



## Tour around Mont Blanc (self-guided trip)

### Introduction:

The tour around Mont Blanc (meaning "The White Mountain") is recognized as one of the best of the world's classic self-guided walks. Faithful to its myth, the Mont Blanc is no doubt one of the most beautiful massifs of the Alps. Although the route does not bring you to the peak itself, the circuit will lead you from France to Italy and Switzerland in order to discover its various faces. The sceneries are stunning with innumerable alpine peaks and beautiful glaciers all around with the impressive Mont Blanc massif constantly in the background. This walk is reasonably demanding, but you only need to carry a light backpack each day and in the evening you will enjoy French and Italian cooking and Swiss hospitality in the traditional alpine villages you stay in.

### Special highlights:

- Tour du Mont Blanc - a Classic 8-day circuit of the Mont Blanc massif (with highest summit 4807 m a.s.l.) and "must-do" for every mountain hiker
- Three countries, three cultures, three cuisines - all on one great trip!
- Among other areas you'll be hiking in Chamonix - one of Europe's most eftersought hiking destinations - with views of spectacular peaks and glaciers every single day
- Charming hotels and fine dining, featuring regional specialties

### Itinerary:

**Day 1.** Arrival at Les Contamines - how to get there & receiving of travel documents: Normally people fly to Geneva Airport. From there you take the bus directly to Les Contamines (1,30hrs drive; 1100 m a.s.l.). Bus schedule is available at: <http://www.sat-montblanc.com/> or

<http://www.alpybus.com/timetables>. Other sources: [www.gva.ch](http://www.gva.ch) or Chamonix tourist board at [www.chamonix.fr](http://www.chamonix.fr). You are also

welcome to use the Airport Transfer Services (however lots of choices to get to the Chamonix valley). Arrival and overnight in the charming, traditional village of Les Contamines.

(N.B. Other possible arrival airports: Turin Airport (171 km from Chamonix) – arrive by bus [http://www.savda.it/orari\\_tariffe.htm](http://www.savda.it/orari_tariffe.htm); Lyon Airport (220 km from Chamonix) – arrive by train)

Many people prefer to arrive by private car. It is possible to leave the car at the first hotel but this is only practical if you book an extra night in Les Contamines at the end. Otherwise, there is plenty of parking places in Chamonix (for example below the Aiguille du Midi cable way). Parking there is free of charge and on the other hand you have your car in Chamonix when you come back to Chamonix on day 7 (and do not need to return to Les Contamines). From Chamonix you can then find your way to Le Fayet (by train) and then to Les Contamines (by bus), unless if you want to book a taxi. The roadbook (in English), maps (1:25 000) and vouchers for your trip will be waiting for you in the hotel of the first overnight stay.

### /dinner/

**Day 2.** Les Contamines-Col de la Croix du Bonhomme-Les Chapieux (18 km; 5-6 hrs of walking, including 2-2,30 hrs of descent; uphill walk 1300m, downhill walk 950m)

A short transfer to Notre Dame de la Gorge (done by the hotel staff upon request from the previous evening; around 2-2,5 km – Free of charge). Once there, you join the Roman Way (Voie Romaine) which takes you to the refuge of La Balme. Climb over the Col du Bonhomme (2329m a.s.l.) and the Col de la Croix du Bonhomme (2483m a.s.l.) leading to the

Chapieux Valley (1550 m a.s.l.). Col du Bonhomme is characterized by a double-headed rock on the left. Splendid views expect you over the Aiguille des Glaciers. Overnight in a mountain lodge in Les Chapieux.

### /breakfast, dinner/

**Day 3.** Les Chapieux-Col de la Seigne-Rifugio Elisabetta-Courmayeur-Rifugio Elena (18 km; 7 hrs of walking, including 3-3,30 hrs of descent; uphill walk 1000 m, downhill walk 400m)

From your lodge in Chapieux Valley the route continues upwards reaching the Italian border at Col de la Seigne (2516 m a.s.l.). After breakfast you will be transferred to Séloge where the real walk starts (appr. 3 km; done by the hotel, about 2€). This is a very spectacular hike, as the path weaves all the time overlooking the inclined pastures of the valley from higher and higher points until reaching the saddle. A fine descent, often upon névés, gives way to a flatter path leading to the lower pasture of the Lée Blanche. The valley on the Italian side is the realm of the alpine Marmots. You can see many of them playing over the snow patches. Descent into the long glacial valley of Val Vény until you rereach Rifugio Elisabetta (at 2300m a.s.l.) backed by two magical glaciers. The you continue walking further to La Cantine de la Visaille (some 30 km after the hut). From this point you take the bus to Courmayeur (about 2€; tel +39 0165 84 13 05) and your overnight accommodation at Rifugio Elena (2062 m a.s.l.; outside Courmayeur), recently rebuilt only 200 metres away from the ruins of the old one. You are here very close to the glacier of Bar - one of the most beautiful glaciers of Mont Blanc massif.

