



Tour du Mont Blanc

July 22-30, 2017 (9 days)

The celebrated trek around Mont Blanc (15,771')—the “Tour du Mont Blanc”—is undoubtedly one of the great treks of the world. From its mighty massif, the roof of Western Europe, seven valleys spread out into France, Italy, and Switzerland. And though these countries are in close proximity, each manages to retain its own culture, language, customs, and cuisine, making an adventure here a multicultural and scenic extravaganza. Each day you'll hike up to sublime ridges for wondrous views of a parade of peaks, pinnacles, and glittering glaciers, then descend into quiet valleys where cattle graze in green mountain meadows and tiny villages await your discovery. You'll picnic at the most scenic spots and dine on the most delectable foods. This is an adventure full of surprises and moments to cherish for many a year. Join us in the Alps for the adventure of a lifetime!

TRIP DETAILS

Strenuous ▶ 7 days strenuous hiking; 8 nights hotels and inns

ITINERARY

(You will need to leave the U.S. on Jul. 21 in order to arrive in Geneva on Jul. 22.)

Day 1, Jul. 22 ▶ Arrive In Geneva – Chamonix

Arrive at the Geneva airport, Switzerland (we recommend you arrive by 1:00 p.m. to have enough time to go through customs and immigration). You will be picked up at 2:00 p.m. for a group

transfer by minibus to the charming alpine town of Chamonix, France (~90 minutes), nestled at the foot of the Mont Blanc massif. After settling into your centrally located hotel, you may have some time to wander around the lively town. In the evening you will meet with your guides for a “welcome” dinner and trip orientation.

D... Hotel Le Prieuré

Note—we encourage you to arrive in Geneva or Chamonix a day or so early (transfer on your own). This allows you to begin the trek well rested and gives you a chance to do a bit of sightseeing that isn't on the itinerary. As an excursion in Chamonix, we recommend taking the cable car all the way up to the Aiguille de Midi, a fantastic viewpoint at 12,300' that offers outstanding views of Mont Blanc and all its attending peaks and glaciers.

Day 2, Jul. 23 ▶ Les Houches – Les Contamines

A short transfer to the nearby town of Les Houches brings us to a cable car station from where we ascend quickly to Bellevue (5,500'). At the top we'll enjoy panoramic views of the Mont Blanc range as we begin hiking down through forests below the tumbling Bionnassay Glacier, then up to the Col de Tricot (6,955') with enchanting views of the valley below us. A steep descent brings us to the Chalets de Miage (5,115') where we enjoy a picnic lunch (and maybe purchase a beer at the local café). After lunch, a short climb takes us up to Le Truc (5,942'), then down through the thickly wooded hillside to the charming small town of Les Contamines (3,829'), with its pretty churches and chalets. 6 – 6 ½ hours hiking.

B,L,D... Hotel La Chemenaz

Day 3, Jul. 24 ▶ Les Contamines – Les Chapieux

After a short drive to the trailhead, we hike up an old Roman road to the Plan des Dames, marked by a huge pile of stones left by passing hikers (it is said this is the spot where an English woman perished in a storm nearly 200 years ago). We then make a long ascent to the Col du Bonhomme (7,641') and further to the Croix du Bonhomme (8,100') where we have lunch. After a short rest, we hike downhill on a grassy trail through wide mountain meadows to the hamlet of Les Chapieux (5,500'). Our accommodation is a comfortable inn with a welcoming atmosphere and great cuisine. Rooms are with shared baths. 6½ hours hiking.

B,L,D... Auberge de la Nova

Day 4, Jul. 25 ▶ Les Chapieux – Courmayeur

We transfer to the end of the valley, then begin hiking up a switchback trail to the Col de la Seigne (8,245'). After lunch at the top, with plenty of time to admire the fantastic scenery of spiky ridges, rugged mountains, and numerous glaciers, we descend to Lac Combal and Visaille. Now we are in Italy, and the views of Mont Blanc from here are simply awesome in scale, as it rises in a breathtaking abruptness from the bottom of the valley to the summit 10,000 feet above. Transfer to Val d' Aosta and Courmayeur. Tonight you will be free to roam around Courmayeur and enjoy dinner on your own. 6 hours hiking.

