



Icicle Mountaineering, Ski & Adventure

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Matterhorn Summit Course 2008 courses detailed itinerary



Day 1, Sunday

Travel out to Chamonix Mont Blanc. Here you meet the Icicle course hosts in the Icicle Chamonix office at 18:00 (if you need directions to find the shop, look at the contacts page of the website). The staff will give you an introductory briefing, and show you to your accommodation where you will be staying for the duration of your course. After settling in you have time to buy or hire any equipment and buy lunch for tomorrow. At 18.30 you meet up again for a full course and safety briefing, equipment checks and fitting. After the briefing the hosts accompany you to dinner to answer any queries, then you have time to pack for the next day.

Day 2, Monday

CLASSIC ALPINE ROUTE & ACCLIMATISATION DAY: Today is a choice of classic Chamonix routes. The route will be long, multi-pitch and exposed to test your ropework and ability on exposed rock. You climb all day at an altitude of at least 2500m to start your acclimatisation. Below are some popular route options...

OPTION 1: CHAPELLE DE LA GLIERE: This is accessed from the Index cable car. The climb is 14 pitches consisting of slabs, cracks and chimneys, with good quality rock. The route involves good route finding skills and the use of natural protection as a couple of the pitches involve scrambling around pinnacles and over uneven ground in order to find the correct route. This means that although you should climb the main pitches in rock shoes, you should also carry mountaineering boots. To complete the climb usually takes six hours, with the most famous pitch being pitch 8, as it involves a traverse along a razor sharp edge of rock with large exposure on either side. The summit gives the fantastic views of the Mont Blanc range on the opposite side of the valley. The descent is via a 20 metre abseil and a climb down a narrow chimney.

OPTION 2: AIGUILLE DE L'M: To reach the Aiguille de L'M, you walk beneath its North face to the base of the NNE arête. The start is mixed, before reaching some solid granite. There is a choice of routes to the summit, but the classic route is suitable for climbing in your mountaineering boots, which is a useful skill for altitude rock routes such as the Matterhorn. The climb involves every style of rock climbing from slabs to chimneys, and even a letterbox. The summit is at 2844m, and there is always time for some summit photos. For the descent, if it is early in the season, you should be able to practice glissading (skiing on your boots).

EVENING INSTRUCTION SESSIONS: Tonight is focused on Alpine Ropework, Fall Factors, Knots, Anchors and Equipment. After being taught about fall factors and their influence in equipment failure, you are taught anchor systems and the different ropes used for Alpine climbing. Then we go through knots and ropework including 'figure of 8', bowline, prussics, protecting abseils, Italian / Munter hitch, and one handed clove hitch. Even the most experienced Alpinist may find an aspect of rope work that they had previously not considered.

Day 3, Tuesday & Day 4, Wednesday

TECHNICAL ALPINE MIXED ROUTE DAYS: The routes for the next two days are based on your skills and experience. You usually spend the night in a mountain hut to aid your acclimatisation. Or, if you would prefer not to stay in a hut, as you know that you do not sleep well at altitude, there is the option of two day routes.

OPTION 1: TRAVERSE AIGUILLE D'ENTREVES, TORINO HUT FOR NIGHT, DENT DU GEANT

DAY 1: You travel through the Mont Blanc road tunnel and ascend the cable cars (3642m). An hour traverse along the glacier gets you to the Aiguilles D'Entreves. After a steep snow approach you gain the rocky, shattered rock ridge, which is exposed, involving moving together to reach the rocky pinnacle summit (3600m). You have time to admire the stunning panorama, dominated by the faces of the Grand Capucin and Mont Maudit. You spend the evening acclimatising, and practicing technical ropework with your guide.

DAY 2: After traversing the glacier, you ascend to the base of the Dent du Geant to access the good quality slabs of rock, which lead up to the summit. The steep slabs are fixed with thick ropes and iron staples. The top of the Dent du Geant is a rocky pinnacle, marked by a large Madonna statue. It is very exposed with the valleys of Italy far below. The descent is by abseil down one of the steep faces.

OPTION 2: GLACIER & TECHNICAL ROCK CLIMBS, COUVERCLE HUT, SOUTH RIDGE OF THE MOINE

DAY 1: After reaching the surface of the Mer de Glace glacier you can practice your ice axe & crampon technique, including the French techniques of Piolet Canne & Rampe, and some vertical ice climbing. Or on the way to the hut you can try a short technical rock route, such as the three pitch 'Stardust' (Alpine TD). The Couvercle hut has great views of the famous Grande Jorasses and Whympfer Couloir of the Aiguille Verte.

DAY 2: The South Ridge of the Moine starts within half an hour behind the hut. The route is an exposed, shattered rock ridge, swapping sides below the crest several times. Route finding is quite difficult through the rocky pinnacles and the route requires good balance, ropework, and the ability to move together. You will get great satisfaction weaving a route through the rocky spikes to find a way up the arête to the summit.

EVENING INSTRUCTION SESSION & MATTERHORN BRIEFING: Tonight's session is crevasse rescue & emergency hoists. The instructors break the systems into sections and you will become happy constructing hoists of 1:3 and 1:5. Afterwards there is a Matterhorn briefing, including advice on which equipment to carry.

Day 5, Thursday

TRAVEL TO ZERMATT & HUT APPROACH: Today you are driven from Chamonix to Zermatt, which takes around two hours. After a short walk through town to reach the main Schwartzsee cable car, you ascend the cable car, and have a two hour trek and scramble up to the hut. The Hornli Hut is at the base of the ridge from which it takes its name. In the afternoon you have climbing practice on the start of the route, or the Guides answer technical queries. You can also sit on the hut terrace and enjoy the amazing views.

EVENING SCHEDULE / BRIEFING: You are booked into the hut on a half board basis. Before you go to bed, you should get a last view of the mountain as the sun sets behind it, which always makes a great photo.

Day 6, Friday

ASCENT OF THE MATTERHORN (4478m): You are woken up at 03:30 in the morning for breakfast. From the Hornli Hut you rope up before setting off onto the first rock pitch, which twists around to lead you to the route which is about 10 metres from the edge of the North Face. After an easy section, the route steepens as you ascend through the first towers, then traverses left across the East Face, until you have the Solvay hut above you. Here is the steepest section of the climb, up the Moseley Slabs, which are fixed with thick white ropes and some chains. At the top of these is big exposure as you are on the edge of the North Face. The final section is the summit block itself, which usually requires crampons as the rocks are iced up. An iron cross marks the Swiss summit, from which you can traverse to the Italian summit across a short broken ridge. After the summit celebrations, it is a slow and careful process to descend safely. Once you reach the Hornli Hut, you rest before returning via the cable cars to Zermatt, then are driven back to Chamonix.

EVENING INSTRUCTION SESSION: The theory for tonight is avalanche prediction & transceivers. The Icicle staff accompany you to go out for a celebratory meal & drinks in a variety of bars to toast the weeks climbs.

Day 7, Saturday

Breakfast in Chamonix, then at 10:00 you have a course debrief. After this there is an opportunity for course feedback and a questions and answers session. Time for any last sightseeing and shopping in Chamonix.

ITINERARY NOTES: Where possible we follow itineraries. Mountain adventures are weather and conditions dependant, so occasionally we are forced to alter the plans. If this is the case, suitable alternatives are offered. Please use this outline itinerary as a guide to the types of route / activity that you will attempt.

