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Dossier: TMB/Guided/Hotels/11 days/2027

Tour du Mont Blanc / Guided: 11 days

Trip starts: *Day 1 in the Chamonix Valley*
Trip ends: *Day 11 in the Chamonix Valley*

The 11-day Tour du Mont Blanc covers the complete circuit on foot. There are 5 major passes, 165km of walking and we cross into France, Italy and Switzerland.

Starting in the Chamonix Valley, we trek in a clock-wise direction along established trails to small villages where we spend the night. The views are outstanding throughout: huge granite spires, tumbling glaciers, snowy peaks and fast-flowing rivers. You will see magnificent Alpine flowers, birds of prey and animals such as ibex, chamois, stoats and marmots.

During the trek, we stay at hotels for 9 nights and at an auberge for 1 night. We have chosen to include most of your dinners as we have found it is simpler for you and often costs less overall. There is a rest day in La Palud (Courmayeur) on day 7 where you can trek to La Visaille or relax in the town.

The walking will be mostly on good trails, though it is likely that we will encounter some rougher ground which may include rocky steps, rocks and tree roots. The trails are not maintained by a park authority, but are well-travelled and so are clear to follow. Some ascents will be tough and you should be confident of climbing and then descending over 1000m in a day. The walk should appeal to people who regularly take walking weekends and are happy covering 16-22km (10-14 miles) each day, with a number of ascents and descents. This is a challenging trek and you should be confident of your fitness.

We trek in a clockwise direction as the days are less strenuous at the beginning: it allows you to build your fitness and have a day off in La Palud (Courmayeur) before the last three big days.

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The trip will be led by an experienced and fully qualified International Mountain Leader (IML).



ITINERARY

Day 1 Meet at our hotel in Les Houches
If you are coming from Geneva Airport, the journey is around one hour to Les Houches and is very easy to arrange. Please see below for details under the section 'Getting to the Chamonix Valley'.

Les Houches is a small town 7km from Chamonix and has a few restaurants, bars and outdoor equipment shops. Rooms are normally available from 3pm. If you want to visit Chamonix town, it takes 15 minutes by public bus. There will be a short briefing by our Trek Leader at 6pm about the trip. Dinner is at the hotel.
Hotel. Meals included: dinner

Day 2 Les Houches – Plan Praz - Lac Blanc – Argentiere
After breakfast we take the local bus for 15 minutes from Les Houches to Chamonix (1030m) where we start our trek. We walk along the river to Les Praz and then take the telecabin to Chalets de Flegere situated at 1900m. We continue through open countryside for 1.5-2 hours to Lac Blanc (2352m). There are increasingly better views

of the whole Mont Blanc range, including Les Grandes Jorasses, Aiguille Vert and Les Drus. We then follow a path through the forest to Argentiere (1244m).
You will have your main luggage delivered to the hotel.
Hiking time is approximately 6 hours. Distance: 12 miles (19km). 1460 feet (450m) of ascent, and 4,264 feet (1,300m) of descent.
Hotel. Meals included: breakfast & dinner

Day 3 Argentiere – Col de Balme – Col de la Forclaz (Switzerland)
From the hotel we hike through old Argentiere and up to the Col des Posettes (1997m) for superb views Mont Blanc and the Chamonix Valley. From here, we traverse to the Col de Balme (2191m) and look directly into Switzerland. We descend through open country with views of glaciers to Trient (1297m). There is 30-40 minute climb to the Col de la Forclaz (1526m) where we spend the night.
You will have your main luggage delivered to the hotel.
Hiking time is approximately 7.5 hours. Distance: 11 miles (18km). 3280 feet (1000m) of ascent and 2933 feet (894m) of descent.
Hotel. Meals included: breakfast & dinner

Day 4 La Forclaz – Bovine Route – Champex
We hike steadily upwards through the forest along the 'Bovine Route' with magnificent views of the mountains of Verbier and the great Sion Valley. At Bovine (1987m) there is a small farm and the route then winds its way down through meadows, forests and open country. We arrive at Champex Lac (1486m) with its beautiful lake and lake-side cafés.
You will have your main luggage delivered to the hotel.
Hiking time is approximately 6 hours. Distance: 10 miles (16km). 3,115 feet (950m) of ascent, and 2460 feet (750m) of descent.
Hotel. Meals included: breakfast & dinner

