

Intro to Alpinism

With Stuart Macdonald Guiding

If you want to learn the basics of alpinism then this is the course for you. Over a 3 day period we will cover all the essential skills to get you moving in the Alps, and enjoying the high mountain peaks.

Likely itinerary:

Day 0: We will meet in Chamonix in the evening to discuss the trip, check your equipment, and answer last minute questions. Anyone needing hire kit can collect it then.

Day 1:

Option A: We will drive through the tunnel to Italy, and then take the Skyway lift up to Punta Helbronner. After checking into the Rifugio Torino we will head out onto the glacier and do an "ecole de glace" where we will learn how to use our crampons and ice axes. After that we will take a hike on the glacier, possibly going to the Col d'Entreves.

Option B: After a short drive to Le Tour we will take the lift and then walk for 2hrs up to the Refuge Albert Premier. In the afternoon we will do an ecole de glace.

We will then return to the refuge for the night. In the evening we will look at equipment for alpinism, focussing on boots, crampons and axes.

Day 2:

Option A: Our plan today slightly depends on the number of people in the group. Possible options include an ascent of the Aiguille d'Entreves, or a traverse of the Vallee Blanche (with a cable car trip back to the refuge).

Option B: Most likely we will make an ascent of the glacial Tete Blanche, possibly with an ascent of the Petite Fourche afterwards. We will then cross the Col Superior du Tour and traverse the glacier to the Cabane du Trient.

We will then do a brief introduction to Crevasse Rescue.

Day 3:

Option A: A traverse of the Aiguille Marbree will give you the opportunity to practise your skills. An easy glacial approach, with a superb rocky ridge, and an abseil descent back onto the glacier mean that this peak has a bit of everything. After climbing we will take the lift back down to Courmayeur.

Option B: The Aiguille du Tour is the classic Intro Peak of the Mont Blanc Massif. After traversing the glacier from the refuge we will climb a short snow slope to the rocks where we will usually leave our crampons and axes. After that we will scramble upwards over superb rocky terrain to the summit. To get down we will reverse the route. After re-joining the glacier we will cross the Col Superior du Tour again and then head back down past the Refuge Albert Premier to the lift at the Col des Autannes.

Weather and time permitting we will then enjoy a cold drink in the sun before heading back to Chamonix.

Ratio: 1:4 max

Cost: €650

EQUIPMENT

Each day you will be wearing the following:

- Mountain Trousers. *Mammut "Base Jump"* (Schoeller fabric) or similar recommended.
- Thermal shirt/T shirt. Merino wool (eg *Icebreaker*) recommended as they don't smell.
- Thick socks. *Smartwool* or *Teko* recommended.
- Mountain Boots. *La Sportiva "Trango"*, *Scarpa "Rebelle"* and similar boots are recommended. Boots must have a rigid sole for crampons. Excellent boots can be hired in Chamonix for around €50/week. S
- Fleece/Soft Shell top. *Arc'teryx* recommended.
- Thin gloves. Fleece or leather gloves recommended.
- Gaiters. Gore tex. Black diamond recommended. Ankle length are fine.
- Sunglasses. Category 4 glacier glasses by *Julbo*, *Cebe*, *Vuarnet* and *Adidas* recommended.

You should be carrying the following:

- Waterproof Jacket and Trousers. Gore Tex. *Arc'Teryx* Recommended.
- Warm Gloves. *Black Diamond "Patrol"* Gloves recommended.
- Sun Hat
- Warm Hat
- Goggles. Low light lenses recommended as goggles most likely used in poor weather.
- Packed lunch and drink
- Sun cream and lip salve. SPF >30.

- Blister Kit and personal medication if required. “Compeed” recommended.
- Head torch. *Petzl “Tika Plus”* or similar recommended.
- Ear Plugs (in case of snorers in the huts). Wax ear plugs are far better than foam.
- Compact camera (fully charged)
- Wash kit ie toothbrush, small tube of toothpaste, wet wipes.
- Sheet liner to sleep in. These are mandatory for the Mountain Huts for hygiene reasons. Silk bags are best due to their weight. *Summit to Sea* recommended.
- Antiseptic hand gel – some huts do not have running water to wash with.
- Duvet Jacket. Synthetic jackets recommended as they stay warm if wet. *Arc’teryx* and *Decathlon* recommended.

Technical Equipment:

- Harness. *Arc’teryx* recommended.
- Helmet. *Petzl “Ecrin Roc”* and *Black Diamond “Half Dome”* recommended.
- Ice Axe. *Grivel “Air Tech”* recommended. The bottom of your axe should reach your shin when held in your hand standing upright.
- Crampons. *Petzl Vasak* and *Grivel G12* highly recommended.
- Walking Poles. These can be handy when crossing glaciers, and on paths for reducing shock on your knees. *Leki* and *Komperdell* recommended. Snow baskets essential. It is personal preference whether to use one pole or two.
- Rucksack. 30-40 litre maximum.

