

France, Italy & Switzerland: The Mont Blanc Circuit

Tour-Only Itinerary

An adventure through the spectacular Alpine landscapes of three countries, the celebrated Tour du Mont Blanc is a journey like no other. Follow expert guides on trails through coniferous forests and lofty mountain passes, breathing crisp, mountain air. Marvel at the towering rock spires of Aiguille Verte and Aiguille Rouge, and summit the Col de la Seigne for panoramic views of the colossal Mont Blanc massif. At rustic mountain lodges and refuges, fuel your journey with delicious regional fare served in a breathtaking setting. Along the way, stay in Alpine inns and mountain hotels, where you'll relax and refresh at the end of each day. This Mont Blanc hiking tour is an exhilarating adventure through France, Italy, and Switzerland, where mountaineering was born.



Highlights

- Ride the historic Montenevers railway from Chamonix to the Mer de Glace, the largest glacier in France, taking in spectacular mountain views
- Delight in the best of Savoyard cuisine after an invigorating day on the trail, from creamy fondues and raclettes, to savory stews and delicious tarts
- Enjoy the mountaineering culture of the Alps in Courmayeur, visiting local shops or sipping a cool drink at a café beneath towering Mont Blanc

On all Fully-Guided Adventures you can count on ...



Expert local guides to introduce you to the best of your destination.



Gracious accommodations that are a clean, comfortable home away from home.



Off-the-beaten-path places you'd never find on your own.



Experts to handle all the details.



A maximum of 18 fun-loving fellow travelers to share the journey.



Flight + Tour Combos include plane tickets, airport car service, and pre- and post-tour accommodations.



Delicious, authentic multi-course meals—virtually all are included.

DAY 1

Join Your *France, Italy & Switzerland: The Mont Blanc Circuit* tour **La Villette to Les Contamines-Montjoie**

6 miles (about 5 hours of walking), moderate to challenging, 2,600-ft. elevation gain, 1,950-ft. elevation loss

Your guide(s) will meet you at 8:00 a.m. in the lobby of Hôtel Le Morgane. Your guide(s) will be wearing a Country Walkers shirt.

Your exploration of the legendary Mont Blanc Circuit begins in Chamonix, the mountaineering capital of the Alps. Following an early-morning meeting, you transfer one hour to the hamlet of La Villette to start your first hike.

Today's hike offers exceptional views of the Aiguille ("needle") de Bionnassay, with its dramatic glacier and soaring rock spires. The route also provides an excellent introduction to the unique flora of this region. Martagon lily, masterwort, and gentian are among the flowers that adorn the mountainsides and are protected as an integral part of this incredible area. Following a large trail along gorges you ascend toward the Refuge de Miage, a mountain hut nestled in a large pastoral bowl crowned by the summit of Dômes de Miage.

Following a hearty lunch at the refuge, you continue up on a narrower trail to the pasture land of the Truc plateau, where a local farm produces and sells its own cheese. Your destination is the attractive village of Les Contamines-Montjoie, once home to chamois hunters and today a popular mountaineering and ski resort.

You are welcomed at a cozy family-run hotel nestled in the Montjoie Valley. There is time to relax before gathering again for a welcome drink and excellent dinner of local specialties served in your hotel's dining room.

Accommodation: Hôtel La Chemenaz, Les Contamines-Montjoie, France

DAY 2

Les Contamines-Montjoie to Les Chapieux

11 miles (about 7 hours of walking), challenging, 4,395-ft. elevation gain, 3,260-ft. elevation loss

If for any reason, you wish to opt out of this walk, as it is not possible to join the luggage transfer, your guides can arrange a private transfer at your own expense (cost of approximately 250 euros for a 2 ½-hour transfer)

After an early breakfast, you transfer by minibus to the end of the valley and the start of what is the most

challenging hike of the tour. The trail begins at the Baroque chapel of Nôtre Dame de la Gorge, a pilgrimage site at the foot of the Gorge du Bon Nant. From the church, you walk along an old Roman road that climbs steadily through a beautiful conifer forest. Leaving the woods, you cross broad, level Alpine pasture, passing rustic chalets as you make your way to La Balme. Continue the ascent, pausing occasionally for a snack of tasty Alpine chocolate and views of the dramatic valley below.