Day 5 Champex – La Fouly
From Champex d'en haut it is a gentle 5-6 hour trek to La Fouly (1600m) along the Val Ferret. We start our walk from the hotel continuing to Champex Lac and then descend to the valley floor and follow the river through forests and meadows to Praz-de-Fort. We then ascend in similar surroundings with wonderful views of Mt Dolent and the South Face of the Mont Blanc range.
You will not have access to your luggage tonight and so you need to pack appropriately.
Hiking time is approximately 5-6 hours. Distance: 12½ miles (20km). 1,804 feet (550m) of ascent, and 1,443 feet (440m) of descent.
Hotel. Meals included: breakfast & dinner

Day 6 La Fouly – Grand Col Ferret – La Palud, Courmayeur (Italy)
We continue from La Fouly along the Val Ferret and cross into Italy via the impressive Grand Col Ferret (2537). From here, the descent is slightly steeper but rewards us with outstanding views of two of the Alps most iconic mountains – Les Grandes Jorasses and Mont Blanc. Our hotel is in La Palud (1350m), a small hamlet 3km outside of the centre of Courmayeur (45mins walk / 10mins bus ride).
You will have your main luggage delivered to the hotel.

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Hiking time is approximately 7-8 hours. Distance: 15 miles (24km) or 9 miles (14.5km) if you take a bus ride from Arnouva to La Palud to shorten the day. 3,100 feet (945m) of ascent, and 3,850 feet (1,170m) of descent.
Hotel. Meals included: breakfast

Day 7 Rest day in La Palud, Courmayeur or hike to La Visaille
Today can be used as a rest day or to hike to La Visaille meaning you complete the whole circuit of the TMB on foot. The accommodation at the half-way point between La Palud and Les Chapieux is not good enough and so we spend two nights at La Palud.

If you choose to walk, you head to Courmayeur (1200m) and then up to the Col Chécrouit (1956m). From here you follow the TMB trail with superb views of the whole of the South Face of Mont Blanc. The mountain is much steeper this side, compared to the views from Chamonix, with fabulous long ridges and gullies – many of which offer the most challenging routes to mountaineers. You descend to La Visaille (1659m) and then take a 15-minute bus ride back to Courmayeur.
Hiking time is around 5 hours. Distance: 7 miles (11km) with 3,600 feet (1100m) of ascent and 2100 feet (640m) of descent. You can take a cable car from Courmayeur to gain height and take the edge off the ascent.

Courmayeur is one of Italy's premier ski resorts and is full of pretty shops, cafés and restaurants. Close by, there is the excellent Skyway cable car, the spa at Pre St Didier and lots of gentler walking options. You could also head to Aosta (one hour by bus) to see Roman walls, an amphitheatre and medieval walls and buildings.
Hotel. Meals included: breakfast

Day 8 La Palud, Courmayeur – Val Veny – Col de la Seigne – Les Chapieux
We take public transport for approximately 25 minutes and travel to Val Veny under the spectacular South Face and ridges of Mont Blanc. We trek along a wide glacial valley surrounded by glaciers and high peaks to the Col de la Seigne (2516m) which marks the border between France and Italy. We then descend to Les Chapieux (1549m). Today is quite a long day, although it is not steep.
You will not have access to your luggage tonight and so you need to pack appropriately.
Hiking time is approximately 7 hours. Distance: 13 miles (21km). 2,829 feet (860m) of ascent, and 3,171 feet (967m) of descent.
Auberge. Meals included: breakfast & dinner

Day 9 Les Chapieux – Col du Bonhomme - Les Contamines
We make a steep ascent above Les Chapieux through marmot country and on through open meadows to more barren scenery. We cross 2 cols (2479m and 2329m) in wild surroundings with fabulous Alpine Flowers and marmots, weasels and chamois. We then head down through open country and on to a narrowing valley. Our destination is Les Contamines (1167m) – a pretty ski village with an interesting church. Today is a long day. The hotel is located 1km outside of the centre of Les Contamines.
You will have your main luggage delivered to the hotel.

