



Icicle Mountaineering, Ski & Adventure
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Mont Blanc Summit Course

2014 courses detailed itinerary & notes



Photo: Jo and Jonathan on the summit of Mont Blanc 4810m, via the Gouter route

So you want to climb Mont Blanc? It is a dream, but not for dreamers...

There is a lot of information around on the internet, and in books and magazines, about climbing Mont Blanc. Some articles say it is 'nothing more than a hard walk' while others say it is 'extreme altitude climbing'. So what is the truth? Well the honest answer is that we have been running Mont Blanc courses for a decade, and every single client is different, and would have answered the question differently. Some have arrived with no experience, yet had great balance and been incredibly fit, and have run up the mountain. Others have arrived with loads of experience and struggled. The answer must lie somewhere in the middle; altitude affects everyone in different ways, you are not going to be 100% acclimatized in one week, the weather and conditions must play their role, and then there are the two greatest variables of fitness and ability on steep ground with crampons. Some people are fast learners, others need more time. Mont Blanc is not an ideal first 4000m peak for anyone, but if everything goes in your favor, it is often a possible summit. So yes, it is a realistic goal, but be realistic in your preparation, and accept that nothing in the mountains is guaranteed. Being prepared and in the right place at the right time is everything in the mountains. The same formula for an ascent might work for one person, yet not another. Flexibility is the key. For some, staying in the highest hut on a mountain may seem like the best plan, but the effects of altitude combined with a worse night's sleep may mean that spending a night in a lower hut could actually increase your summit chances. We have seen some people summit as early as 4am, and others at 22:30pm. Each case is different, and all the decisions made on the mountain are made by the guide leading you. It is imperative that you and your guide gain each others' trust, as when roped together you are joined as if by an umbilical cord, and must have complete faith in each other. Trust is earned. A guide cannot drag someone up the mountain. We strive to do everything possible to make your attempt on Mont Blanc a success, and hope that by being so candid on this page that you understand our desire to be honest and help you succeed. We all wish you the best of luck!

Day 1, Sunday

Travel out to Chamonix Mont Blanc. From 16:00 onwards you can check into your accommodation. Sorry, but we cannot accommodate extra nights or early check-ins / baggage storage, so please book your flights and transfers accordingly. At 17:00 you meet the Icicle resort staff at the course meeting point (if you need directions to find the meeting point, look in your course information booklet) for a full course and safety briefing, equipment checks and fitting. For those of you who have hired any equipment, you are shown how to use / adjust / fit it. After the welcome briefing the hosts usually accompany you to pre-dinner drinks (not included) to answer any queries. We aim to give you free time from 19:00 at latest.

Day 2, Monday

GLACIER SKILLS & ICE CLIMBING DAY – usually Mer de Glace at approx 2000m.

After breakfast, you take the mountain railway to the Mer de Glace. The mountains surrounding you are some of the most famous in the Alps, including the Dru, the Grand Jorasses, and the Aiguille de la Republique. The guides will teach both the UK and French techniques of moving on ice, so that as well as front pointing and down climbing, they also teach the advanced French skills of using your ice axe, including Piolet Canne, Ramasse, Panne, and Rampe. There is also a key focus on your crampon skills, as good footwork will be essential for Mont Blanc. After lunch, you trek up the glacier to steeper ice, and the guide will set up a number of ropes for ice climbing with technical ice axes. For those with some previous ice climbing experience (or for those who develop quickly) there will be the opportunity for you to climb some more difficult ice pitches or to try leading on the ice. The guide may also demonstrate the skills of crevasse rescue, cutting steps, placing ice screws, setting up anchor systems, and making anchors on ice, including the Abalakov belay. The day is quite intensive, as you are using muscles not often used, and you will feel your acclimatisation starting as you ascend the ladders back to the mountain railway station at the end of the day. You descend by the mountain railway for the evening in Chamonix.

EVENING INSTRUCTION SESSION – optional attendance from 17:15-18:00.

We try and vary the exact instruction sessions each week, to cater for those on two week courses, so they can develop more, but rest assured that the instruction is tailored to the requirements of all of the groups that are out that week. We firmly believe that the evening instruction sessions are an integral part of your course, designed to make you more autonomous, and to develop your awareness. On this first evening the instruction is usually focused on Alpine rope-work, 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 rope-work including 'figure of 8', bowline, prussics, protecting abseils, Italian / Munter hitch, and the one handed clove hitch. If the group wishes, any instruction session can substituted with another topic, or even a general interest talk and mountain slideshow. After the session, you are free to go out to eat with other group members, or to cook in. We are well aware that you are on holiday, and always ensure we finish prompt to guarantee you rest time!