B,L...Hotel Berthod or similar

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Day 5, Jul. 26 ▶ Montagne de la Saxe – Lavachey

We start our hike from the hamlet of Villair, 10 minutes away from Courmayeur. The trail starts off gradual and then we climb more steeply into a larch pine forest that leads to Rifugio Bertone. We enjoy a nice rest at the hut and indulge in an Italian espresso and refill water. The view of Mont Blanc from here is stunning! Our trail continues across Mont de la Saxe and above Italian Val Ferret. Lavachey in the Val Ferret, is spectacularly situated beneath the Grand Jorasses. Overnight at Auberge Lavachey, where our dinner will highlight some local Italian dishes. 5½ hours hiking.
B,L,D...Auberge Lavachey

Day 6, Jul. 27 ▶ Lavachey – Champex

After a short transfer to the trailhead, we walk up a good trail past the spectacular Glacier de Pré de Bar. We cross the Grand Col Ferret (8,300') and enter Switzerland, descending to the scenic village of La Fouly (5,280'), located beneath the Glacier de l'A Neuve. From here we transfer to the small lake resort of Champex. 5½ hours hiking.
B,L,D...Hotel Sporting Glacier

Day 7, Jul. 28 ▶ Champex – Trient

From Champex, there are many trails that take hikers into the next valley, but we will take the classic "Bovine" route. After a short transfer to the trailhead, an hour and a half of easy walking followed by a rapid ascent in the forest brings us high over the Rhône Valley and the town of Martigny. You will not be disappointed with this fabulous view! An easy descent brings us to the Col de Forclaz, and then we transfer to the French village of Vallorcine (3,900'). 5½ - 6 hours hiking.
B,L,D...Hotel du Buet

Day 8, Jul. 29 ▶ Vallorcine – Chamonix

From the Col De Montets (4,800') we hike to Les Cheserys (7,130'), enjoying views of the Le Tour and Argentiere glaciers, and all the peaks of the Mont Blanc range. After rejoining the Grand Balcon Route and La Flégère, we descend to Chamonix (3,300') and hike to town. Tonight we'll celebrate the last week with a farewell dinner in a restaurant in Chamonix. 5 hours hiking.
B,L,D... Hotel Le Prieuré

Day 9, Jul. 30 ▶ Chamonix – Geneva

After breakfast, we transfer to the airport in Geneva and depart. Please schedule your homeward bound flights after 12:00 p.m.
B...

LAND COST

\$5395 per person (6-8 members)
\$5095 per person (9-11 members)
\$4795 per person (12-14 members)
\$600 single supplement

Rates quoted are per person, based on sharing double accommodations.

*Should you choose to pay with credit card there will be a service charge of 3%, the fee we incur from the bank.

Note—Prices listed are subject to change. We are occasionally faced with unavoidable cost increases due to fuel increases, costs of services or currency fluctuations that we cannot absorb. We will, however, do everything we can to keep prices the same as published.

LAND COST INCLUDES...

- o Expert leadership (with two local guides if more than 12 persons in the group)
- o Accommodations in hotels and inns (based on double occupancy)
- o Meals as noted (B=Breakfast, L=Lunch, D=Dinner)
- o Local group transfers by bus or cable car
- o Roundtrip transportation Geneva/Chamonix (group arrival/departure dates only)
- o Ground transportation by van
- o Wine at dinner
- o Maps

LAND COST DOES NOT INCLUDE...

International airfare to Geneva and return; individual transfers for early arrivals or late departures; trip insurance (we urge you purchase the optional trip insurance offered by Cattara, which includes trip cancellation insurance); optional tipping to leader, guides and local staff; excess baggage charges; airport taxes (if any); cost of medical immunizations; and items of a personal nature (sodas, alcoholic beverages, laundry, etc.).

TRIP PAYMENT SCHEDULE

At time of reservation25% of land cost
120 days prior to departure25% of land cost
90 days prior to departure.....Balance

CANCELLATION FEE SCHEDULE

From time of reservation
until 90 days prior to departure25% of land cost
89-60 days prior to departure.....50% of land cost
59 days or fewer prior to departure.....100% of land cost

EXPERT LEADERSHIP

Expert leadership is the key to every successful trip. Cattara attracts knowledgeable and gifted leaders who are passionate about guiding trips and truly enjoy sharing the experience with others. They understand the cultures and traditions they work in and are a fountain of information. In addition to making sure everything runs smoothly and safely, Cattara guides enhance your experience by being educators, companions, and the best of friends.

