

# MATTERHORN ASCENT

INFORMATION FOLDER

Many thanks for booking your Matterhorn expedition with us. We're here to do everything possible to make your dream a reality. This is one of the most famous alpine peaks in the world, and an ascent is not to be under-estimated. We will be with you every step of the way.

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### **ITINERARY**

Day 1 – Your trip will start with a briefing at 6:30 pm at the Pension Heino in Saas Grund. We will discuss the week ahead and answer any questions you may have before checking/issuing equipment.

Day 2-4 – Training and acclimatisation climbs. The Saastal region gives excellent access to a number of great routes which are perfect preparation for the Matterhorn. We will most likely walk up to the Almageller Hutte, where we might undertake rock climbing, the traverse of the Wiesmies and the South Ridge of the Lagginhorn. At the end of the training and acclimatisation phase the Guide will decide whether you are ready to attempt the Matterhorn. Please note that the Guide's decision is final. All the Guides have a huge amount of experience, and their priority is your safety.

Day 5-7 – The summit phase. Usually an ascent of the Matterhorn takes 2 days. We have a three day window and will select the best two day period. Hence you will either have a day off before or after the summit phase:

After driving to Tasch we take the train to Zermatt. From there a walk across town to the Klein Matterhorn lift allows you to soak up the atmosphere. The Matterhorn dominates the town, and you'll pass the famous Hotel Monte Rosa where Edward Whymper and the rest of the team stayed prior their ill-fated first ascent in 1865. After reaching Schwarzsee (Black Lake) the hike to the Hornli Hut begins. The trail is straight-forward, and there's no need to use ropes etc. Shorts can be a good idea to avoid getting too hot. The hike to the hut will take around 1 ½ hours. Once there, there's plenty of time to prepare your rucksack for the following day. You can leave excess gear at the hut to collect on the way down.

The climb to the summit will begin early the next morning. Breakfast will likely be around 04:30/05:00. Traditionally the Zermatt Guides leave the hut first, with the foreign Guides following, and the unguided teams at the rear. Headtorches will usually be used for the first part of the climb, but it will soon be light. The climb is long – 1200m of ascent. The route is a mix of walking, scrambling, easy rock climbing, and fixed ropes. The fixed ropes are on various parts of the mountain

where the ground is steepest. They are mostly fat gym ropes like you'd find in a school gym. On reaching those your Guide will climb up and then belay you up. The best technique is to try and keep your arms as straight as possible and then use your legs on the wall. Efficient rope climbing is essential to avoid getting too tired. On the way up there is an emergency shelter at Solvay. This is often used as a turnaround point. Different Guides use different times, but any team taking over 2 ½ hours to reach the Solvay will have a very slow ascent, and an even slower descent. Hence for safety reasons they will turn around.

The route is usually climbed without crampons until around 2/3 height at "The Shoulder". From there it's usually snowy to the summit. After a brief celebration at the summit it's time to turn around and head down. Most teams take longer to go down than they do to go up. Imagine climbing a ladder – easy on the way up, not so easy on the way down. Hence it's important to keep to time, and to listen carefully to the instructions of your Guide. On the steeper sections you will be lowered by your Guide – DO NOT TRY AND CLIMB DOWN. LET GRAVITY TAKE OVER OR YOU WILL TAKE TOO LONG AND CAUSE A LOGJAM. The terrain is very serious in nature, and your footwork needs to be precise. Hence the reason for a strict guiding ratio of 1:1. Return trip times vary but 6-10hrs is fairly normal. Some teams are benighted.

Once back at the hut it's traditional to have a Rosti (fried potatoes, cheese and eggs) to replace all the calories burned, often with a cold beer. After that it's back down to the lift at Schwarzsee.

On the final day breakfast at the hotel is included before departure. Don't forget to settle your hotel bill before you leave.

## 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 "Ribelle"* and similar boots are recommended. Boots must have a rigid sole for crampons. Boots can be hired in Saas for around 65CHF/week.
- Fleece/Soft Shell top. *Arc'teryx* recommended.
- Thin gloves. Leather gloves recommended for the fixed ropes.
- 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.
- Helmet. *Petzl* and *Black Diamond* recommended.
- Ice Axe. *Grivel* "Air Tech" recommended. A short axe (50cm) is usually fine and is less likely to snag the rope when on your pack.
- 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. *Gipron* recommended as they split into 4 sections to be stowed inside your pack, and are super light. Snow baskets essential. It is personal preference whether to use one pole or two.
- Rucksack. 30-40 litre maximum.

