



## Hiking in Gran Paradiso National Park

July 18 – 26, 2015 (9 days)

**Join trekking guide Cathy Ann Taylor for a fabulous hiking experience in Italy's Gran Paradiso National Park**, a beautiful untouched realm of snowcapped mountains, alpine meadows, turquoise lakes, and quaint villages. This area was named a Royal Reserve in 1850 (it was the former hunting reserve for King Vittorio Emanuel), and became Italy's first national park in 1922, a sanctuary for chamois, ibex, marmots, golden eagles, and a rare flora including the fragile paradise lily. Our hike brings you from the historic town of Aosta through Gran Paradiso and beyond, over high passes and down to wild valleys, all the while accompanied by views of some of the mightiest peaks in the Alps—Mont Blanc and Monte Rosa, two of the highest peaks in western Europe, and the huge, isolated Gran Paradiso (13,323'). Our overnights are in hotels and inns of character, with two nights in alpine rifugios (mountain refuges); while the area's renowned sumptuous Italian cuisine fuels our forays on these remote mountain trails.

## TRIP DETAILS

Strenuous ▶ 7 days strenuous hiking; 6 nights hotels and inns, 2 nights rifugios

## ITINERARY

(You will need to leave the U.S. on July 17 in order to arrive in Geneva on July 18.)

### **Day 1, July 18 ▶ Arrive in Geneva, Switzerland – Aosta, Italy**

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 to Aosta, Italy, a drive of about 2.5 hours. In the late afternoon, we gather for an orientation and trip briefing, followed by a welcome dinner with the guides and your fellow travelers. Overnight at hotel in Aosta.

D...Hotel Cheval Blanc or similar

### **Day 2, July 19 ▶ The Cogne Valley**

Our day begins with a ride to the top of the Chamole chairlift, from where we start hiking to the Col de Tsa Seche (9,251'). The views toward the east face of Gran Paradiso (13,323'), the Mont Blanc massif, and Monte Rosa, which marks the border with Switzerland, are absolutely stunning. From the pass, we descend to the charming little town of Cogne, once very famous for its iron mines and now one of the most popular summer resorts in Italy for hikers and nature lovers. Overnight in Cogne. 5 hours hiking, 2,360 feet ascent, 3,830 feet descent.

B,L,D...Hotel Bouton d'Or or similar

### **Day 3, July 20 ▶ Valnontey**

After a short transfer to the hamlet of Valnontey (5,465'), we hike toward the end of the valley along a glacial stream known as the Dorea de Valnontey. The ascent to the Herbetet Hut (7,989') is quite steep, but well worth it as we cross alpine meadows facing the Gran San Pietro range to reach Loson Lake (8,641'), where ibex like to gather in the evening, and the welcoming Rifugio Vittorio Sella (8,477'). The rifugio is a comfortable, two-story building with dormitory-style accommodations (6-8 people in each room) and shared shower facilities. (One of the buildings is the renovated hunting lodge of the late Italian king Victor Emmanuel II.) Note—Tonight you will not have access to your luggage, so you will need to carry your overnight belongings in your daypack today. Overnight at the rifugio. 6 hours hiking, 3,176 feet ascent.

B,L,D...Rifugio Vittorio Sella

### **Day 4, July 21 ▶ Valsavarenche**

Getting an early start, we follow a trail that takes us above a beautiful grassy cirque to a narrower trail that leads steeply to the Col Loson (10,823'), the highest pass in the national park. Once at the top, we enjoy great views of the western face of Gran Paradiso. Our very long descent brings us through scree, meadows, and larch forest to Valsavarenche and the hamlet of Eaux Rousses (5,465'). Overnight in Eaux Rousses at the Hostellerie du Paradis, a small, family-run hotel whose restaurant offers excellent cuisine. 6½ hours hiking, 2,296 feet ascent, 5,413 feet descent.

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B,L,D...Hostellerie du Paradis

**Day 5, July 22 ▶ Valsavarenche**

This morning, we follow a popular trail used by climbers attempting the summit of Gran Paradiso. The wide trail winds through the forest to reach a high plateau where the Chabod hut (9,022') is located, then a traverse brings us toward Rifugio Emmanuel, another base camp for Gran Paradiso climbers (and a favorite spot for herds of chamois). The descent to Pont is an easy one on a very comfortable trail. We then transfer back to our hotel in Eaux Rouses. 6½ hours hiking, 3,480 feet ascent, 3,100 feet descent.

B,L,D...Hostellerie du Paradis

**Day 6, July 23 ▶ The Rhemes Valley**

A beautifully built old royal hunting trail takes us above Eaux Rouse to the alpine meadows of Orvieille, the setting of peaceful Lake Djouan (8,254'). From here the trail becomes steeper and passes another small lake to reach the Col d'Entrelor (9,865'), a narrow pass granting a stunning view toward the Grande Rousse and Grande Traversière. On the other side, our destination, the small village of Bruil, seems tiny. But the descent is very steep at first, and brings us through the welcoming Entrelor meadows where chamois graze the rich grass. Once we reach the valley, a short transfer takes us to our hotel in Rhemes-Notre-Dame, just a 10-minute walk from the town center. 7 hours hiking, 4,400 feet ascent, 4,212 feet descent.

