

# **STUART MACDONALD GUIDING**

## **MONT BLANC INFORMATION FOLDER**

Many thanks for booking your Mont Blanc expedition with us. We're here to do everything possible to make your dream a reality. Our Mont Blanc package is specifically designed to make your week as comfortable as possible, as enjoyable as possible, and as successful as possible. We use the best Mountain Guides, have a great itinerary, and look forward to celebrating with you on your successful return to the valley from the summit.

**Contents:**

- Itinerary
- Equipment
- Valley Accommodation
- Frequently Asked Questions

**ITINERARY**

Day 1 – We'll meet at the Hotel Prieure (149 Allee Recteur Payot) at 18:30. Hire equipment will then be distributed as required and we will have a briefing about the week to come. Your Head Guide will show the clothing and equipment that they will be taking on the acclimatisation phase. NB: These trips usually (but not always) run Thursday to Thursday, in which case, you should book your travel for Thursday both out and back.

Day 2 – 08:30. The day will start with a kit check at the hotel. After that, there will be time to go to a local shop to hire boots if needed, or to make last-minute purchases. We will then head to Italy (via a bakery to pick up lunch) via the Mont Blanc tunnel. The journey to Courmayeur only takes around 30 minutes. Once we take the Skyway lift to the Rifugio Torino (3400m). Due to the easy access you can take a bag of luxuries such as extra clothes, food, water and books with you to leave in the hut. After getting to the refuge we'll take a lunch break and then spend the afternoon on the glacier learning how to use our crampons and ice axes.

Day 3 – Usually we use this day to get some mileage in our legs with a glacial hike. Depending on

weather and conditions this may be across the Vallee Blanche, or we climb one of the local peaks around 3500m altitude. Both are great preparation for Mont Blanc. We will then head back to the refuge for a second night

Day 4 – Today we'll aim for some more technical climbing with an ascent of a peak such as the Aiguille Marbrée. We climb this on a ratio of 1:2 for maximum safety. After that we take the lift back down to the valley.

Day 5-7 – Summit Phase. Depending on the weather and conditions we may spend either one or two nights in mountain huts to maximise our chances of success. Most often we use two for optimal flexibility. Usually our first night is in the Refuge Tete Rousse (3167m), and our second night is at the Refuge Gouter (3817m). Ideally we climb to the summit from the Tete Rousse and then sleep at the Gouter on the way down. That minimises risk crossing the Grand Couloir.

#### Summit Day

Expect to have breakfast very early morning (1.30/4.00 am is quite standard), before setting off using head-torches. After a few hours it is usually light enough to see clearly. The pace on summit day is not fast, but should be steady and constant. Approximate timings for each route are in the FAQs section.

### 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 "Nepal Extreme" or Scarpa Ribelle recommended. Boots must have a rigid sole for crampons. Excellent boots can be hired in Chamonix for around €65/week.
- 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, Vuarinet 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 – most huts do not have running water to wash with.

On summit day you will also need:

- Mitts/extra warm gloves. Dachstein wool mitts recommended, or fleece with Gore Tex shell.
- Duvet Jacket. Synthetic jackets recommended as they stay warm if wet. Arc’teryx and Decathlon recommended.

Technical Equipment:

- Harness. Black Diamond “Alpine Bod” and Beal “Aero Team III” 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. Gipron recommended. Snow baskets essential. It is personal preference whether to use one pole or two. Gipron poles are best because they are ultra light and split down into 4 segments, meaning they can be stored inside your rucksack when climbing.
- Rucksack. 30-40 litre maximum. If buying a rucksack get one with ice axe loops.

Anyone wishing to hire equipment in Chamonix rather than buy it can do so. We use a local shop for boot hire (allow €65 for the week), and other items are available as follows:

#### EQUIPMENT HIRE PRICES IN €

Ice Axe - 22

Harness - 16

Helmet - 16

Crampons - 33

Duvet Jacket - 28

Mitts -11

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

#### **Valley Accommodation**

For this trip we will be using the Hotel Prieure in Chamonix. This is a lovely \*\*\*\* hotel, ideally situated so

you can stroll into town. Rooms are on a twin-sharing basis. If you are a couple, please let us know and we can arrange a double bed for you.

If you already have your own accommodation in the valley that's no problem at all but we will use the hotel for group briefings etc. If you are arranging your own accommodation please let us know as you may be entitled to a discount.

#### **Packed Lunches:**

Packed lunches can be collected each morning from a local bakery. In the mountains they can be

ordered the night before from the Refuge staff.