By midday you reach the Col de la Croix du Bonhomme (8,180 feet), where you stop to take in the breathtaking panorama. With the most difficult part of the day complete, you break for a trailside picnic before meandering down to the valley.

The day's final walking destination is Les Chapieux, a summer village at the southern limit of the Mont Blanc massif. A 45-minute drive takes you to your hotel in a Savoyard village. Here, you stroll out for dinner at a local restaurant after perhaps unwinding in the sauna or swimming pool.

Accommodation: Hotel l'Autantic, Bourg Saint Maurice, France

DAY 3

Les Chapieux to La Visaille and Courmayeur

10 miles (about 6½ hours of walking), moderate to challenging, 2,645-ft. elevation gain, 3,050-ft. elevation loss

Today you say *au revoir* to France and *buongiorno* as you enter the Aosta region of Italy, tracing the footsteps of countless Roman legionnaires. The hike begins at La Ville des Glaciers after a short transfer, and climbs eastward. After two-and-a-half hours, you reach the Col de la Seigne (8,300 feet). This "hill," with a broad, flat landscape, represents a watershed between the ancient glaciers that extended along the Aosta and Savoy slopes. Following a descent along an easy, winding trail, you reach the Elisabetta Refuge for lunch, a spectacularly situated stone chalet beneath the Aiguille of Combal. The valley enjoys a certain regional autonomy, and French is spoken by its friendly population.

You continue on foot to La Visaille, at the base of the spectacular Glacier of Miage, whose snowcapped domes you saw for the first time two days ago. A short transfer brings you to the resort town of Courmayeur, Italy's elegant counterpart to Chamonix and your home for the next two nights. After settling

into your comfortable in-town hotel, you are free to dine on your own at one of the town's many lively pizzerias or trattorias.

Accommodation: Hôtel Berthod, Courmayeur, Italy

DAY 4

Free day in Courmayeur with optional walk

Today is a rest day, and you have the opportunity to explore the charming Italian resort of Courmayeur. You may choose to peruse the local shops for souvenirs, sit at a sidewalk terrace to taste a delicious gelato, or simply relax in the hotel's sauna or Jacuzzi. If you prefer to walk, your guides offer a hike in the surrounding area (the mileage and level of difficulty will vary depending upon the group's interests) with a stop for an independent lunch. Another option in Courmayeur is to ride the Skyway cable car, a new aerial lift reaching the closest point to the summit of Mont Blanc. Your guides can assist with logistics, but the cost is not included in your tour price.

This evening, you reunite for a dinner of Italian mountain specialties at a nearby local restaurant.

Accommodation: Hôtel Berthod, Courmayeur, Italy

DAY 5

Courmayeur (Arnouva) to Ferret (Champex)

8.5 miles (about 5 ½ hours of walking), moderate to challenging, 2,600-ft. elevation gain, 2,830-ft. elevation loss, highest elevation: 8,370 ft.

Following a hearty buffet breakfast, a 20-minute drive takes you to Arnouva and the start of today's hike. Exploration of the Val Ferret continues along a winding footpath with a view of the Pré de Bar, the imposing granite peaks of Mont Dolent (12,543 feet), and the Grandes Jorasses. Along the way, you may stop for a rest at the Rifugio Elena for a steaming cup of rich hot chocolate. The climb continues through meadows that are home to Alpine wildlife—ranging from the talkative marmot to the agile chamois, which may be seen frolicking on the glacier after you cross the Grand Col Ferret (8,321 feet). This pass, in use

for several centuries, serves as the Italian-Swiss border between Val D'Aosta and the canton of Valais. The descent brings you along a trail with a profusion of wildflowers and the sound of Swiss cowbells echoing across the hillside. This is truly *Heidi* country; its tidy chalets with geraniums spilling from the window boxes greet you as you enter the sleepy village of Ferret.

A final minivan transfer delivers you to Champex, a tranquil Swiss summer resort on a lake with the same name. Upon arrival at your comfortable family-run hotel, there is time to relax, swim, or take advantage of the Jacuzzi before dinner on site.