B,L,D...Hotel Granta Parey

**Day 7, July 24 ▶ Valgrisenche**

Today is a long but incredibly magnificent day! We start from Thumel (6,164'), a 10-minute drive from our hotel, and hike along a wide trail to Rifugio Benevolo (7,496'). The trail narrows as we pass under the shadow of the impressive wall of the Granta Parei, and we soon enter a desolate, silent, high altitude landscape (mostly moraines) and reach the narrow saddle of Col Bassac Dere (10,171'). Our descent is steep as well, the trail alternating between scree and snow, and brings us down to the lower meadows where the very comfortable Rifugio Mario Bezzi (7,493'), is our overnight accommodation. The rifugio offers dormitory-style rooms (4 people in each) with shared toilets and showers. No need to carry your overnight belongings on this day—your luggage will be brought to this hut by cable pulley. 7 hours hiking, 4,225 feet ascent, 2,970 feet descent.

B,L,D...Rifugio Mario Bezzi

**Day 8, July 25 ▶ Valgrisenche – Courmayeur**

A very scenic traverse with few elevations takes us to Rifugio de l'Épée (7,775'), and we rise above the Alpes Vaudet and follow the trail skirting the mountains with the high Valgrisenche in front of us. After a nice lunch at the hut we start our descent to the abandoned hamlet of Useleres through 100-year-old protected larch forest. A 1-hour drive brings us to Courmayeur, where we spend our last night in Italy after a festive farewell dinner. 6 hours hiking, 2,450 feet ascent, 3,560 feet descent.

B,L,D...Hotel Berthod or similar

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**Day 9, July 26 ▶ Geneva – Depart**

Transfer to the Geneva airport and depart on homeward-bound flights.

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**LAND COST**

- \$5,295 per person (6-7 members)
- \$4,995 per person (8-10 members)
- \$4,695 per person (11-14 members)
- \$600 - singles where possible (not available in rifugios )

Rates quoted are per person, based on sharing double accommodations. Single Supplement— Single accommodations are only available at the hotels (depending on availability of rooms).

\*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...**

- Expert leadership (with three guides if more than 11 persons in the group, two guides if 10 persons or less.)
- Accommodations in hotels, inns, and rifugios (based on double occupancy)
- Meals as noted (B=Breakfast, L=Lunch, D=Dinner)
- Local group transfers by bus or cable car
- Round-trip transfer from Geneva to Aosta and from Courmayeur to Geneva (group arrival/departure dates only)
- Ground transportation by van

**LAND COST DOES NOT INCLUDE...**

International airfare to Geneva and return; individual transfers for early arrivals or late departures; trip insurance (we strongly recommend 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 reservation .....25% of land cost  
 120 days prior to departure.....25% of land cost

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90 days prior to departure.....Balance

### CANCELLATION FEE SCHEDULE

From time of reservation

- until 90 days prior to departure .....25% 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.



**Cathy Ann Taylor**, a high altitude trekking guide for the last 25 years, will be leading this trip. She’s trekked all over Nepal, Tibet, and Bhutan, with well over 150 trips in the Himalayas (she still considers the Himalayas her “second home”)! She’s also hiked extensively in the European Alps and led the Tour du Mont Blanc with Laurent in 2009, 2010, and 2013. 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 eleven remote village children, all of whom are in boarding school and one who is about to graduate from University in Australia. She consistently gets rave reviews from members of her groups and has quite a loyal following. Cathy Ann is active in the Breast Cancer Fund and has participated in thirteen 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 \$600,000 for the cause!). Cathy Ann’s program, Sacred Treks, which benefits the Breast Cancer Fund (Bhutan, Mont Blanc, Peru, Everest Base Camp, Ladakh, Mustang, and Georgian Caucasus treks) has raised over \$580,000. 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. Laurent and Cathy

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Ann have guided several trips together in the Alps.

## 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 (one day is 5,400 feet!) and at altitudes up to 10,823 feet. The terrain includes some groomed trails, but some of them can be narrow with loose rocks, gravel scree, and roots. We highly recommend you bring hiking poles. 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 with a daypack of ~ 20lb. 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 pre-requisites are a spirit of adventure and a positive attitude.

## 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!

## 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, painkillers, 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 the trip leader; at least \$150-\$175 per guest for the lead local guide and at least \$75 per guest for the driver. You can present your gratuities to your leader, local guide, and driver individually.

The currency of Italy is the Euro. 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 Aosta before the trek begins, as there are few ATMs along the way while trekking. Credit cards, traveler's checks, and US dollars are not generally accepted at the inns outside of Aosta.

## 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 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.

## 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. We will also spend two nights in rifugios, which offer dormitory-style accommodations and common toilets and showers. 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:** Italy is 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

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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:** Italy is 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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