The plan for the rest of the week

On the first day there was one guide leading the whole group (up to six people maximum), but for the next four days there is a guide with every two persons. This is to give you the most amount of opportunities for altering the itinerary to suit you and your requirements. We are more than happy for each group to go off and do their own thing, so there is a lot of flexibility. Obviously at this stage you are not well acclimatised, so it is usual to do an acclimatisation route on Tuesday (and possibly on Wednesday too), then to ascend to a hut on Mont Blanc on Wednesday or Thursday evening depending on the weather, hut bookings, and your skills. Essentially the next four days are very flexible to your requirements, so do not read the next days' itineraries as set in stone, but as more of an idea of what can be achieved, and an insight into the range of options.

Day 3, Tuesday

OPTION A, 1 DAY ACCLIMATISATION ROUTE – such as the Arête des Cosmiques 3842m

You take the Aiguille du Midi cable car to the top station at 3842m, then put on your crampons and harness and descend the famous ridge that is the start of the Vallée Blanche. This is airy and very similar to the summit ridge on Mont Blanc. At the base of the ridge you turn right and head towards the Cosmiques hut before cutting up to the start of the Cosmiques Arete. This route is a great training climb, and will really develop both your acclimatisation and your ability on crampons on mixed ground, where you encounter both snow and rock. This is very useful for certain sections on Mont Blanc such as the section between the Gouter and Tête Rousse huts. The route finishes on one of the viewing platforms of the Aiguille du Midi cable car station, from which you started in the morning. If you finish the route early, stay at the cable car station for the afternoon to acclimatise more. Take a book and read it in the sun, or have a bite to eat in one of the heated cafés up there. Every minute of acclimatisation time really counts for you, so stay until it closes.

OPTION B, 2 DAY ROUTE & HUT NIGHT – day 1 of 2, e.g. Aig' du Tour 3544m or Gran Paradiso 4061m

If you are definitely going to a hut on Mont Blanc on Thursday night, this could be a good option for you to select. This is a two day mountain ascent involving the ascent to a mountain hut today and a peak the next day. The exact choice of routes and objectives for these two days is made by the guides in reaction to your technical level, the route conditions, weather and safety. Whenever it is possible to offer you a choice of objectives, you will be fully involved in the decision making process. Common objectives include ascents of Gran Paradiso 4061m or the Aiguille du Tour 3544m. Whichever summit is selected, today is spent getting up to the hut. Some involve cable cars and walking, others are from the valley floor. You do not need to take anything extra up to a hut as all bedding and food is provided, just a head torch for the Alpine start the next morning. If you get up to the hut and have time to spare, ask the guide to show you some more rope-work, or go on a short training climb. In the evening the hut will provide you a cooked dinner, then it's time for bed.

EVENING INSTRUCTION SESSION – optional attendance from 17:15-18:00 (for option A only)

A popular choice for instruction today is Alpine weather prediction and the interpretation of synoptic charts. Don't worry if this sounds a little boring – we make it as fun and lively a talk as we can, and you will learn key skills for your own use, whether in the UK or abroad. The main focus of this instruction is teaching you how the mountains can alter and even generate weather.



Day 4, Wednesday

OPTION A, ONE DAY ACCLIMATISATION ROUTE – such as the Petite Aiguille Verte 3512m

If you selected option A yesterday, you could follow this day or option C today. Note that if you followed option B yesterday, neither this or option C will be a possibility today. After breakfast in Chamonix, you will be taken to Argentiere, and ascend the Grands Montets cable car. This whisks you up and away from the valley in two sections, to over 3000m. As you exit the cable car and descend the steps to the glacier, the mountain ahead of you is the Petite Aiguille Verte. There are several route choices to ascend the peak, but the classic route cuts up right over the rimaye / bergschrund to reach the ridge, which is followed to arrive at the rocky summit block. This is a scramble, and from the top you get amazing views across onto the north face of the Aiguille du Dru. After descending, you might have time to practice some crevasse rescue on the glacier, or to work on your crampon skills on one of the icy slopes near to the cable car station.