NB: On the Matterhorn, speed is critical. As a result your rucksack needs to be as light as possible. Every gram counts. Paclite jackets, super light duvets, and lightweight boots can all combine to make the difference between success and failure. This is an opportunity to treat yourself to new kit.

Anyone wishing to hire equipment can do so.

#### **EQUIPMENT HIRE PRICES IN €**

Ice Axe	20
Harness	13
Helmet	13
Crampons	28
Duvet Jacket	24
Mitts	10

**Full Package: Duvet Jacket, Mitts, Axe, Harness, Crampons, Helmet – €99CHF, payable in cash.**

**Please let us know in advance if you will need anything this week.**

#### **Valley Accommodation**

For this trip we will be staying at the Pension Heino in Saas Grund. The hotel is near the “Saas Grund Schulhaus” bus stop.

The hotel is basic, but clean, well run, and excellent value. It provides an excellent base for the week. Rooms are normally on a twin sharing basis.

They will provide us with “Saastal Cards” to use local lifts and buses for free. You should settle the bill before you leave at the end of the week.

#### **Packed Lunches:**

We usually grab a sandwich from the bakery before we take the lift. On the mountain you can order a sandwich from the refuge staff before dinner.

#### **Evening Meal**

Dinner can be taken in the hotel.

#### **Transfers to and from Geneva/Zurich Airport**

The easiest way to reach the hotel is by public transport from either airport. You will change from train to bus in Visp. Please do not arrive at the hotel before 1500.

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.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### How much does the trip cost ?

The week costs €2950. There are additional costs, and these are outlined later in this section.

A 20% deposit is payable upon booking via [www.stuartmacdonald.org](http://www.stuartmacdonald.org).

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

### What is included in the week ?

- Transport as per the itinerary.
- All Guiding. Days 1-3 at 1:2, days 4-6 at 1:1.
- Lifts in Saas Grund.

### What costs extra ?

- Flights
- Transfers
- Insurance
- Valley Accommodation (Half Board). Allow 300CHF, in cash.
- Mountain Refuge Fees for you and your Guide. Please look after your Guide in the refuges ! (allow 550CHF for the 3 nights). The Hornli Hut is expensive ! All huts on this trip accept card payments.
- Mountain Uplift for you and your Guide. (allow 100CHF for the lift to Schwarzsee).
- 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](http://www.thebmc.co.uk/modules/insurance/Default.aspx) . If living outside the UK then we recommend World Nomads ([www.worldnomads.com](http://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 in the trip should expect to be moving for 8-12 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 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).

### **What is an equivalent day in UK ?**

In Scotland in summer, an ascent of Tower Ridge on Ben Nevis, followed by a descent of Ledge Route would be good training. To really make it as tiring and demanding, finish with an ascent of Castle Ridge.

In North Wales in summer conditions, an ascent of Ordinary Route on Idwal Slabs followed by Cneifon Arete. Descent to the base of Glyder Fach and another scramble from there to the top, before a descent of Bristly Ridge to practise difficult descents.

### **How fit do I need to be ?**

Fitness requirements are different for every peak. For the Matterhorn, you need to be capable of moving quickly for 10 hours at altitudes between 3200m and 4500m. You will need to be swift at rope climbing. The physical demands of the Matterhorn should not be under-estimated – many people are turned around at the Solvay hut because they are too slow.

Stamina, endurance, and upper body strength are just some of the things you might need to work on for this trip. To best prepare yourself, I would strongly recommend you consider some professional training before your trip. I now work together with Mountain Guide and Personal Trainer Euan Whittaker to help prepare people to achieve their goals. Euan operates an on-line training facility and will develop an individual training plan for you. This will include an initial consultation, goal setting, and a systematic program including video analysis, heart-rate monitoring and regular communications. Training programs cost around £100/month.

If you're interested in working with Euan, please contact him directly here: +44 (0)7765 823545.