TRIP LEADERS



Cathy Ann Taylor, a high altitude trekking guide for the last 27 years, will be leading this trek. Cathy Ann has trekked all over Nepal, Tibet, India, and Bhutan, with well over 200 trips in the Himalayas (she still considers the Himalayas her “second home”)! She has also hiked extensively in the European Alps (Tour du Mont Blanc (5), The Haute Route, and Gran Paradiso), the Georgian Caucasus, and the Dolomites), India and South America, and Africa. A devout hiker and mountain biker, she leaves no trail undiscovered, and her passion for the mountains, caring nature, and boundless energy are renowned. Her experience, knowledge, positive attitude (she can find the good in anything!), and her wonderful rapport with the local staff will enhance your experience. With the help of caring and like-minded individuals she has been able to manage the sponsorship of nineteen remote village children, all of whom are in boarding school and a few who have graduated from Universities in Australia and the United States. She consistently gets rave reviews from members of her groups and has quite a following. Cathy Ann is active in the Breast Cancer Fund and has participated in sixteen expeditions, including Mount McKinley, Cho Oyu, Mount Fuji, Mount Shasta, and Mount Rainier, which helped increase awareness of breast cancer (she alone has raised over \$670,000 for the cause!). Cat’s new program, Sacred Treks to benefit the Breast Cancer Fund (Bhutan, Mont Blanc, Peru, Everest, Ladakh, Mustang, Georgian Caucasus, Sikkim, and Dolomites treks) has raised over \$650,000. She has also reached the summit of Ama Dablam (22,500') in Nepal and Argentina's Aconcagua (22,834'), the highest peak in South America. Cathy Ann received an honorable mention in *Hooked on the Outdoors* magazine's Outdoor Person of the Year Awards, January 2006, and also received a letter of recognition for her fundraising and environmental work from former Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi.

Laurent Langoisseur, a resident of Chamonix of well over 20 years, will be one of the local guides on our trek. Laurent has a passion for mountains and nature. His engaging company complements the wonderful scenery and his knowledge of the flora, fauna, and geology are unmatched. Laurent is a comic, a terrific athlete and hiker, and overall great human being. He is a ski patrol monitor during the winter. You will be in great hands with him at the helm every step of the way.

PHYSICAL EXPECTATIONS

You should be an experienced hiker in good physical condition. This trip is rated strenuous, as you will be hiking five to seven hours a day on trails with steep ascents and descents—count on 3,000-4,000 feet up and 2,000 – 3,000 feet down every day! For physical preparation, we recommend regular cardiovascular exercise for one hour at least 4-5 times a week. We suggest stair climbing, running, and mountain biking on hills, squats, and lunges or elliptical or treadmill training in the gym. And, of course, the best way to train for a trek is to go hiking! We recommend you get out on the trails at least once a week. Wear your boots and daypack and pick some trails with hills so you can strengthen your leg muscles and build up your stamina. We believe other important prerequisites are a spirit of adventure and a positive attitude.

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TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

You will need a passport, valid for at least six months beyond the date of completion of the trip. No visas are required for this trip. Note—it's a good idea to make a photocopy of the photo page of your passport and carry it separately from your passport. If your passport is lost or stolen, a photocopy will help the local consulate speed up authorization for replacement. Extra passport photos can also be helpful to have just in case.

AIR TRAVEL

Airfare is not included in the land cost of the trip. For air reservations, please contact the airlines directly, either by phone or via the Internet. Plan your arrival in Geneva by 1:00 p.m. on Day 1. Many travelers elect to use their “frequent flyer” miles when traveling, but please check with us before purchasing or obtaining your tickets. We need to verify your arrival and departure schedule and ensure we have enough participants to operate the trip. Note—Names on air tickets and passports must match!

INDIVIDUAL TRANSFERS FROM GENEVA TO/FROM CHAMONIX

If you are arriving before the start of the trip and you would like a private transfer to/from Chamonix and the Geneva International Airport, we recommend the following shuttle services:

www.geneva-shuttle.com

www.chamexpress.com

www.alpybus.com

Be sure to have your flight arrival and/or departure information handy before making your on-line booking. Cancellation policies are very strict.

Pick-ups at the Geneva train station are also available. Your train arrival time and train number must be provided in order to make an on-line booking. Please review their cancellation policy carefully.

If you would like to travel by train from Geneva to Chamonix, a scenic option is via Martigny, Switzerland. Travel time is about four hours. For more information, you can contact RAIL EUROPE by phone (1-800-4-EURAIL), by fax (1-800-432-1FAX) and on-line at:

<http://www.raileurope.com>

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EXTENDING YOUR TRIP

If you are arriving in Chamonix a day or two early or wish to stay on for a few days after the trip, we recommend our group hotel, the Hotel Prieuré in Chamonix. Extra nights per room cost approximately € 194 to 263 (about \$213- \$289), breakfast included.