OPTION B, 2 DAY ROUTE & HUT NIGHT – day 2 of 2, continued from the day before

You will get up early in the mountain hut for a quick breakfast, then it's on with the crampons and harnesses, and off into the dark, picking your way up the glacier by the light of your head torch. For either the Aiguille du Tour or Gran Paradiso options, there is a long though relatively gentle glacier ascent, with a rocky scramble to reach the summit. From the top of either peak there are great views of the Mont Blanc massif. After taking the summit photos, you descend to the hut, and after a short rest to collect any items that you stored there, you start your descent back to the car park. Especially on this option, you must be very careful that you do not use too much energy, that could impact on your ascent for Mont Blanc. Also be as kind to your knees as you can, and use trekking poles to reduce the impact of a long descent on your cartilages. Having said that, this two day option is the best chance for you to see how you cope with altitude for later on in the week.

OPTION C, ASCEND TO HUT ON MONT BLANC – day 1 of 2, e.g. Gouter, Tête Rousse or Cosmiques

If you selected option A yesterday, you could follow this day or option A today. Note that if you followed option B yesterday, neither this or option A will be a possibility today as you will be up in a hut already, and climbing another peak today. Today you would start with an early breakfast in Chamonix, and then the guide would meet you for final kit checks before you set off. There is a range of huts that could be used today, and the exact choice of which one is selected by each guide will be a reaction to your skills, acclimatisation, the weather, conditions, and hut spaces. Whichever hut is selected, involves you taking some uplift (either the Aiguille du Midi cable car, or the Bellevue cable car and the mountain railway to the Nid d'Aigle). From the top stations you ascend to the selected mountain hut. The approach to the Cosmiques 3613m hut is very quick, so you might take in a training climb, such as the Traverse of Pointe Lachenal. The ascent to the Tête Rousse 3167m hut is longer, and you normally reach the hut in the early afternoon. The Gouter 3817m takes about another hour and a half to reach, and there is a scramble to reach the hut. For all three options, you are normally in the hut early, to avoid the risks of rockfall and / or weak snowbridges. Most people opt for trying to get some sleep in the afternoon, due to the very early start the next day. A cooked evening meal is provided in the mountain hut, then normally people head straight off to bed for a valuable few hours sleep.

EVENING INSTRUCTION SESSION – optional attendance from 17:15-18:00 (for options A & B only)

The focus for tonight is crevasse rescue skills, and in particular the emergency hoists. You will also be shown some more specialist rescue equipment, so you can see what the Guides would do to assist you, should any member of the group fall into a crevasse.



Briefing for Mont Blanc 4810m

Whatever day you set off for Mont Blanc, we will ensure that you get a thorough briefing the day before. We can show you a slide show and film footage of the ascent, by whichever route you are ascending, so that you can see exactly what the ascent will entail. The guides will have already told you exactly what equipment to take, but many people use the evening before their ascent for any last minute shopping, equipment checks, and to pack their rucksack carefully to ensure that they have forgotten nothing. All of the Icicle staff have climbed Mont Blanc several times, and they can advise you on any last minute concerns you have, and to give you some top tips. For example some people who really need to keep their energy levels up pack sweets like Jelly Babies or Haribo in their pockets to have a constant supply of sugar loaded energy to keep them going. This is a brilliant idea, as it keeps the blood sugar levels up, and combined with enough water will help power you up the hill. You will also be warned of some common mistakes, such as taking baguette sandwiches up the mountain. The crusty bread plays havoc with you already dry throat at altitude, and many find that they can't eat it. Another top tip is that Mars bars freeze, so cut them into small blocks to eat.

Day 5, Thursday

OPTION A, ASCEND TO HUT ON MONT BLANC – day 1 of 2, e.g. Gouter, Tête Rousse or Cosmiques

If you followed options A or B yesterday, this will be your itinerary today. Today you would start with an early breakfast in Chamonix, and then the guide would meet you for final kit checks before you set off. There is a range of huts that could be used today, and the exact choice of which one is selected by each guide will be a reaction to your skills, acclimatisation, the weather, conditions, and hut spaces. Whichever hut is selected, involves you taking some uplift (either the Aiguille du Midi cable car, or the Bellvue cable car and the mountain railway to the Nid d'Aigle). From the top stations you ascend to the selected mountain hut. The approach to the Cosmiques hut is very quick, so you might take in a training climb, such as the Traverse of Pointe Lachenal. The ascent to the Tête Rousse hut is longer, and you normally reach the hut in the early afternoon. The Gouter takes about another hour and a half to reach, and there is a scramble to reach the hut. For all three options, you are normally in the hut early, to avoid the risks of rockfall and / or weak snowbridges. Most people opt for trying to get some sleep in the afternoon, due to the very early start the next day. A cooked evening meal is provided in the mountain hut.