### /breakfast, dinner/

**Day 4.** Rifugio Elena-Grand Col Ferret-La Fouly-Champex.

(6 hrs of walking (without the bus to Champex: 8-8,30 hrs); uphill walk 900 m, downhill walk 1000m)

The path goes uphill from the lodge, reaching Grand Col Ferret (2537 m a.s.l.), where passes the border between Italy and Switzerland. On the left, Mont Dolent (3823 m a.s.l.) has one face in Italy, a second in France, and the third in Switzerland, which qualifies it as the most European summit on the Tour! The Col Ferret is, moreover, a very venerable passageway between the alpine valleys, and has been used since antiquity. As descending towards the village of La Fouly you will get a glimpse, far away on the right, of the Massif des Combins, with the Grand Combin summit culminating at 4314 m a.s.l., aside its neighbours the Petit Combin (3672 m a.s.l.) to the North, and the Mont Velan (3734 m a.s.l.) to the South. You can then extend the itinerary from La Fouly to Champex (walking 2-2,30hrs more through pastoral Swiss mountain valleys), or you can choose to take a bus from La Fouly to the beautiful village of Champex and its lake. ( regular bus : bus (or train) La Fouly – Orsières (30') + bus Orsières – Champex (30') : 11 CHF ~ 7 euro; railway station in Orsières : tel +41 (0)27 783 11 05) Overnight in Champex.

**/breakfast, dinner/**

**Day 5.** Champex-Col de Forclaz

The highest point of the walk is reached today as you climb over the Fenêtre d'Arpette (2750 m a.s.l.). The views are tremendous while you go down alongside the Trient glacier. Overnight in a lodge in Col de Forclaz.

For this day you have 2 options:

- The first one via Fenetre d'Arpette is tougher, but more spectacular and should be undertaken only if the forecast is for calm, settled weather. The route through the Fenêtre d'Arpette has to be considered as the "climax" of the Tour du Mont Blanc. It will take you more than 4 hrs walk to reach the pass. It is not particularly difficult, but long and you should get an early start. Beyond the pass, the descent offers a spectacle of unique beauty, with the Trient glacier descending almost along the path.

(7-8 hrs of walking; uphill walk 1100 m, downhill walk 1350m)

- The second option is easier and is advised if the weather is bad. It passes the small and quiet Swiss villages Champex d'en Haut and Champex d'en Bass. Having walked along some green meadows and later on following the footpath through the forest, you come to the farm buildings of Le Plan d'Au. From here on the track starts rising until you get to an open hillside providing awesome views, before Bovine (1987 m a.s.l.). The Bovine farm is located on a gentle slope of pasture facing the Rhone Valley, showing the contrast between the pastoral life of the traditional alp farmer and the modern

agriculture with its orchards and vineyards 1500 m below in the valley.

(5-5,30 hrs of walking; uphill walk 750 m, downhill walk 700m)

**/breakfast, dinner/**

**Day 6.** Col de Forclaz-Col de la Balme-Le Tour Return to France via Col de la Balme - a contrast with the previous hike, since this pass consists of nothing more than an alpine pasture presenting no difficulties, apart from 800 metres uphill along a good series of hairpin bends which rapidly wind up in the direction of the pass. Again you have to choose among 3 alternative routes for the descent to Le Tour (1450 m a.s.l.) at the end of the day where you will stay overnight.

1/ Go down directly to the village of Le Tour by following the ski slopes (pistes), and continue to the CAF refuge. This is the simplest itinerary on the TMB, and is recommended in bad weather.

(5-6 hrs of walking uphill walk 850 m, downhill walk 850m)

2/ Continue to the Plan des Reines and down to the Col des Posettes. Then pass above the Balme chalets to Le Tour's abandoned slate quarries. The passage by the Crête des Posettes is only to be undertaken in fine weather. There you will find superb view over the Mont Blanc range and the Aiguille Verte in particular.

(5- 6 hrs of walking; uphill walk 1000 m, downhill walk 1000m)

3/ Go left to Refuge Albert 1er, near the Le Tour glacier, the path which follows the contour line (chemin en balcon). Go back down the very steep moraine along the glacier, as far as the village of Le Tour. This is the most beautiful itinerary, but also the steepest descent.