MEDICAL MATTERS

Please advise us of any pre-existing medical conditions that may affect your health on the trek (recent injuries or surgeries, chronic illnesses, etc.). We recommend you bring your own personal first-aid kit, pain killers, and allergy medicines if you are prone to allergic reactions (especially epipens if you are allergic to bee stings). Moleskin or Second Skin for blisters is also recommended, as well as Band-Aids and antibiotic ointment. Consult your doctor about bringing other medications, such as antibiotics like Cipro. The trip leader will also carry a basic kit for emergencies, but will not have any prescription medications.

MONEY MATTERS

You should bring enough money for any souvenirs you may buy, plus a few items like aperitifs, extra beverages, and the like (most of your meals are included in the cost of the trip). Depending on how much of a shopper you are, \$500 should be plenty for incidentals and souvenirs. You should bring an additional amount for gratuities to the leaders, and driver. At least US \$200 - \$225 per guest is recommended for each of the trip leaders and at least \$100 - \$125 per guest for the driver. You can present your gratuities to your leaders and driver individually.

The currency of France and Italy is the Euro. The currency of Switzerland is the Swiss Franc. Though Switzerland does accept the Euro, change will be given back in Swiss Francs. You will want to check the current rate of exchange just before traveling when planning how much cash to bring with you.

We suggest you withdraw money from an ATM in either Geneva or Chamonix before the trek begins, as there are few ATMs along the way while trekking. It's also a good idea to get a few Swiss Francs along with the Euros for your short time in Switzerland. Credit cards, traveler's checks, and US dollars are not generally accepted at the inns outside of Chamonix.

WEATHER & CLIMATE

As in most mountain environments, the weather in the Alps can be unpredictable, so each day on the trail you need to be prepared for a variety of weather conditions: hot sun, windy rainstorms—even the possibility of light snow. (The Mont Blanc region is notorious for its microclimates—there can be full sun in one valley, and cloudbursts in another.) For that reason you will carry your raingear and jacket in your daypack every day, even if the morning starts out bright and hot. Dressing in layers that can be adjusted to suit the prevailing conditions is highly recommended.

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WHILE ON THE TRIP

Our accommodations are the best available nearest to the trails we take each day. Located in mountain or valley villages, they are generally small simple inns that accommodate hikers in the summer months, and closed during the winter. They have a homey atmosphere and serve delicious food that is reflective of the particular region. While comfortable, most of them do not sport all the amenities, such as hair dryers, internet access, and the like, and a couple of the inns feature rooms with shared baths (these are generally spotless, though!). We are confident you will enjoy the experience.

INCIDENTALS

Laundry: You will not really have time to have your laundry done during the hike. You can hand wash a few items and hang them to dry in your room. Synthetic, quick drying fabrics are best (see the equipment list).

Electricity: France, Italy, and Switzerland are on the 220V system. Sockets are usually the round two-pin variety, but they vary. If you are planning to use something like a hairdryer, electric shaver, camera battery, or phone charger, bring a converter and a selection of plug adapters (you can buy these in drugstores or travel specialty stores in the U.S.).

Time Zones: France, Italy, and Switzerland are Greenwich Mean Time plus one hour. That means that Chamonix and Geneva are six hours ahead of New York and nine hours ahead of California.

Communications: While we discourage the use of cell phones on our trip, we can't deny the fact that you may want to be in touch with your friends or family. Please be sensitive to the needs of others and use them in the privacy of your room. Contact your cell phone service about international coverage.

WHAT TO BRING: CLOTHING & EQUIPMENT LIST

Packing Notes

It's best to go as light as possible and take only the essentials. Excess baggage can be a burden, not only to you but to support personnel.

Always bring all irreplaceable items, such as camera, medications, important documentation, and trekking boots in your carryon luggage.

Luggage

- Duffel bag, large enough to hold your trekking clothes and gear. It should have a full-length zipper (for easy access), and be sturdy and water-resistant or waterproof. Wheeled duffels are OK to bring, but hard-shelled suitcases are not advisable (they are difficult to load compactly in the vans).
- Daypack with a capacity of about 2,800 – 3,200 cubic inches, with a good padded waist belt. It can double as your carryon bag.*
- Spare roll-up duffel (optional). This is essential if you wish to bring home those great souvenirs! It should be lockable.