OPTION B, AN ALTERNATIVE MOUNTAIN

If for whatever reason, you have not already gone to a hut on Mont Blanc or do not plan to do so today, due to weather, conditions, illness, skill level, fitness etc, there are many options still available to you. Your guide and the Chamonix team will outline all the options available to you, so you can select what you can achieve. Occasionally some people opt out of attempting Mont Blanc, even when the conditions and weather is good, either through a change of heart or lack of determination. Don't worry if this is the case, as we will find an alternative mountain for you, or if you prefer you could climb two day routes above Chamonix.

OPTION C, SUMMIT ATTEMPT – day 2 of 2, from the Gouter, Tête Rousse or Cosmiques Huts

If you ascended to one of the Mont Blanc huts yesterday, this will be your itinerary. There is a very early start today, often around 2 or 3am, for a quick breakfast. Then you put on your equipment, and set off as soon as you can to take advantage of less people on the route, and better snow conditions, when the snow is hard and easier to walk on and there are stronger snow bridges over crevasses. For the first few hours you will need to use your head torch, and it is a really memorable and exciting experience to climb up the mountain with the lights of other climbers dotted along the route. You normally reach the top at 4810m in the early morning (usually about 7am). If the wind is not too cold, you can stay on the summit for a short while to take in the atmosphere, have a bite to eat, and to take some photos. All of the famous peaks, such as the Matterhorn, the Eiger and Monte Rosa, are easily recognisable and seem small in comparison. You descend down the snow ridge via the Gouter route to the valley. There is quite a lot of time pressure on you during the descent for several reasons. You need to reach the Gouter hut well before midday in order to be able to descend the Gouter rib and cross the Grand Couloir before it warms up too much. If you arrive too late, the risk of rock fall on this section is too great. Also the effects of altitude sickness are often slightly time lagged, and so it is key to descend quite quickly to avoid the onset of any altitude sickness. When you reach the mountain huts on the route, you have a chance to rest, rehydrate, and eat some lunch. You then continue the descent to the Nid d'Aigle (Eagles Nest) train station to catch the 'Tramway Mont Blanc' to Bellevue, then catch the cable car which returns you to Les Houches, by which time a shower and beer is most welcome!

EVENING INSTRUCTION SESSION – Usually you are in a hut on Thursday night, but if you are in the valley there is a night off evening instruction. If you've just descended Mont Blanc today, usually a couple of beers over a celebratory meal, and sleep are far more likely to be on the cards. It's completely your choice.



Summit day for Mont Blanc 4810m

Whether you ascent to the hut on Mont Blanc on Wednesday or Thursday, there are still many options for the summit attempt, and you should be fully aware of these and be prepared for them. Sometimes the weather forecast can change quite quickly, and you may have to adapt plans. For example we have seen some groups planning on ascending to the Gouter hut, with the intention of ascending to the summit the next day, have to change their plans and continue past the hut to reach the summit that day due to the threat of adverse weather the following day. Obviously they stayed in the hut after summiting, and descended the next day. On this route on their summit day, it equated to a vertical ascent of approximately 2400m in one day. Other groups have used three days to ascend Mont Blanc, by ascending to the Tête Rousse on one day, then climbing to the Gouter the following day, and summiting and descending on the third day. As you will understand by now, there are many options available, not one generic formula to apply to all.

