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

Tour du Mont Blanc / Self-Guided: 11 days

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

The 11-day Tour du Mont Blanc covers the complete circuit on foot. Crossing between France, Italy and Switzerland, there are 5 major passes and 165km of walking. Our trek allows you to walk the complete circuit with no need to take buses - thus not missing any of the trail.

Starting in the Chamonix Valley, you trek in a clockwise direction along established trails to small villages where you will 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, you stay at hotels for 8 nights and spend 2 nights at an auberge at Trient and Les Chapieux. We have chosen to include most of your dinners when on the trek 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.

You 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.

The trip is self-guided. This means that you do not have a hiking Guide. We will supply you with Route Notes of the trek, an emergency procedure and a list of

essential phone numbers. Suitable mountain skills and previous mountain experience is essential. You should know how to confidently use and interpret a map and compass. You need to be conscious of hazards whilst trekking in a mountain environment.



ITINERARY

Day 1 Arrive Les Houches
Arrive at the hotel in Les Houches in the Chamonix Valley. If you are coming from Geneva Airport, the journey is around one hour and is very easy to arrange – 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. Dinner is at the hotel.
Hotel. Meals included: dinner

Day 2 Les Houches - Chamonix - Lac Blanc - Argentiere
After breakfast you will meet our Luggage Man who will transfer your main luggage to tonight's hotel.
The trek begins by crossing to the other side of the valley in 10 minutes and then hiking for 90 minutes on the undulating path that follows the River Arve to Chamonix (1030m). From here, take the telecabin to Plan Praz (2000m) and hike along the famous Grand Balcon Sud that has magnificent views of the whole Mont Blanc massif on the other side of the valley. You arrive after 90 minutes at the Chalets de Flegere situated at 1900m. Continue through open countryside for 1.5-2 hours to Lac Blanc (2352m). There are incredible views of the whole Mont Blanc range, including

Les Grandes Jorasses, Aiguille Vert and Les Drus. You then follow a beautiful path east and descend through the forest to Argentiere (1244m) or via the Col des Montets and then on to Argentiere. You are re-united with your luggage at 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

Day 3 Argentiere – Col de Balme – Trient (Switzerland)
From the hotel you hike through old Argentiere and up to the Col des Posettes (1997m) for superb views Mont Blanc and the Chamonix Valley. From here, you traverse to the Col de Balme (2191m) and look directly into Switzerland. You then descend through open country with views of glaciers to Trient (1297m) where you spend the night. You will have your main luggage delivered to the auberge tonight. Hiking time is approximately 7 hours. Distance: 10 miles (16km). 3280 feet (1000m) of ascent and 2933 feet (894m) of descent.
Auberge. Meals included: breakfast and dinner

***** please note that, on some departures, you will stay at a simple hotel at Col de la Forclaz rather than at Trient. It is 30-40 minutes hike from Trient to Forclaz. We will let you know at the time of booking.***

Day 4 Trient - Col de la Forclaz – Bovine Route – Champex
We take a short climb to the Col de la Forclaz (1526m). From here you 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. You arrive at Champex Lac (1486m) with its beautiful lake and lake-side cafés. You will have your main luggage delivered to the hotel tonight.
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 and dinner

Day 5 Champex – La Fouly
From Champex it is a gentle 5-6 hour trek to La Fouly (1600m) along the Val Ferret. You walk from the lake and descend to the main valley floor and follow the river through forests and meadows to Praz-de-Fort. You then ascend in similar surroundings with wonderful views of Mt Dolent and the South Face of the Mont Blanc range. You have no 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 and dinner

Day 6 La Fouly – Grand Col Ferret – La Palud, Courmayeur (Italy)
You continue from La Fouly and cross into Italy via the impressive Grand Col Ferret (2537). From here, the descent is slightly steeper but rewards you with outstanding views of two of the Alps most iconic mountains – Les Grandes Jorasses and Mont Blanc. You stay at La Palud (1350m), just over 3km from Courmayeur, and are re-united with your luggage.
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 (Courmayeur) 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.

