

Below is the proposed itinerary for the trip. As is true on any adventure travel trip, plans for any specific day may be modified due to weather considerations, unforeseen circumstances, new opportunities, and group interests.

DAY 1

Meet in Chamonix, France at 5 p.m. at the Hotel

We will meet in the lobby of our lodging in Chamonix for a Welcome and Introductions before enjoying our first dinner together. We will be staying on the outskirts of Chamonix in a quiet and very beautiful location with stunning views of the glaciers from the terrace, but with easy access to the bustling town centre. This will allow you to get a good nights sleep and to get over your jet lag. Overnight Chamonix at Aiguille du Midi. (D)

DAY 2

Visit Montever, Balcony Hike

There is so much hiking to do right in the Chamonix Valley that we'll spend a full day here before we leave for our trek. This time it's an all-day excursion to the world famous Aiguille du Midi and the Mer de Glace, the largest of Mont Blanc's glaciers! We start the day with a visit a local bakery (or grocery) to grab our picnic lunch before taking the lift to Aiguille du Midi to view Mount Blanc in all her glory. We then descend to the mid-station and begin our 'balcony' hike along the mountainside with the entire valley opening before us. While enjoying our picnic lunch, we'll gaze out over the spectacular Mer de Glace. After lunch, we will hike down to the glacier, and we will have the opportunity to actually walk inside the glacier. There we'll visit an ice grotto carved into the ice and view this magnificent glacier up close. Hiking: 5 - 7 hours. Elevation gain: 1432 feet. Overnight Aiguille du Midi (B, L, D)

DAY 3

Hike from Bellevue to Les Contamines

We begin our Tour du Mont Blanc trek today with a short bus ride to Les Houches and then a cable car to the top of Bellevue. This is where we begin our trek on the famous Tour du Mont Blanc trail. After crossing over a picturesque railroad crossing, we enter the forested side of Bellevue. Hiking along the trail we come to a gate - one of many we will encounter on this trek - just don't forget to close it! Shortly we will be at the bottom of the mountain and here our true alpine hiking begins as we pass the terminus of the huge Glacier. We continue up through alpine meadows to the Col de Tricot (6,995 feet) where we are rewarded with views of the Dome du Gouter and the entire Chamonix Valley. A steep descent brings us to the village of Miages and Truc where lunch awaits us under the inviting umbrella of the rifugio. After lunch we climb out of the valley of Miage and ascend another 'hill', heading to the village of Les Contamines, our destination for the night. Hiking: 6 - 8 hours. Elevation gain: 5,000 feet (cumulative). Overnight Les Contamines, Hotel Gai Soliel or similar (B, L, D)

DAY 4

Hike from Les Contamines to Les Chapieux

From our hotel in the village of Les Contamines we will start the morning with a short shuttle to the Notre Dame de la Gorge, a famous 15th century mountain church that is worth a stop. Our trail today is up the broad Mont Joie Valley with a total elevation gain of over 4,000 feet. Initially our route climbs steeply alongside the Bon Nant River, on a path believed to be 2,000 years old, part of a link from Gaul to the Roman empire called the "Old Roman Road". Crossing a small ancient Roman bridge, we continue upward, approaching the top of the ridge where we will take a welcome lunch break amid the high mountains, sheep, and local cows. From here we continue climbing until finally reaching the Col du Bonhomme for yet another spectacular view of the valleys below. We'll then continue along a ridge to the Col de la Croix du Bonhomme, our highpoint of the day. From here the path starts descending steeply and we ford several streams on our way to the charming little hamlet of Les Chapieux and the hospitable Auberge-Refuge de la Nova and a hot dinner! About 8 hours walking. Hiking: 7 - 9 hours. Elevation gain: 4,000 + feet. Overnight Le Chalet de Roseland, Les Chapieux. (B, L, D)