Day 6, Friday

OPTION A, SUMMIT ATTEMPT – day 2 of 2, from the Gouter, Tête Rousse or Cosmiques Huts

If you ascended to one of the Mont Blanc huts yesterday, this will be your itinerary. There is a very early start today, often around 2 or 3am, for a quick breakfast. Then you put on your equipment, and set off as soon as you can to take advantage of less people on the route, and better snow conditions, when the snow is hard and easier to walk on and there are stronger snow bridges over crevasses. For the first few hours you will need to use your head torch, and it is a really memorable and exciting experience to climb up the mountain with the lights of other climbers dotted along the route. You normally reach the top at 4810m in the early morning (usually about 7am). If the wind is not too cold, you can stay on the summit for a short while to take in the atmosphere, have a bite to eat, and to take some photos. All of the famous peaks, such as the Matterhorn, the Eiger and Monte Rosa, are easily recognisable and seem small in comparison. You descend down the snow ridge via the Gouter route to the valley. There is quite a lot of time pressure on you during the descent for several reasons. You need to reach the Gouter hut well before midday in order to be able to descend the Gouter rib and cross the Grand Couloir before it warms up too much. If you arrive too late, the risk of rock fall on this section is too great. Also the effects of altitude sickness are often slightly time lagged, and so it is key to descend quite quickly to avoid the onset of any altitude sickness. When you reach the mountain huts on the route, you have a chance to rest, rehydrate, and eat some lunch. You then continue the descent to the Nid d'Aigle (Eagles Nest) train station to catch the 'Tramway Mont Blanc' to Bellevue, then catch the cable car which returns you to Les Houches, by which time a shower and beer is most welcome!

OPTION B, CLIMBING DAY / SPARE DAY – several options

If you made your summit attempt yesterday, you may have not made it all the way down the mountain, and so may use the day to descend to Chamonix. If you got back to the valley yesterday, today can be used in many ways. Some opt for rock climbing in the valley and a relatively easy day, others go and ascend a local via ferrata with their guide, and some with energy ascend a route such as Index in the Aiguilles Rouges.

EVENING SOCIAL – from 18:30 onwards

There are optional drinks and a celebratory evening meal in town. You usually meet at 18:30 for pre-dinner drinks, then the Icicle staff (and sometimes the guides, if they are not already sleeping) may accompany the group to go out into town for a celebratory meal to toast the weeks achievements.

Day 7, Saturday

Breakfast in Chamonix, then by 10:00 you check out of the course accommodation, and are free to depart for your return flight home. Airport transfers take approximately 75 minutes from Chamonix to Geneva airport.

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.



Icicle Guides - Mont Blanc 4810m summit course notes

This page is a summary of a lot of far more detailed information that is available on the Icicle website, and should be used accordingly. If you have any last minute queries before you travel, from training to kit, then please call our office in Windermere in the Lake District on 01539 44 22 17 or 0845 058 98 78. Thanks.

Getting to Chamonix

The closest international airport is in Geneva, and this is serviced by most national carriers as well as several budget airlines. In the winter months there are also several charter airlines that fly there. Often the cheapest airline is EasyJet, and you can book your tickets online. If you are booking quite close to the course date, sometimes the national carriers offer better deals, and so it may be worth checking British Airways, Air France or Swiss. The majority of flights to Geneva airport land in the Swiss sector. If you travel internally from France you may arrive in the French sector. All the airport transfers to Chamonix depart from the Swiss part of the airport, so if you arrive in the French side, you can easily walk through to the Swiss sector.

Visas and documents

EU citizens do not require any paperwork or visas to enter Switzerland, nor do the majority of Commonwealth countries. If you are in any doubt it is worth checking with your local embassy to see if there are any visas required. Should you need any paperwork from Icicle for a visa application, please let us know. Usually all that is requested is confirmation of a booking, a local address, and the reason for your visit.

Airport transfers

The transfer from Geneva to Chamonix takes approximately one and a quarter hours. We can book airport transfers for you as long as it is not within a week of travel, to meet any flight at any time. The cost is currently c.30 euros each way per person. If you book through Icicle, the driver will meet you in the arrivals hall just after baggage reclaim, with a sign with your name on it. They will drop you off directly to the meeting point in Chamonix. The course accommodation check in on Sunday is any time from 16:00.

Accommodation

The course accommodation is usually in rooms of two or three sharing. A couple (double bed) booking / sending forms together are guaranteed a room of two sharing. Accommodation is included from the Sunday night through to the following Saturday morning. On every morning you are in Chamonix a continental breakfast is provided (cereals, fruit juice, toast, jams etc). On the nights that you stay in huts a cooked evening meal and basic breakfast is provided. You can opt to upgrade to have all your evening meals in Chamonix provided, so effectively you are on a half board basis throughout your stay. See the website for full details of accommodation upgrades, extra nights and options.