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Hiking time is approximately 7-8 hours. Distance: 13 miles (21km). 3,050 feet (930m) of ascent, and 4,329 feet (1,320m) of descent.
Hotel. Meals included: breakfast & dinner

Day 10 Les Contamines – Les Houches
We ascend through pretty forests and meadows to the Chalets du Truc perched under the great west-face of the Mont Blanc range before descending to the Chalets de Miage at 1559m. We then make a steep climb to the Col du Tricot (2120m) and then on towards the plateau above Les Houches. This is a fitting end to our trek with the most outstanding views of the Chamonix Valley, the Chamonix Aiguilles and the Mont Blanc massif. We descend quickly by cable car and take a short ride by public bus to our hotel.
We check into the hotel and are reunited with our luggage.
Hiking time is approximately 6-7 hours. Distance: 10 miles (16km). 3,675 feet (1120m) of ascent, and 1800 feet (550m) of descent.
Hotel. Meals included: breakfast & dinner

Day 11 Trip ends in Les Houches
Check out from the hotel is normally 11am.
Meals included: breakfast

Extending your stay in the Chamonix Valley
If you would like to arrive earlier or stay longer in the Chamonix Valley, please let us know and we can book you some extra accommodation.

Ascents, descents and distances
The distances and altitude gains and losses in the itinerary above were measured over six separate TMBs by our Guides using GPS. We know that GPS readings vary from person to person, so the information is only indicative of what to expect on the trek.

While our intention is to adhere to the day-by-day route as printed above, a degree of flexibility is built into the itinerary. Overnight stops may vary from those suggested. Occasionally, it may not be possible to follow the itinerary as planned. This may be for a variety of reasons – climatic, political, physical or other. In these circumstances we will make the best alternative arrangements possible that maintains the integrity of the original itinerary.

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Is it for me?
This trip should appeal to you if you regularly take walking weekends and are happy covering 16-22km (10-14 miles) each day, with a number of ascents and descents. On the TMB we normally walk for between 6 and 8 hours each day and be outdoors for 8 or 9 hours. We generally follow good paths that are well-travelled, but they are not maintained by a park authority. You will encounter uneven paths, rocky steps, rocks underfoot and occasional tree roots on the trail. The highest altitude we walk to is 2537 metres, so you should not feel the altitude apart from a little shortness of breath. In late June and early July we may encounter patches of snow, particularly at the cols, and may have to kick steps to make the path secure. You will be in twin-bedded rooms throughout, though occasionally there may be more than two in a room at the auberges at Trient and Les Chapieux.

We grade this trip as challenging
Longer days will be 16-20km with up to 1000m of ascent and descent. You should expect approximately 6-8 hours of walking each day on a mix of well-worn and uneven paths. There may be some long ascents and descents and, as you will trek to higher altitudes, the effect of any poor weather will bring cold wind and rain. Early-season treks may encounter old winter snow at the highest elevations and a ski pole is useful for balance. Ice axes and crampons are not necessary. You need to be confident of your fitness.

If you are not completing the daily treks in the suggested times, you may have to retire from the trip. Poor weather or people having to wait too long for very slow members of the group can all add to the hiking Guide's decision to recommend that someone retires from all or part of the trek: the safety and enjoyment of the individual and the group is paramount. The first half of the route has easier days, the second half is much tougher.

Why we go clockwise
Many people choose to trek anti-clockwise. However, over many years we have concluded that you are better hiking clockwise. If you go anti-clockwise you cross three huge mountain passes at the beginning of the trip: this means a lot of physical effort when you are just finding your trekking feet and getting used to the higher altitudes. In addition, our hotel owners report that many hikers are anxious about being able to cross these passes – particularly between Les Contamines and Les Chapieux – and the atmosphere at the hotels is tense.
By travelling clockwise, the first few days of the trek are easier and you get fitter and acclimatised without the stress. It means that crossing the big passes on the last three days are much more enjoyable.

Staff
Throughout the trip, you will be accompanied by a qualified International Mountain Leader who has a First Aid certificate and carries a First Aid Kit.

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Group size

- Minimum 6, maximum 14.