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DAY 5

Hike from Les Chapieux to Courmayeur

Today we continue this amazing trail. We will gain over 3,000 feet as we climb from Les Chapieux to the Col de la Seigne where we cross from France into Italy. From the Auberge de la Nova we get a short shuttle to 'the end of the road' and begin our hike at the bottom of Col de la Seigne. The climb is along a switchback trail where often enterprising locals offer donkey transports for backpacks up the top of the ridge! Arriving at the Col at 2,516 meters (8,255 feet) the view ahead is amazing. This is the Franco-Italian border, and we have our first view of the Italian side of Mont Blanc, including the entire Val Veny. On our left will see the Mont Blanc massif. This side of the mountain is more angular, rockier, and the snowy peak is easily visible in the distance. Descending from the col, we hike to La Visaille and take a short 30 minute bus ride to the gorgeous Roman town of Courmayeur, where we will stay for the night. Viva Italiana! Hiking: 7 - 9 hours. Elevation gain: 3,000 + feet. Overnight Hotel Edelweiss, or similar (B, L)

DAY 6

Hike from Courmayeur to Champex

After sufficient food has been consumed, we jump on the local bus (a very Italian experience), which takes us up the stunning Val Ferret. We then set off on a lovely traversing path which leads us to a morning coffee/cake stop at the lovely Rifugio Elena. From here we climb the steady zig-zag path that leads us to Switzerland and the Grand Col Ferret at 2537m (8321ft). From this pass, there are views of the snow-capped Grand Combin and also Mont Dolent, the summit of which is rather unique as it is shared by France, Switzerland and Italy. The views in both directions from this Col are really spectacular. After lunch we enter Switzerland, no need for passports here, and discover that the terrain becomes less rugged and more meadow-like as we descend to La Peule. This small farm produces cheese throughout the summer months, and also runs a 'buvette' the name given to a 'snack bar/small cafe' in the mountains. Many farmers offer food and drink to the hikers as a way of supplementing their income. We always feel it is incumbent upon us to support them, though there is a limit to how much tea/coffee/cake we can consume in one day. A final traversing trail to the small village of La Fouly and it is here that we catch our private taxi transfer to our overnight halt in the beautiful lakeside village of Champex.

Hiking: 12.5 miles, 6-7 hours

Elevation: 3700ft

Overnight: Hotel du Glacier, Champex (B, L, D)

DAY 7

Champex to Col de la Forclaz

Another morning of beautiful hiking through the Swiss Alps begins. Today's trek is through the beautiful Bovine Trail, and in classic Swiss style, we will be walking through picturesque countryside filled with Swiss chalets, wildflowers, and a plenty of cows. After a steep ascent, we are rewarded with a coffee and cake break at a cafe. This cafe is owned by a local woman who also tends cows! Her herd is the HÃ©rens cows, or the 'Swiss Fighting Cow' variety. These strong and muscular ladies love to fight with each other- maybe we will spot a show! After our homemade treat break, we wander through the Rhone Valley until we reach our destination at Trient village. Hiking: 9.5 miles, 5 - 6 hours of hiking

Elevation: 2,542 ft

Overnight: Hotel de la Forclaz or similar, Trient Village (B, L, D)

DAY 8

Col de la Forclaz to Chamonix

We will begin our day by dropping down to the Trient Valley, which is where we start the climb up through fine woodland to reach the border between Switzerland and

France. Our route back to Chamonix, in France, can vary to take account of the prevailing weather conditions. The preferred route, via Les Tseppes, allows us to linger over views of the Trient Glacier and the rocky skyline ridge of the Fenetre d'arpette. After wandering through the flower meadows where there are often herds of sheep grazing tended by a 'berger', which means shepherd, we then climb on a limestone trail towards the border with France. Soon after passing the border we are greeted with amazing views of Mont Blanc which immediately tells us we have come full circle back to our starting point. It is this view that prompted English writer, Charles Dickens, to put pen to paper during the Victorian era and describe the immense beauty of Chamonix Valley and its mountains. We descend to the valley along the mountainside below the Aiguillette des Posettes ridge with stunning views leading us every onwards to our accommodation for the night. Hiking: 11.5 miles, 6 - 7 hours
Elevation: 3,936 ft

Overnight: Heliopic Hotel & Spa or similar, Chamonix (B, L, D)

DAY 9

Depart Any Time

The trip officially ends this morning. After breakfast (or earlier if you have a plane to catch) we say adieu to Chamonix and take one last look at the beautiful Mont Blanc Massif. You can continue on to other explorations or, if you must, take the train or a shuttle to the Geneva airport to begin your journey home or to the next adventure. (B)