*Remember, you must carry your fleece jacket and rain gear with you every day on the trail, as well as your picnic lunch, 2 liters of water, sunscreen, warm hat, gloves, camera, and cover for daypack in case of rain. You will also need to carry your overnight belongings on Day 3, as we will not have access to our luggage that evening. Be sure your daypack is large enough!

Clothing Notes

You should be prepared for very unpredictable weather. Bring comfortable clothing that will protect you from cold and possibly wet weather. Synthetic fabrics (such as polypropylene, capilene, or wool) are the most effective barriers against the cold. They provide the best insulation, are light in weight, wick away perspiration, and dry quickly if wet. (Cotton garments are not good in cold or wet mountain conditions.)

When layering, your innermost layer should be a synthetic T-shirt or long underwear. The middle layer can be a synthetic turtleneck or wool shirt, and pants. The outermost layer should be a synthetic fleece jacket, and/or a good quality Gore-Tex wind/rain parka and over-pants.

We haven't included quantities for each item listed. Use your own judgment, based on the expected weather conditions, your personal needs, and the overall weight restrictions for your luggage.

Underwear

- Regular underwear. Synthetics are easier to wash and dry.
- Thermal underwear (lightweight), top and bottom.

Socks

- Casual socks (synthetic for easy washing and drying) that are suitable for your walking (not hiking) shoes.
- Mid-weight hiking socks (synthetic or wool/synthetic).
- Synthetic or silk sock liners—optional. Some people wear sock liners to help prevent blisters, and some wear the same pair of hiking socks for three days in a row and achieve the same result.

Shirts

- Long-sleeved, synthetic or wool shirt.
- Short-sleeved synthetic T-shirts (in case we have some hot, sunny days on trek).

- Shirts for non-hiking activities.

Pants

- Full-length synthetic hiking pants or synthetic sweat pants.
- Hiking shorts, cotton or synthetic.
- Casual pants or skirts for non-hiking activities.

Outerwear

- Medium-weight jacket of synthetic fabric, such as fleece.
- Rain/wind parka (must fit over bulky clothing).
- Rain/wind pants, preferably with full-length side zipper (must fit over your other pants).
- Gloves or mittens (wool or fleece).
- Waterproof daypack cover.
- Gaiters (optional)—can come in handy if crossing snowfields or scree. Ankle gaiters OK.

Head Gear

- Sun hat with wide brim, preferably with a chin strap to keep it from blowing off, or baseball cap.
- Fleece or wool hat
- Bandana. A generally useful item—it will keep your neck from getting sunburned and can double as a hand towel in the field.

Footwear

Please break new boots in well before the trip.

- Medium-weight hiking boots with padded ankle, good arch support, and lug sole for traction. Your hiking boots must be waterproofed, well broken in, and suitable for prolonged walking on rocks.
- Comfortable walking shoes to wear while in towns.

Other Items

- Water bottles, 1 or 1.5 quart capacity. Make sure they are leak-proof. Bring 2 and mark them with your name or initials as several people may have the same bottle.
- Hiking poles—highly recommended. These are essential to relieve the impact on your knees during long downhill; they are also useful on uphill. Practice with them before the trip.
- Toiletry kit—soap, toothbrush, etc. (The rifugios do not provide body soap in the showers.)
- Purell hand sanitizer for quick hand washing and hygiene (a must!).
- Toilet paper and a Ziploc bag (for stops along the trail).
- Personal medical kit, including blister protection.
- Ace bandage or brace if you're prone to sore knees or ankles.
- Sunglasses (100% UVA/UVB protected).
- Spare pair of prescription glasses, prescription sunglasses, or contact lenses.
- Sunscreen lotion and lipstick of SPF 25 or higher.
- Small padlocks or combination locks for your duffels.

- Heavyweight plastic garbage bag to help keep the contents of your daypack dry during hikes.
- Backpack cover in case of rain.

Optional Travel Accessories

- Camera and plenty of memory cards, and extra batteries.
- Repair kit with needle, thread, and safety pins.
- Pair of compact binoculars.
- Swiss Army-type pocket knife.
- Powdered electrolyte mixes for your water.
- Your favorite trail snacks or supplements, especially if you have dietary restrictions.
- Reading and writing material.
- Swimsuit (there are swimming pools and saunas at some of our accommodations along the way).

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