on the area you ski at.

What's included in the price of your holiday?

6 full days guide fees and expenses
4 nights half board chalet accommodation in Chamonix
3 nights half board accommodation in mountain huts
Resort transfers to the slopes and back

Scheduled expenses

International travel
Airport transfers to and from Geneva airport
Uplift costs (about £100 - £150 payable locally in Euros)
Lunches and drinks – 25 – 35 Euros per day depending on consumption!
Equipment hire
Personal Insurance
Single room occupancy if required
Helicopter ride on Mont Blanc if chosen

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 250 - 300€. There are cash point facilities in Chamonix.

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 hire skis and/or boots while in Chamonix we work with Sanglard Sports who have 2 large shops one in Chamonix and one in Argentiere stocked with the latest skis and boots.

Mountain Tracks customers receive a 15% discount when you book your ski/boots with them. You need to request the specific booking form from the Mountain Tracks office and email it to resa@rentski.com

We strongly recommend you do this in advance of your holiday. They have a selection of skis for off piste and ski touring, all touring set up's come with skins cut to fit the skis and couteaux.

You will also need to ski with the 3 items of safety equipment, avalanche transceiver, shovel and probe, if you do not have your own equipment. Your guide can rent these to you for a cost of 65€ for the 3 items for the 6 days. Please let us know in advance if you need to rent these items.

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 it's 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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