Price and what it includes

- Accommodation on a twin-share basis for 9 of 10 nights. Most have attached bathrooms, though very occasionally you may have to share a bathroom with another room. When at Les Chapieux we aim to get twin rooms, but there may be more than two people in a room and you may be in a triple, quad or small dormitory. At Les Chapieux the shared bathrooms are along the corridor.
- All transfers and cable cars throughout when part of the organised trek.
- 10 breakfasts & 8 dinners with a 3-course set menu.
- Luggage transfers so that you have your main luggage for 8 of the 10 nights (Les Houches, Argentiere, Forclaz, Champex, La Palud (Courmayeur) and Les Contamines.
- The trek is led by a qualified International Mountain Leader (IML).

What is not included

- Dinners and lunches when in La Palud and lunches on Day 1 and 11.
- Picnic lunches on trek: you can purchase from mountain cafés or refuges on the trail, from local mini-marts or boulangeries, or picnics can be purchased directly from most hotels. You guide will advise you of the best options day to day.
- Snacks, chocolate, energy bars.
- Flights and transfers to and from Geneva Airport.
- Personal travel insurance.

Accommodation and meals

You stay in hotels for 9 nights and an auberge for 1 night. When staying at the hotels, the rooms are on a twin-share basis and have attached bathrooms, though very occasionally you may have to share a bathroom with another room.
At Les Chapieux we stay at an auberge: this is extremely simple with no frills and the shared bathrooms are along the corridor. It is not a hotel. For the night at Les Chapieux, you may be in a twin, triple, quad or small dormitory.
Bedding is provided at each night stop, so there is no need to carry sleeping bags. For the night at the auberge at Les Chapieux, duvets and pillows are provided.
Towels are provided at all night stops.
Please note that we do not use mountain refuges or huts for any of the night stops.
Dinner is normally a set 3-course meal and eaten in the hotel's restaurant area. Tea and coffee at dinner and all other drinks are not included.

Typical meals on trek

Breakfast: tea, coffee, juice, cereals, bread, butter, jam.
Dinner: starter, main course, dessert or cheese.
You have to provide your picnic lunches, snacks, chocolate, energy bars etc.
The hotels and auberges also sell soft drinks, beer, wine, mineral water, cakes and a variety of chocolate bars and in many places you can order sandwiches for the following days trek.

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The hotels offer meals for vegetarian diets. Most of the hotels try very hard to cater to vegan and low-gluten diets, although we cannot guarantee this. The hotels cannot guarantee there will be no cross-contamination of gluten for people with Celiac's disease. If your diet is very restricted, we suggest you bring supplementary foods with you.
If you chose not to take or eat any of the meals provided throughout this trip, there is no refund.

Luggage transfers
You will have access to your main luggage for 8 of the 10 nights. This will be at Les Houches, Argentiere, Forclaz, Champex, La Palud (Courmayeur) and Les Contamines. On the days you do not have access to your luggage (night 5 and night 8) you will need to carry your over-night gear, which will most likely include spare socks, underwear, T-shirt and basic toiletries. This is light back-packing and we recommend you have a 40 litre rucsac.

Please restrict the weight of your main luggage to 15kg and we prefer sports bags or rucsacs. This helps us with the luggage transfers. Any excess luggage can be left at the first hotel in Les Houches as we return here for the last night of the trek. You need to provide your own bag to leave luggage at the hotel.

We strongly recommend that you do not leave any valuables or any object of high value in your main luggage. When your luggage is transferred and then delivered to the next hotel, it is likely that it will be left in the reception area or in an unattended back-room. We recommend that you lock your luggage and clearly label it with your name, address and mobile phone number.

Getting to the Chamonix Valley
It is very easy to travel from Geneva Airport to Les Houches. It is 100km/62miles and takes just over one hour.

Mountain Drop Offs provide a professional and frequent shuttle service between Geneva Airport and the Chamonix Valley. They drop you at the hotel. You can book with them for as little as €50 each way (so long as your flights arrive and depart between 10am and 6pm – it may be more expensive outside these hours). You decide what time they pick you up and when you want to be taken back:
www.mountaindropoffs.com

The first and last night is normally at Hotel du Bois in Les Houches.

There are other shuttle companies in the Chamonix Valley. Some might be cheaper but be wary that they may only do drops to fixed places in Chamonix and not take you to your hotel. Taxis from Geneva Airport will be at least €300.

We do not recommend the rail service from Geneva as it takes over 3 hours with a number of changes. You can reach Chamonix by car (10 hours from Calais) or by the Eurostar and TGV over-night train.