### **What does an ascent equate to physically ?**

In the UK in summer, an ascent of Twin Ribs and Fiacall Ridge in the Cairngorms, followed by the ascent of Ben Macdui and Cairngorm. Starting and finishing at the Cairngorm Ski Area car park.

In the UK in winter, a traverse of Carn Mor Dearg and then the Carn Mor Dearg arete to the summit of Ben Nevis, and back to the car park. In the Lake District, Striding Edge followed by Hellvelyn, Fairfield and St Sunday Crag.

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

Fitness requirements are different for every peak. For Mont Blanc, you need to be capable of moving steadily for around 10 hours at altitudes between 3000m and 4800m. Working at high altitude is exhausting and will highlight any weakness in your personal fitness.

Stamina and endurance 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.

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

How fit do I need to be ?

- You should be capable of a 12 hour day in the high mountains carrying a 6kg rucksack. This can be difficult to judge at sea-level, but as a rough guide you should be capable of running a Half Marathon in <2hrs10.
- If you have previously been to Kilimanjaro, you should have found it easy, not challenging.
- You should not be over-weight - people carrying excess body weight don't get to the summit. Your Body Mass Index (BMI) MUST be in the "Healthy" range of 20-25. Please use

this BMI calculator: [BMI Calculator](#)

### **How much does the trip cost ?**

Trip costs may vary depending on the time of year. Please see the website for all prices. There are additional costs, and these are outlined later in this section.

### **What is included in the week ?**

- Half Board accommodation in Mountain Refuges x 4 nights.
- Half Board accommodation in a Chamonix Hotel x 3 nights.
- Transport to and from training venues.
- All Guiding and Guides expenses.

### **What costs extra ?**

- Flights
- Transfers
- Mountain uplift (allow €90-125)
- 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](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). Bedding is provided, but you will need to bring a silk liner for hygiene reasons. 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. Training days will usually start between 0600 and 0800, and last for 6-8 hours. Mont Blanc summit day will usually start very early, and can easily last 12 hours.

**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 work well. Carrying several 0.5L plastic drinks bottles also works very well, and they pack very easily.

**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 should 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.

**Why do some people use different huts to us ?**

All huts have their advantages and disadvantages. The approach route for the Tete Rousse (2-3 hrs) and Gouter Hut is the same, with the Gouter being 400m higher (an extra 2hrs climbing) on the same route. While the Gouter is higher (and thus a shorter summits day) it is not quite as comfortable as the Tete Rousse.

Choice of hut depends on group fitness, technical ability, conditions on the mountain and availability of spaces. Approx timings for routes are as follows:

Tete Rousse to Summit 6-8 hrs.

Gouter to Summit 3-4 hrs

Once descent times are added (approx 4-5 hrs) it becomes a long summit day !

If climbing from the Tete Rousse you will initially cross the "Grand Couloir" before scrambling up a rocky buttress to the Gouter Hut. This couloir is not difficult to cross, but can be prone to rock fall in warm temperatures. From the Gouter Hut the route is relatively straight-forward to the summit although the summit ridge is exposed and can be icy.

**Is it really necessary to spend so long acclimatising ?**

Yes. Acclimatisation is absolutely vital for Mont Blanc. Many people spend insufficient time up high before attempting the summit, and often fail as a result. Failure to acclimatise properly can lead to sickness and even death. If you are pressed for time and want a shorter trip, please book with someone else.

**Why does the trip not run weekend to weekend ?**

Mont Blanc is one of the most popular climbs in the Alps. As such, getting the required mountain

refuge bookings is exceptionally hard. By starting out of synch of most other groups it is a little easier to get the required bookings.

#### **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 more than any other Guiding Company operating on Mont Blanc. 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 ?**

You can buy a good packed lunch from a local bakery.

#### **What if the conditions are too bad to attempt the summit ?**

If conditions are really bad we will find an alternative plan. This would usually involve climbing in either Italy or Switzerland. If possible we would still try and climb a major peak >4000m high.

#### **How do some companies seem to be offering the same for less ?**

There are many companies operating on Mt Blanc and the packages often look very similar. However, the details are usually slightly different. If comparing prices, just check what is included. We firmly believe that ours is the best Mont Blanc package available.

#### **Client Testimonials:**

"Absolutely superb ! To reach the summit on my 70th Birthday was a dream come true. I cannot thank you enough." John Doble, Somerset.

"Fantastic. The trip was so well organised I could not have asked for more." Chloe Chick, Australia

"To have had the whole group on the summit was way beyond our expectations. We were so well

looked after, and felt completely safe throughout. A very professional service – Thanks !” Joe Shore,  
London