Acclimatisation Weekend

The standard Mont Blanc course has five days of guiding. If you are concerned

about acclimatization or sleeping well at altitude, you should seriously consider booking the Acclimatisation Weekend straight beforehand. You meet at midday on the Saturday and walk to a mountain hut where you stay the night. The next day you take in an altitude trekking peak such as Mont Buet 3099m. You return back to Chamonix in time for the 18:00 course briefing for the main Mont Blanc course. The advantage of this weekend is that sleeping and exercising at altitude for an extra couple of days will really give you an advantage, as your red blood cell count will be boosted in reaction to the days at altitude, and you will have started the important acclimatisation process.

Local currency

The local currency in Chamonix (France) is the euro. On this course you might travel into Italy, which is also in the euro zone. You fly to Switzerland, and there is the possibility of climbing there also, but you do not need Swiss Francs, as the euro is also accepted widely. We advise that you do not take travelers cheques as these are not widely accepted, and most people favor taking their credit / debit cards to use in ATM's, which are widely accessible in the whole Chamonix area.

Travel Insurance

It is a condition of booking your course that you provide documentary proof of suitable activities insurance that will cover you for all the likely activities of your course, specifically mountaineering to up to 4810m. It is highly unlikely that a bank insurance or generic travel insurance policy will cover your trip. We insist that you arrange suitable insurance before you travel, as once you have left your home country most policies will not cover you, so your course would be over before it has even started. Your insurance should be arranged as soon as you are confirmed on the course, as this will cover you in event of you having to cancel. The costs of helicopter and mountain rescue, medical / treatment and repatriation are prohibitive, and so your policy must cover these. On the day you arrive in Chamonix, we will check your insurance, so ensure you have it and any supporting documentation. Note that no insurance equals no course. We suggest you arrange insurance via Snowcard or the British Mountaineering Council. If you are a non UK resident, you can get cover via the Austrian Alpine Club.

Hire Equipment

Our office in Windermere has a stock of hire equipment suitable for the Mont Blanc course, ranging from crampons to ice axes, harnesses to helmets. Have a good look at the hire equipment page of the Icicle website to work out whether you would prefer to hire or purchase any kit. You will also see that there is a bulk hire discount for those without any of the key essential kit (boots, crampons, harness,

helmet, ice axe, and safety kit etc.). If you are providing your own kit you should ensure that it is good quality, and suitable for an ascent of Mont Blanc.

Local Payments

If you book on the standard Mont Blanc course, with no upgrades, all you should budget for in terms of local payments is evening meals for the nights that you spend in Chamonix, lunches for each day, and cable cars. You can budget for a minimum of 10 euros a day for food and water in huts. If you require any hire equipment, budget for this too.

Unused Elements

We cannot book the weather, but we do guarantee to do our best to maximise your summit chances by tailoring the course to you, the individual. If you cannot summit (through your skill or technical level or the weather or objective dangers such as rockfall), we offer a 2nd attempt package. Please note that we cannot issue a credit voucher for the value of any 'unused' elements of your course, as guiding is not transferable as it is provided anyway and the huts are pre-paid to secure a reservation, to put towards a future attempt or another Icicle trip.

Course Inclusions

1) IFMGA Mountain Guide for five days, 2) Chamonix course hosts for logistics & briefings, 3) Evening technical instruction sessions, 4) Twin / double room B&B accommodation in Chamonix (inc. linen, bedding & towels) for the whole week, so you don't move out when in huts, 5) One night half board in mountain hut / base camp on Mont Blanc for you & guide, 6) Pre course info booklet, 7) Equipment discount voucher for UK shops, 8) Free 36 page technical Course Instruction Booklet, 9) Road transport in Chamonix valley, 10) Icicle discounts privilege card for use in local shops and restaurants in Chamonix.

Course Exclusions

1) Travel to and from Chamonix, 2) Equipment hire, 3) Cable cars & uplift (c. 60 euros depending on itinerary), 4) Optional second or more nights (not usually required) in a mountain hut / base camp on a half board basis for you and guide, 5) Personal laundry, telephone calls, lunches, evening meals in valley, & any purchases in mountain huts / hotels / restaurants, 6) Road transport outside Chamonix valley (not usually required), 7) Activities insurance, & excess baggage.