Transport during the tour
All transfers to the walks are included in the price of the tour: we use a mix of private and public transport. No journey is longer than 25 minutes. We intend to use cable cars to gain or lose altitude on some days. These are included in the cost of the holiday.

Weather
In the summer, daytime temperatures can vary from 15-25°C in the valleys to 0-20°C at higher altitudes (at the cols it can be cold and windy). It all depends on whether the sun is out and it can often feel very hot: occasionally it reaches 30°C in the valley and can feel quite muggy in the late afternoon. At night the temperature is 5-12°C in the valley and can drop close to 5°C at some of the night stops. As with all mountain ranges it can rain – either as frontal weather or as thunder storms after a hot day – and you should come prepared for this. It can be cold and windy at higher elevations and snow is not unknown. We pay special attention to the local weather forecasts and will adjust the day-to-day itinerary if we feel it is necessary to get the best from your tour.

Clothing and equipment
- Good walking boots: leather or fabric and should be worn-in before you arrive.
- Full set of good-quality waterproofs – jacket and trousers. Gore-Tex recommended: a 'pac-a-mac' is not good enough.
- Trousers or skirts, short trousers.
- T-shirts and tops that includes a jumper or fleece jacket.
- Rucsac that will give you enough room to carry a few clothes plus other items for the 2-day periods when you do not have access to your main luggage: 40 litres is recommended.
- Sun hat, sun cream, sunglasses, water bottle, warm woolly hat and gloves.
- Swimming costumes for the two hotels that have pools.
- Torch, blister kit, any personal medicine.
- Trekking poles are useful, but not essential, and are particularly helpful in the early season when there will be old winter snow lying at the passes.

For the night stops when you will not have access to your main luggage we recommend you carry a change of underwear, socks and T-shirt, basic toiletries and a torch – please remember that you will have to carry it all. You will need to carry your picnic and will probably have your camera and blister kit with you.
Although it may be cold outside at night, it will be very warm inside and so down jackets are not needed.

Extra expenses & money
There is an ATM in Les Houches, Argentiere, Chamonix and Courmayeur. There are also a couple of Bureau de Change kiosks in Chamonix. Do not use the ATM's at Geneva airport as they will give you Swiss Francs – France is part of the Euro Zone - so wait until you arrive in the Chamonix Valley. On trek, euros are accepted everywhere.

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You will need extra money for drinks and evening meals not included. In addition, postcards, souvenirs and snacks you might buy at mountain cafés and any optional activities. Chamonix and Les Houches have cafés, map shops and outdoor stores with a huge range of equipment.

Typical costs

These are approximate costs: you can spend more or less than indicated.

Dinners	Allow €35 per meal for 2 nights: La Plaud, Courmayeur.
Lunches	Depending on how much you eat and what you choose to buy, allow 7-20€ for each picnic lunch.
Misc	Wine (€12-25), beer (€5-7), soft drinks (€4), cakes & snacks, coffee.

Passports, visas and insurance

It is essential that you are in possession of an up to date and valid passport. You must check the visa and entry requirements of your chosen destination and any countries that you may be stopping off at en-route. Whilst we are able to offer general advice to British citizens, personal circumstances such as criminal records, may affect your eligibility to enter certain countries. It is therefore your responsibility to ensure that you have the correct documentation to gain entry into your chosen destination(s). For any further information, please consult the relevant embassy or for British residents visit: **Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office**

Adequate and valid travel insurance is compulsory when you travel with us and it is a condition of accepting your booking that you agree you will have obtained adequate and valid travel insurance for your booking by the date of departure. We recommend that you take out insurance as soon as your booking is confirmed.

We recommend that your travel insurance includes repatriation, that you are covered for trekking in the Alps up to 2600 metres, helicopter rescue, all the activities mentioned in this dossier and any optional activities you may take part in. You must check with your insurer that you have adequate and valid cover for your tour. Anyone who does not have insurance will not be allowed to take part in the tour until cover is arranged. This is part of our booking conditions.

Please ensure that you have an up-to-date copy of this dossier immediately before you travel, as from time to time our itineraries may be amended, either for operational reasons or in response to feedback from clients. You will be informed of any major changes to your trip but small changes may just be added to this dossier.