**Danger:** early in the season, névés can make this descent dangerous, especially on the dotted lines on the map. Therefore this itinerary is suitable for experienced mountaineers only. (6 hrs of walking; uphill walk 1150 m, downhill walk 1150m)

**/breakfast, dinner/**

**Day 7.** Le Tour-Lac Blanc-Chamonix

(5-7 hrs of walking; uphill walk 900 m; downhill walk 400m (using the lifts) or 1300m descending directly to Chamonix)

Hike to the wonderful Balcon des Aiguilles Rouges before a climb to Lac Blanc (2352 m a.s.l.). Just enjoy the scenery to your left: Aiguille Verte, Les Drus, La Mer de glace, Aiguilles de Chamonix, Mont Blanc du Tacul (4248 m a.s.l.), Aiguille du Goûter (3863 m a.s.l.), and last but not least, Mont Blanc (4807 m a.s.l.)! Descent to Chamonix by Planpraz. You can also choose to take the cableway of La Flégère (11 to 18€ ) leading directly to Chamonix (which is the first lift station along the ridge; Planpraz comes 1,30 hrs after that). Overnight in Chamonix. No doubt this is one of the most spectacular days as the numerous marmots and ibexes provide additional charm to the landscape.

**/breakfast /**

**Day 8.** Departure. See bus schedules mentioned on Day 1.

**/breakfast/**

**DETAILED ROAD BOOK AND MAP WILL BE PROVIDED UPON ARRIVAL**

**General remarks:**

It is usually best to leave early in the morning, thereby putting any mountain passes behind you before midday. This will help you to avoid any problems associated with stormy weather, leave you the afternoon to recover from your exertions, and ensure that you're in fine form to carry on the day after. Up until the 15th of July, we strongly advise you to include telescopic walking poles in your equipment.

If there are névés (patches of snow of varying depths and dimensions) always approach these with extreme caution, especially if they are frozen hard. Wear mountain boots with good grips on the soles, long trousers and a pullover (no bare legs or arms on steep névés!). If you don't possess an ice axe, descend slowly using the 'steps' already made by someone who has. Avoid running or sliding, as a névé always ends up in a scree, and without an ice axe it's almost impossible to stop.

The way marks everywhere are very good; signposts with tables are available on the biggest crossroads en-route. Although the uphill/downhill walks exceed normally 1000m per day, the paths are tourist-friendly – not very steep, making serpentines where needed in order to gain height as easier as possible.

**Accommodation & luggage transportation:**

The first and the last night will be in 1\* hotels in Les Contamines and in Chamonix, in double rooms with private facilities. The other 5 nights the accommodation will be in lodges in dormitory with shared facilities (showers and toilettes on the floor). Halfboard with breakfast and dinner at all accommodations except day 7 (when dinner is not served). You only carry a small rucksack with the necessary luggage for the daily hike. The rest luggage is transported by vehicle every day.

**The price includes:** accommodation and meals as detailed on the program, the transfer of Day 2 to Notre Dame de la Gorge, the luggage transport every day, maps and detailed road book.

**The price does not include:** drinks, lunches, the bus transfers (e.g.Courmayeur, Champex, Chamonix) and cableways, insurances.

**Difficulty grade:** C

**Best period:** Mid June to mid September.

**Group size:** Min. 2 persons

**GENERAL**

**TOUR TYPES & GRADES**

We provide different varieties of tours as regards to their types and difficulty grades! Whether you will choose individual and group tours with a guide or combined tours with a guide for some part of the trip depends on you. We emphasize on using local experienced guides with knowledge of the local language, culture, history, art, etc. The tours are conducted in the English language. Guides in other languages are available upon request.

**Tour types**

Our tours are divided in different tour types, regardless of being guided or not or if someone travels alone or in a group. We have prepared your vacation so that you can concentrate on new impressions and experiences, awaiting you all the time. Here is a description of the various tours:

**IT: Individual tours**

There is no guide on this tour. You travel individually and we are responsible for the hotel overnights and /some/ transfers. Sometimes you will travel together with other people. If you wish a guide can be arranged, if ordered. We take it for granted that you can read maps, provided by us upon arrival.

**Difficulty grades**

To prepare yourself for the best of your vacation we recommend that you start planning it in an advance. Good physical condition is required. In order to achieve it we advise you to start walking, jogging or cycling everyday. Swimming a couple of times a week is also highly recommended. You do not need much to get yourself in shape. And don't forget that the most important tip for an unforgettable active holiday is to choose a trip which corresponds to your physical condition!

**C: Difficult**

These tours include trekking which is a little harder, normally on a challenging terrain. We take it for granted that you are in good condition and fit. You should be physically prepared at home to get the maximum of the tour. Most of the trekking is done at a greater height (max 3000 m). As on other tours you are free to skip some treks and have a rest.