Exclusions Notes

If any item is not specifically noted as an inclusion, it is an excluded cost. For example if you require an extra night in a hut for you and your guide, you must pay for this. The same goes for an extra day of guiding or any other excluded costs such as bottled water in mountain huts.



We send a course specific equipment list to all those booking on our courses, but due to the popularity of this course, we outline a typical packing list for the Mont Blanc summit day in the equipment list below, to give you an idea of what equipment will be required. Don't worry if you don't have not got any of the technical kit such as ice axe, crampons, etc, as we have a large supply of hire equipment in the Windermere office.

Basic clothing

- Light coloured long sleeve wicking base layer
- Schoeller / soft shell climbing trousers
- Mid layer fleece jacket / gillet
- Fleece hat and gloves, and sunhat / cap
- B3 leather / plastic boots, and gaiters

Altitude gear

- Synthetic or down insulation jacket
- Goggles in case of high wind
- Neoprane face mask in case of wind
- Thick waterproof over gloves
- Windproof over trousers (eg PacLite)

Equipment

- Harness, helmet, ice axe (without leash)
- 12 point crampons & good anti-balling plates
- 1 x 120cm Sling, 1 x karabiner, 1 x prussic loop
- Telescopic trekking poles with snow baskets
- Head torch (LED style is lightest type)

General kit

- Close fitting sun glasses (Factor 4 for snow)
- Pocket snacks for summit day (eg Haribos)
- Water bottle (not bladder type as they freeze)
- Rucksack (up to 35 litres max is ideal)
- Basic blister kit, Aspirin, suncream

For more equipment advice, and the range of Icicle hire kit for Alpine courses, please visit the [kit pages](#) of the website, as we have spent a lot of time advising on the best brands and models of equipment, and how to save money when buying kit too, as we know how expensive it can be to make mis-informed mistakes, and some of the shops haven't got the most experienced sales teams to help you avoid those costly errors.

If you have any queries about your equipment before you travel, it's best to contact our course advisors, as they include highly experienced climbers and guides, so anyone there will be able to offer you good advice. You can call us on 01539 44 22 17 or 0845 058 98 78, or e-mail info@icicle.co.uk if that's easier. We also have Skype, so you can call / chat with advisors for free. When you get round to packing for your trip, your bag(s) should easily get within the 20kg airline weight allowance, so don't worry about excess baggage.





What skills do I require for Mont Blanc?

This is the most important question anyone can ask about Mont Blanc, which is why we quote in the second paragraph on the website page; “For the Mont Blanc ascent you need excellent fitness, stamina and determination. You do not necessarily need any previous crampon or altitude experience, though it would be a real bonus. Any skills you have will help, as well as great balance combined with the ability to move quickly and efficiently over broken mountain terrain is essential. You should be confident on steep ridges, but don't worry as you are taught all the necessary ropework and skills during the week”. The most common cause of people failing to summit isn't weather, but the people themselves. The key parts to focus on in the quote above are the comments about your movement on broken mountain terrain, and your confidence on ground with big exposure. Whilst it is the guides job to set a pace that suits your pace, there are many factors such as the cold, time at altitude, afternoon rockfall, and weaker snow bridges later in the day, that dictate a safe and suitable pace to make your ascent. If you cannot move at a reasonable pace on steep or rough ground, then that may stop you reaching the summit, so prepare well in terms of fitness and mountain training days involving rocky ground, walking on snow, and on scrambling terrain.

How fit do I need to be for an ascent?