If you choose to use today as a rest day, 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 Courmayeur – Val Veny – Col de la Seigne – Les Chapieux
You take public transport for approximately 25 minutes and travel to La Visaille at the end of the Val Veny under the spectacular South Face and ridges of Mont Blanc. You 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. You 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 night 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 and dinner

***** please note that, on some departures, you will stay at Bourg St Maurice rather than at Les Chapieux. There are only 2 small village inns offering basic dormitory accommodation at Les Chapieux and it is very difficult to get reservations. Instead, we will book a 3-star hotel with twin rooms in Bourg St Maurice which is a 25-minute drive. We will arrange transport to get you to and from the hotel so you can get back on the TMB trail straight away the following morning. We will let you know at the time of booking.***

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

Day 10 Les Contamines – Les Houches
You 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. You 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 your trek with the most outstanding views of the Chamonix Valley, the Chamonix Aiguilles and the Mont Blanc massif. You descend quickly by cable car - or walk down in one hour if you prefer - and take a short ride by public bus to the hotel. You check into the hotel and are reunited with your 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 and dinner

Day 11 Trip ends in Les Houches
Free at leisure. Check out time from the hotel is 11:00hrs (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 you will normally walk for between 6 and 8 hours each day and be outdoors for 8 or 9 hours.
You 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 you 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 you may encounter patches of snow left from the winter, particularly at the cols, and may have to kick steps to make the path secure. All nights are in twin-bedded rooms, except at the auberges at Trient and Les Chapieux where you may be in a twin, triple, quad or small dormitory.

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 are 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.

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.

Self-guided trekking
The Tour du Mont Blanc follows a well-established trail and many of the pathways are sign-posted. However, parts of it cross through some wild and remote mountain areas and you should be aware that mountains can be hostile places. You should take special care and attention if you cross any streams: these can quickly become hazardous, particularly if a rainstorm is combined with early-season snow melt.

Special attention must be paid to the weather. Rainstorms, lightning, fog, mist and even snow are not common - but not unusual - and you need to be able to safely navigate in these conditions. Snow can be a particular hazard of early summer, where whole sections of the route at higher altitudes - particularly at mountain passes - may be covered in old winter snow. The possibility of collapsing snow bridges, or a slip that may result in a long slide, can both cause serious accidents. You should be confident that you can safely and competently cross snow; if you are not confident you should not attempt it and either take a different route or public transport.

We will supply you with Route Notes for the trek but these must be used in conjunction with a good map and your own previous mountain experience. You should know how to confidently use and interpret a map and compass - particularly in poor weather.

Mobile phone reception is very poor or non-existent between the sections that go from Courmayeur to Les Chapieux to Les Contamines. In case of an accident, calling the mountain rescue in this area can be seriously delayed and you will rely on telephone landlines at the refuges that are located intermittently along the main TMB trail.

You are responsible for your own actions and safety and you should join this trip with suitable mountain skills and previous mountain experience. If you do not feel confident you should book one of our Guided TMBs.

Group size

- Minimum 2 people.
- If there are an odd number of people in your party (ie. 3, 5) there will be an extra charge for the one single supplement. Please ask us for the price at the time of booking. We may, however, be able to reserve triple room for which there is no extra charge.

Price and what it includes

- Accommodation on a twin-share basis for 8 nights. All have attached bathrooms, though very occasionally you may have to share a bathroom with another room. At Trient and Les Chapieux the bathrooms are along the corridor. When at Trient and Les Chapieux there may be more than two people in a room and you may be in a dormitory.
- Luggage transfers so that you have your main luggage for 8 of the 10 nights (Les Houches, Argentiere, Trient, Champex, La Palud (Courmayeur), Les Contamines). You are without your luggage for 2 out of 10 nights.
- 10 breakfasts & 7 dinners.
- Route Notes of the trek, an emergency procedure, essential phone numbers.

