



Icicle Mountaineering, Ski & Adventure
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Alpine Intro 4000m Course

2014 courses detailed itinerary & notes



Photo: Icicle groups on summit of Pointe Lachenal, with the East Face of Mont Blanc du Tacul behind.

Why to choose the Alpine Intro 4000m 'Summits & Skills' course...

You need no previous experience of climbing or mountaineering. This course is suitable for keen hill walkers, indoor wall climbers, or rambles, to introduce you to the key technical aspects necessary for mountaineering. The Introduction course focuses on the skills that you will require on rock, ice and snow; including ropework, glacier travel, navigation, crampon & ice axe use, avalanche safety, and kit choice.

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

ALPINE SKILLS & ACCLIMATISATION DAY – usually in the Aiguilles Rouges.

The goal of today is to introduce you to a series of key techniques, and also to take in an Alpine summit. After a cable car ascent into the Aiguilles Rouges, you set off and learn the skills of mountain navigation, route planning and snow techniques. The route you ascend involves scrambling, snowfields and constant hazard awareness, as well as the use of GPS and altimeters. During the day you will be encouraged to make route choice decisions, and given instruction on Alpine emergency scenarios such as the procedures for summoning mountain rescue, and preparing a casualty for a helicopter evacuation. The day is also key to the itinerary in that it develops your acclimatization from the outset.

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!

Day 3, Tuesday

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 later in the week. 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.

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

ALTITUDE MOUNTAINEERING DAY – such as the Petite Aiguille Verte region.

Today you ascend the Grands Montets cable car, put on your crampons and harness, then rope up for your mountaineering day and glacier descent. There is a real mixture of climbing and skills on this day, surrounded by the famous peaks including Aiguille Verte and the Droites. During the day you focus on snow skills, the technical content of which is to enable you to travel as a roped Alpine team, to evaluate rimaye's / berschrund's, to learn to spot snow bridges over crevasses, to move together, and to learn key mountaineering skills. These snow skills include the placement of snow anchors, ice axe belays, avalanche prediction, snow bollards, ice axes arrests, and holding falls on snow. There is usually the opportunity for setting up a real crevasse rescue on the wet section of the glacier. You usually catch the 16.00 cable car back down to Argentiere and are driven back to Chamonix for the night.

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

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 Gran Paradiso 4061m

We ensure that you get a thorough briefing the day before you set off for Gran Paradiso. We will 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 Gran Paradiso 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

OPTIONAL ROCK CLIMBING AND ASCEND TO MOUNTAIN HUT – Victor Emmanuel or Chabod

You drive to the Gran Paradiso National Park, through the Mont Blanc road tunnel to the hamlet of Pont at nearly 2000m. Here you have the opportunity to spend a few hours rock climbing to learn anchor systems and leading, then you trek up to the hut. As you are in a National Park, there are no cable cars, though the walk up to the hut takes a maximum of only two and a half hours through a beautiful unspoilt landscape. The Guides will check you into the hut, and allocate rooms. You are booked into the refuge on a half board basis for the night. You don't need to carry anything extra to the hut to spend a night there, as all your bedding is provided. The evening meal is usually at 19:00, and is three courses. Although the hut is fairly old, it is one of the most luxurious and comfortable huts in the Alps, and you are always fed very well. As you will return to the hut after the climb you can leave any excess kit in the hut, to pick up after your climb. An early night is recommended as you are up around 04:00.

EVENING INSTRUCTION SESSION – none as you are in a mountain hut for the night



Day 6, Friday

SUMMIT ATTEMPT – Gran Paradiso 4061m

You normally are woken up at just before 4am for breakfast and a hot drink, then set off while it is cold to take advantage of the best snow conditions. For the first hour or two 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. The ascent to the summit takes approximately five hours from the hut, and you reach the top in early morning (usually about 09:00). The summit of Gran Paradiso is marked with a 'Madonna' statue and prayer flags. The views across to Mont Blanc, the Matterhorn, and Monte Rosa are amazing. After admiring the view, you descend back along the rocky ridge, and then down the flanks of the mountain back to the hut. When you return to the hut, you have a chance to rest, rehydrate and eat some lunch. You can even buy a celebratory beer! After collecting any stashed kit, and taking any last photos, you then descend back down the mountain paths to Pont, and then are driven back to Chamonix for the night.

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 at 10:00 you are free to depart. If you have spare time, so people book a tandem paragliding flight, while others use the 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.



Icicle Guides – Alpine Intro 4000m ‘Summits & Skills’ 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. If you arrive early, or if you leave late after the check out, please note there are no baggage storage facilities in Chamonix.

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 Alpine Intro 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 Alpine Intro 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.

Course Guides & Leaders

To set the highest standards all of these courses are led by a mixture of top IFMGA guides and UIMLA leaders. These are the highest qualifications for leading groups in the Alps, and it is to ensure your safety and learning throughout the week too.

Local Payments

If you book on the standard Alpine Intro 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, and lunches for each day. You can budget for a minimum of 10 euros a day for food and water in huts. If you require any hire equipment, you should also budget for this, and should read the section lower down the page.

Course Inclusions

1) UIMLA guide for 1 day and IFMGA guide for 4 days, 2) Chamonix course hosts for logistics & briefings, 3) Evening technical instruction sessions, 4) B&B accommodation in Chamonix (inc. linen, bedding & towels) for the whole week, so you don't need to move out when in huts, 5) One night half board in mountain hut (inc. costs for guides), 6) Pre course information booklet, 7) Equipment discount voucher for UK shops, 8) Free 36 page technical Course Instruction Booklet, 9) Road transport in Chamonix valley including tunnel ticket and road transport to / from Gran Paradiso, 10) Icicle discounts privilege card for reductions in local shops and restaurants in Chamonix.

Course Exclusions

1) Travel to and from Chamonix, 2) Hire Equipment, 3) Cable cars & uplift (c. 60 euros depending on itinerary), 4) Personal laundry, telephone calls, lunches, evening meals in valley, & any purchases in mountain huts / hotels / restaurants, 5) Certificate for NNAS navigation award, 6) 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 cable cars during the week whose total cost exceeds 60 euros.

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 the essential kit. If you are providing your own kit you should ensure that it is good quality, and suitable for the course itinerary.

Course Notes

This course is designed to really launch your Alpine climbing career, and you will be taught a huge range of skills. It is highly recommended that you participate in the evening instruction sessions, as they are an integral part of your course.



What about is the background of Icicle?

In 2000 a group of keen climbers and skiers set up Icicle. In its first years Icicle won several new business awards but these are as nothing compared to the pride we have in our team of 40 IFMGA guides & UIMLA leaders. We are honored to work with these top professionals. All our guiding team have been chosen by us for their attitude, ability and personality. Now the company is approaching its tenth anniversary and Icicle has firmly established itself as one of the leading Alpine guiding operators. The aim of Icicle is the same as it always has been 'to offer great trips that we would dream of going on ourselves'. We hope to see you soon in the Alps. We have a highly personalised, flexible and friendly, approach to our courses. When you contact us, your calls and queries are answered by fellow climbers and skiers. We are a small specialist company who has a very personal approach. Once you have booked, you don't need to quote reference numbers, as we will know who you are. Our ethos is simple: you matter to us, and we care.

What are Icicle's ecological policies?

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. All accommodation features Icicle's 'Do Your Bit' campaign posters. Full details of our efforts are on the website environment pages. 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.