Anyone wishing to hire equipment in Chamonix rather than buy it can do so. We use a local shop for boot hire (allow €50 for the week), and other items are available as follows:

EQUIPMENT HIRE PRICES IN €

Ice Axe	10
Harness	8
Helmet	8
Crampons	15
Duvet Jacket	10

Full Package: Duvet Jacket, Axe, Harness, Crampons, Helmet – €50, payable in cash in Chamonix

Valley Accommodation

For this trip we recommend the Hotel Prieure in Chamonix. This is a lovely hotel, ideally situated so you can stroll into town. There is a spa facility so remember to take your bathing costume. The hotel is located at 149 Allee Recteur Payot. The number for reception is +33 450 53 20 72.

Transfers to and from Geneva Airport

The transfer is approximately 70 minutes. The following company is recommended:

www.mountaindropoffs.com When booking use code SMGUIDE15 to receive a discount on your transfer

Please remember that most hotels ask you not to arrive before 15:00.

At the end of the trip, try and arrange your return flight for early afternoon. This will allow you to have breakfast before you leave. Transfers usually leave Chamonix 3 hours before flights depart.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How much does the trip cost ?

The trip costs €650. There are additional costs, and these are outlined later in this section.

A 20% deposit is payable upon booking via www.stuartmacdonald.org.

The balance is required two months before the start of the trip.

What is included in the week ?

- Half Board accommodation in Mountain Refuges x 2 nights.
- Transport to and from training venues.
- All Guiding and Guides expenses.

What costs extra ?

- Flights
- Transfers
- Insurance
- Equipment hire
- Lunches, snacks, drinks

Do I need specialist Insurance for the trip ?

Absolutely. To go on an alpine climbing trip without insurance would be foolhardy. Rescue costs and medical bills are something you don't ever want to worry about, so we insist on everyone being fully insured. If you are UK based, then we recommend BMC Insurance - www.thebmc.co.uk/modules/insurance/Default.aspx . If living outside the UK then we recommend World Nomads (www.worldnomads.com).

What if the trip does not run ?

If the trip does not run, through insufficient bookings, sudden illness, or other unforeseen circumstances, you will be offered a full refund, or transferred onto an expedition with one of our partner firms.

What are the mountain huts like ?

Mountain Huts are mostly owned by the Alpine Clubs. They are there to provide accommodation and food for mountaineers. They often cater for large numbers (>100), and hence can be quite busy. Meals are usually simple but plentiful, and anyone with special dietary requirements must let us know in advance so we can inform the hut guardian. Please note that while huts will usually try and

accommodate vegetarians etc they do sometimes struggle with more specialised requirements such as gluten free. Showers and running water are not usually available. Meals, drinks, and snacks can be purchased for cash. The rooms are usually dormitory style, with large alpine bunks (up to 15 people in a row). Indoor footwear is provided in the refuges so there is no need to take your own.

How long are the days ?

The length of days will vary when Alpine Climbing, but everyone taking part should expect to be active for 8-9 hrs per day.

How much water should I carry each day ?

Do not carry too much water – it is very heavy. As a general rule 1-2 litres is the right amount. Avoid using Camel Back style systems with drinking straws. They leak, the tubes freeze, and they will always let you down when you need them most. Nalgene style plastic bottles are the best.

What type of food should I carry ?

Everyone is different, however it is essential to eat well in the mountains. Sandwiches are hard to beat, supplemented by fruit and chocolate bars. Don't carry too much food, and remember that some foods will freeze solid unless kept in jacket pockets.

What camera should I take ?

Avoid carrying bulky SLR style cameras. They are too heavy, and slow to use. Compact cameras that fit into a pocket are best. **CAMERAS IN RUCKSACKS NEVER TAKE PHOTOGRAPHS.** Digital cameras must be kept warm in a pocket or they will freeze and cease to function.

What sun cream do you recommend ?

Any brand will be fine. The most important thing is the SPF – Do not bother with anything under SPF 30. Creams with UVA and UVB protection are best. Any don't forget lip salve.

If there is no water in the huts for washing, what should we do ?

Take some wet wipes to give yourself a clean in the evening. A toothbrush, some wet wipes, and a small tube of toothpaste (shared between several people) is plenty. Some alcohol hand gel is also handy.

How does every company claim to use the best Mountain Guides ?

We always use the very best Mountain Guides possible. But then every company says that don't they ? To ensure we genuinely do use the best Guides, we pay our Guides well. That way we always have the pick of the very best.

Are all Mountain Guides certified ?

All Guides operating in the European Alps must be Internationally Certified. Training and Assessment takes a minimum of three years and anyone caught operating without a license will be prosecuted.

Occasionally we employ trainee guides (known as Aspirants). They are in the final stages of qualifying as Guides and are allowed to operate under the tutorage of an experienced Guide.

Where can I get a packed lunch for each day ?

Before leaving Chamonix you can buy lunch from a local bakery. Once in the mountains you can buy a good packed lunch from the Mountain Refuge (don't forget to order the night before).