The fitter you are, the enjoyment you derive from the course will increase. The ‘Course Information Pack’ that you receive upon booking includes training advice. If you are in any doubt as to the demands of any course, or your training methods, then look at the following page on the website; [Training Page](#), for information and advice. Inevitably, some clients, doubting their fitness or ability, have chosen to pull out from summit attempts. If possible we offer alternatives. For an attempt on Mont Blanc we suggest that you are capable of running a half marathon in a respectable time (c. 1hr 45mins). Many people ignore this, especially those who have been to a higher mountain, such as Kilimanjaro, as they try to compare the summit days. One mountain is a tough hike on the final day, and you could almost do it in trainers. The other involves the use of axe and crampons just to get to the hut, and all the time above it. These peaks are not comparable in any way. Almost anyone can ascend Kilimanjaro, but only those who have trained well have a good chance on Mont Blanc. Don't train for the minimum and hope you will get away with it. You've read it here that an ascent of Mont Blanc will probably be the toughest physical effort of your life. Don't ignore this! One of the most ignored aspects of mountaineering is the training required for the sport. A classic example is people looking on a map to see the height gain on a summit day, and for Mont Blanc it is 1300m. People then equate this to walking up Ben Nevis (same height gain), and blaming any problems on lack of acclimatisation. To put it bluntly the courses have been designed by professionals to maximise your acclimatisation, and if you struggle it is your lack of training that is at fault, not us. A fitter person acclimatises easier, and their body is better prepared to work at maximum outputs for a long time, or where there is less oxygen. Added into this are the factors of walking in snow on crampons, and carrying a rucksack. The summit day on Mont Blanc could be over 12 hours long, and so your training must reflect this. We rarely see people who have done all their training in a gym as truly mountain fit. Getting outside, and doing cross training on rougher ground is essential, and is better for developing all your muscle groups, rather than cyclical rotor type muscle exercises such as stepping machines, treadmills, and cycling. We are often told by people that they can't run, due to sore knees, but think about it – if you can't run for a couple of hours, how can your knees possibly cope with the stresses and strains of ascending the highest mountain in the Alps, and it's 2500m descent to the valley!



Will my skills be enough for summit success?

Do you want percentages and statistics, or to be told you have an excellent chance? Very few clients like to be told that they are the greatest variable in the equation, but it is true. We have outlined the level of previous skills or experience that is required for an ascent of Mont Blanc. If you approach us stating that you have never worn crampons, but "are a fast learner", you have definitely lessened your chances of summit success. When anyone comes to us with a similar statement to this we draw their attention to these facts, but as long as other competent clients are not affected in any way, we let each client decide if they meet the prerequisites for the course, or choose to ignore them. The other main personal factor is your physical condition. If you are in any doubt as to the level of your skills, then either consider a longer course, or perhaps a few days of refresher or acclimatisation training before the course.

What about a weather window for a summit bid?

In our experience there is on average only one week a year when the chosen summit cannot be reached on at least one day during the week, and other safe objectives are offered. We know the local weather systems and conditions so well, that if there is any possibility of an ascent, we will select the best option. In addition, our local presence gives us a massive amount of greater flexibility, in terms of changing hut and cable car bookings. This is a key factor that gives us better summiting records than any other operator. In addition we carefully schedule each course to only operate in the periods of best weather and conditions and all the courses have carefully planned itineraries, designed to build your stamina and skills. Our aim is to make you achieve your goals in the safest and most enjoyable way. However nothing in the world of mountaineering is guaranteed and our summiting record could never safely be 100%.

Who leads the Mont Blanc courses?

Icicle has a team of approximately 40 mountain guides who hold the prestigious IFMGA qualification. This is the highest mountaineering qualification in the world, and is the mark of the highest possible standards. To gain this qualification takes most people several years even with a high level of previous experience. Icicle uses a range of IFMGA guides from many different countries who live and work in the Alps, and who know the Chamonix region and Mont Blanc itself like the back of their hand. Nationalities on the guiding team include British, French, Italian, Swiss, German, Swedish, and Slovakian to name but a few. On the mountain the guide obviously has total decision making powers for the group in their care. Guides are paid upwards of approximately 300 euros a day, and for Mont Blanc they are paid significantly more. We do not pay a summit bonus to the guides, as this is completely unethical and unprofessional. Rest assured that the guides are well paid, but they have an awesome responsibility for safeguarding you.

What are Icicle's ecological policies?

As was mentioned in the previous paragraph, Icicle is nothing without its guiding team, and we ensure the guides are well paid and supported. You are reading this detailed itinerary on the screen of your computer, and will notice that we do not produce a big brochure each year. The whole booking and confirmation process is via the internet, and it is a key move to us trying to keep as paperless as possible. We encourage you to do the same, as the majority of the e-paperwork you are sent upon booking does not need to be printed. In the Alps we have stringent recycling and energy saving policies, both in our accommodation and in the office, as well as on the mountain. During the course introduction briefing you will be informed of our range of policies both on and off the mountain. Full details of our efforts are on the environmental pages of the main Icicle website. We really encourage you to help us do our bit, as every little effort soon adds up.

www.icicle.co.uk

See the website for full details about the elements of this course, and if you have any queries, get in touch.