What is not included

- Flights and transport to and from the Chamonix Valley (please see below on how to arrange this).
- Picnics. Snacks.
- 1 dinner at Argentiere and 2 dinners at La Palud.
- Any cable cars or local transport you choose to take.
- Personal travel insurance.

Accommodation and meals

You stay in hotels for 8 nights and an auberge for 2 nights. Rooms are on a twin-share basis: all have attached bathrooms, though very occasionally you may have to share a bathroom with another room. At Trient and Les Chapieux the bathrooms are along the corridor. For the nights at Trient and Les Chapieux, you may be in a twin, triple, quad or small dormitory with showers along the corridor.
Bedding is provided at each night stop, so there is no need to carry sleeping bags. For the night at the auberges at Trient and 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.

Meals included are normally a set 3-course meal and are 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.
The hotels and auberges also sell soft drinks, beer, wine, mineral water, cakes and a variety of chocolate bars.
The hotels offer meals for vegetarian diets. Most of the hotels try very hard to cater to vegan and gluten-intolerant 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.
Picnics are not provided and so you will need to buy one each day from the hotels or head to the local shops. Hotels charge around €10 per person for a picnic. It is cheaper if you make your own and is fairly easy to pick up ingredients, such as baguette, cheeses, cold meats, salad and fruit at local shops.

Luggage transfers
You will have access to your main luggage for 8 of the 10 nights. This will be at Les Houches, Argentiere, Trient, Champex, La Palud (Courmayeur), Les Contamines. On the days you do not have access to your luggage (2 nights in total) 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.
We do not transfer your luggage to every night stop as we feel that occasional light back-packing adds to the spirit and adventure of a long-distance hike.
In addition, it adds a great deal to the cost of the tour as some of the drives between hotels are 5-hour round-trips.
Please restrict the weight of your main luggage to 15kg and we prefer sports bags or rucsacs. This helps us with the luggage transfers.

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 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 and 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.

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
You may choose to take a few short bus rides in the Chamonix Valley and Courmayeur. You may also choose to take cable cars to help you gain or lose altitude. These are not included in the cost of the tour.

Weather
In the summer, daytime temperatures can vary from 15-25°C in the valleys to 0-20°C at higher altitudes. 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 a thunder storm after a hot day - and you should come prepared for this. It can be cold and windy at higher elevations - particularly at the cols - and snow is not unknown. You will need to keep an eye on the weather: most of the hotels will have up-to-date forecasts or you can ask the staff.

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 short periods when you do not have access to your main luggage: 35-40 litres is recommended.
- Sun hat, sun cream, sunglasses, water bottle, warm woolly hat and gloves.
- Map, map case, compass, torch, blister kit, First Aid kit, pen-knife for your picnic.

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, blister kit and First Aid kit with you. Although it may be cold outside at night, it will be very warm inside and so down jackets are not needed.

Mobile phone
We recommend that you bring a mobile phone that you can use to call our office or use in an emergency. You will be trekking in France, Italy and Switzerland, so ensure your contract covers these areas. Mobile phone reception is very poor or non-existent between the sections that go from Courmayeur to Les Chapieux to Les Contamines.

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.

You will need extra money for picnics, evening meals not included, drinks and cable cars or local buses you chose to take. 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.

Picnics	€7-20 per day for the 8 days on trek (depending on if you buy from a hotel, mountain café or make your own).
Dinners	Allow €35-40 per meal for 1 night in Argentiere and 2 nights in La Palud.
Buses	Approximately €5 for the buses in Italy.
Cable cars	If you choose to use cable cars, allow €18 per journey at Flegere (day 2) and Les Houches (day 10) .
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 note that on self-guided treks Salamander Adventures is unable to accept any responsibility for clients' health and safety. We are acting as a booking agent. Any advice in the dossiers, route notes, website and in person regarding routes, weather, equipment, terrain etc is given in good faith.

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.