Accommodation: Hôtel du Glacier, Champex-Lac, Switzerland

DAY 6

Champex to Col de la Forclaz

9 miles (about 6 hours of walking), challenging, 2,310-ft. elevation gain, 2,060-ft. elevation loss

Today's hike begins right from the doorstep of your hotel in the picturesque town of Champex. A coniferous trail winds north across Alpine pastures, providing great views of the town of Martigny and the Rhône Valley and its vineyards. You also catch your first glimpse of the highest summits in the Swiss region of Bernese Oberland. After a picnic lunch in this unparalleled setting, you walk to a charming old farm nearby for a cup of coffee or refreshment on their rustic terrace.

Reenergized, you start your afternoon hike to the Col de la Forclaz, pronounced *forcl* by the locals and meaning "fork" in Old French, as it is one of the three entrances to the Chamonix Valley—and the only one on the Swiss side. The trail ascends above the tree line, and, on a clear day, you see the famous Swiss ski resort of Verbier in the distance. Farther along the trail, you might stop for a moment to watch black Hérens cows fight for the title of "Queen"—this consists of two of these strong, bull-looking females pushing each other until the weakest steps backwards.

You arrive on foot at the day's final destination, a simple, family-run inn located at the top of the pass. Toast the day's accomplishment with a glass of Fendant, the fine local wine for which the area is famous, before a simple and comforting dinner.

Accommodation: Hôtel du Col de la Forclaz, Trient, Switzerland

DAY 7

Trient to Argentière

8.5 miles (about 4 hours of walking with cable car descent or 6 hours of walking without cable car descent), moderate, 2,860-ft. elevation gain, 915-ft. elevation loss with cable car descent or 3,080-ft. elevation loss without cable car descent

Today starts with a short transfer as you leave Switzerland. The trail rises gradually from the secluded valley of Trient in Switzerland, where the imposing village church seems to be the only beacon in this entirely green, lush environment. You pass through a tranquil spruce forest with many switchbacks before arriving to the Col de Balme in France. This pass offers tremendous views over the whole of the Chamonix valley, flanked by the Aiguille Verte and Aiguilles Rouges (the “green” and “red” needles, or peaks) surrounding Mont Blanc. The latter is named after the distinctive reddish color of the granite in the morning sun. Upon descending to the village of Tour, you have the option of using a cable car or continuing to walk on the slopes of the Balme ski area.

Your home tonight is in the village of Argentière—literally “silver” in French, as it was once the site of a silver mine. After settling into your traditional hotel, located in the town’s center, you join your guides at one of the several nearby restaurants for dinner.

Accommodation: Hôtel de la Couronne, Argentière, France

DAY 8

Mer de Glace to the Plan de l'Aiguille to Chamonix

4 miles (about 4 hours of walking), moderate to challenging, 1,650-ft. elevation gain, 600-ft. elevation loss, including a cable car descent

Following a few miles’ taxi ride, you set off on the final stage of the circuit, and it’s one of the most beautiful. Your day starts with the Montanvers “little red train ride” to the largest glacier in France, La Mer

de Glace or “The Sea of Ice.” From the upper station, your hike takes you further above to the side of the mountain overlooking the glacier. You reach the higher point at Le Signal where you enjoy an incredible panorama of the most impressive peaks in the Alps. This trail, overlooking the entire Chamonix valley, continues undulating at the foot of the Chamonix Needles towards Mont Blanc and the Bossons glacier.

The historical Plan de l'Aiguille hut hosts you for lunch. The hut keeper is not only famous for his warm welcome but also for his superb pies! A 10-minute ascent after lunch takes you to the cable car for a ride down to Chamonix, where an inviting, heated swimming pool awaits your arrival at an elegant four-star hotel. Reuniting for a farewell feast at your hotel's excellent restaurant, you can indulge to your heart's content after completing 60+ miles of walking.

Accommodation: Hôtel Le Morgane, Chamonix, France

DAY 9

Your *France, Italy & Switzerland: The Mont Blanc Circuit* tour concludes

After a plentiful buffet breakfast, you are free to continue your exploration of Chamonix, or depart for your next destination.

What's Included

Tour Only

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| Exceptional boutique accommodations | ✓ |
| All on-tour meals except 1 lunch and 1 dinner | ✓ |
| Local guides with you throughout tour | ✓ |
| Local wine and/or beer with dinner | ✓ |
| Entrance fees and special events as noted in the itinerary | ✓ |
| Travel assistance available 24/7 provided by Allianz | ✓ |