**Equipment and clothing:**

You should always remember that you must try to keep the weight of your clothing equipment down to a minimum. Your packed rucksack should weigh no more than 10-15 kilograms.

**Recommended items:** waterproof rucksack (60 l) & daypack (35 l); walking waterproof boots with suitable ankle support; sandals; light casual shoes for walking and/or for travelling; gaiters; loose, casual trousers for trekking; waterproof trousers; fleece windstopper jacket; windproof, waterproof outer shell garment (breathable if possible!); hat for sun protection; sunglasses with UV protection; sunscreen lotion and lip balm; water bottle; torch (headlamp); mobile

**Penguin Travel DMC-Bulgaria**

**Address: 9 Orfej Str., 1421 Sofia, BULGARIA; Phone: +35924001050; E-mail: info@penguin.bg**

phone; underwear (not cotton); mosquito repellent; trekking sticks.

**Vaccination:** A yellow fever certificate is required for travellers coming from South American and African countries. Visitors to forested areas should consider vaccination for *tick-borne encephalitis*.

*Rabies* is present. For those at high risk, vaccination before arrival should be considered. If you are bitten, seek medical advice without delay.

**Money and personal expenses**

You will need some extra money to cover meals, drinks and extra trips not included in the tour price. Additional money for souvenirs and personal things could also be spent. That is why it is always necessary to have EURO in cash. The currency in France is Euro (EUR; symbol €) = 100 cents. The exchange rates with US dollars and GB pounds are around: 1 \$ = 0.76 €, 1£ = 1.48 € Some first-class hotels are authorised to exchange foreign currency. Shops and hotels are prohibited from accepting foreign currency by law. Travellers should check with their banks for details and current rates. American Express, Diners Club, MasterCard and Visa are widely accepted. Traveller's cheques are accepted nearly everywhere

Here are some examples of comparative costs in France (NB: prices in mid-range restaurants!):

- Coffee – 0,5 Euro
- Tea – 0,5 Euro
- Beer (0,5 l) – 1,5-1 Euro
- Soft drink (0,5 l) - 0,8-1,5 Euro
- Bottle of water (0,5 l) - 0,6-0,8 Euro
- Bottle of mark red wine (0,75 l) - 10-20 Euro
- Three-course lunch - 15-20 Euro
- Lunch pack - 5-8 Euro

**Cell phone coverage**

Roaming agreements exist with most international mobile phone companies. Coverage is excellent. However the trekking tours are done in mountainous areas where the signal could be weak or even lacking from time to time. In such a situation you just need to change your location a bit in order to find available network.

**Electricity**

220 volts AC, 50Hz. Two-pin plugs are widely used. If you come from the U.S. or UK you need to purchase an adapter.

**Brief about France**

**Territory** - 545,630 sq km (339,054 sq miles) (not including overseas territories).

**Population** - 60.9 million (2006)

**Religion** – Approximately

83% Roman Catholic; Protestant 2%; Muslim 5%; Jewish 1%; unaffiliated 9%.

**Capital city** - Paris.

**Population** - 12.7 million (2.2 million in the city; 10.5 million in the suburbs) (2006).

**Biggest towns** – Marseille, Lyon, Toulouse, Nice, Strasbourg, Nantes, Bordeaux, Montpellier, Rennes  
**Mountains** - There are 7 principle mountain regions in France - The Alps, Auvergne, Massif Central; Jura; Morvan; Pyrennes; Vosges; Corsica  
**Boundaries** - North -the English Channel (*La Manche*), Belgium and Luxembourg; East - Germany, Switzerland and Italy; West - the Atlantic Ocean; South - the Mediterranean (with Monaco as a coastal enclave between Nice and the Italian frontier), the southwest by Spain and Andorra

**Protected areas** - 7 national parks, 44 regional nature parks, 310 nature reserves

**Weather**

A true temperate maritime climate is found in the west, near the coasts, and is exemplified at BREST, where winters are mild (7C / 45 F in January), summers are cool (16C / 61F in July), and rainfall is frequent (800 mm/32 in) during 180 days of the year. A mid-latitude continental climate prevails in the interior of the country, with hotter summers (average July temperature of 18C / 64F in PARIS) and more rigorous winters (average January temperature of 2C / 36F in Paris), and rain falls on fewer days of the year.

A mountain climate prevails at high elevations, where temperatures are influenced mainly by altitude, and winters are generally bitterly cold and prolonged. Precipitation increases with elevation and occurs in the form of snow in winter, many villages in the high valleys receiving more than 50 days of snow each year.

**Average min/max temperatures in**

**Chamonix**

Last edited by: VK, 28/10/10

