



SMART

MOUNTAIN GUIDES

Trip Factsheet: Haute Route Ski Tour

Chamonix and Zermatt

Our tours start in Chamonix, France and finish in Zermatt, Switzerland. These are two of the most historic mountain towns in the Alps.

The town of Chamonix is at 1042m/3,396 ft above sea level. It sits at the foot of Mont Blanc, which at 4810m/15,770ft is the highest peak in Western Europe. Chamonix is a proper working town with a large population of about 15,000 inhabitants. As befits a town of this size there are plenty of shops, hotels, cafes, bars, pubs and nightclubs.

Zermatt is a charming traditional Swiss alpine village. It is car free and can only be reached by a 15 minute train ride from the valley station of Tasch. The bustling village is overlooked by the iconic Matterhorn, probably the most famous alpine peak of them all.

Travel to Chamonix

You want to arrange to arrive in Chamonix by mid-afternoon on the first day, this means you have time to check-in to your hotel in preparation for our welcome meeting with your guide around 5pm.

The most convenient airport is Geneva and from here the transfer time up to Chamonix by road is just 1 hr 15mins. To travel between the airport and Chamonix we recommend you book a transfer with one of the many transfer companies that run shared and private transfers between the airport and Chamonix. We recommend [Haute Transfer](#) or [Mountain Drop Offs](#) who offer competitively priced transfers that run direct to your hotel/accommodation.

Departure from Zermatt at the end of the tour

You should arrive in Zermatt on day 6 of our itinerary (typically a Thursday). We suggest you book a night accommodation in Zermatt on this night. To return to Geneva airport or make any onward travel it's best to use the Swiss railway. You can look up all journey information [HERE](#). Journey time to the airport is around 3hrs 45mins and trains leave every 30mins from Zermatt station and you need to change once at Visp.

Meeting in Chamonix.

The trip begins with a welcome meeting in Chamonix, usually at your hotel at around 5pm on day 0 of our itinerary (usually a Friday). Your guide will brief you on the itinerary, update you on the prevailing weather and snow conditions for the week and carry out an equipment check. It is also an opportunity for you to ask any last minute questions.

Accommodation

Our preferred hotel is the Hotel Pointe Isabelle in central Chamonix, this is a comfortable 3* hotel with modern rooms, bar and restaurant. This hotel is booked on a bed & breakfast basis and there are lots of restaurants in Chamonix where you can eat out. You will be booked into the hotel in Chamonix for 2 nights at the start of the tour.

You can leave any additional baggage in the hotel in their bag storage room before you leave on the tour, clearly labelled with your name and it will be collected and taken to Zermatt for your arrival at the end of the tour.

The rest of the nights are spent in mountain huts on a half-board basis, so with breakfast and evening meal.

Guides and Group Sizes

All our ski touring trips are run by Miles and Liz or one of their preferred IFMGA Mountain Guides. We usually recommend and run all our trips on a maximum of a 1:4 guide to skier ratio. However, it is possible to run trips on a maximum of 1:6 if you have a group of friends that all want to ski together.

Itinerary

Our itinerary starts with a warm up ski day in Chamonix, which is used as a shake down and kit check and an opportunity for you and your guide to get to know each other. On the morning of the second ski day you will begin the tour from the Grands Montets ski area in Chamonix. You will stay 4 nights in mountain huts on half board.

Our route follows the popular Verbier variation and a full itinerary can be found on the Haute Route page of our website. Please note you begin the trip in France but after the first day the rest of the trip is in Switzerland.

Staying in Mountain Huts

The high alpine huts are one of the big attractions to ski touring in the Alps. They allow us to enjoy the mountains with only light packs and without having to worry about carrying food or finding somewhere to sleep! Most huts have only very basic facilities. Sleeping arrangements are in mixed sex dormitory-style rooms with bunks; there can be up to 15-20 people in one room.

Washing facilities are limited and generally there is no running water in any of the huts, although some huts do have more facilities than others. There are basins in which you can use bottled water to wash the best you can and clean your teeth, but they are NOT generally in private cubicles and are mixed gender. Toilets are generally septic-tank type (so non-flushing) and again mixed gender. You need to be prepared for simple living in the huts and appreciate they are located at high altitude.

A 3-course evening meal and breakfast are served by the guardian and his team and food is usually of a good quality and filling. The huts do their best to cater for dietary requirements like vegetarian, vegan and gluten-free diets. Beer, wine, soft drinks and snacks are also available. All

food and drink in the huts is delivered by helicopter and consequently prices will be high e.g. between 10-12€ or 12-16CHF for a 1.5litre bottle of still water.

There are a few basic hut 'rules' which you need to follow so that you (and your fellow ski tourers) have a pleasant stay:

- On arriving at the hut your skis will be left outside in the ski racks and you must take off your boots and leave these together with your ice-axe, crampons, harness and skins in the boot room. Be sure to store these carefully as the hut is likely to get very busy and you'll need to find all your kit in the early morning rush, when all the kit will look the same!
- ***Top Tip:*** *clearly name or place a small amount of coloured tape on your boots, axe, crampons, harness and skins to help you identify them amongst all the others*
- Hut slippers/Croc-type shoes are provided and must be worn in the hut
- Your guide will register you with the guardian and will assign you your room and bunk
- Follow the instructions of your guide and keep requests to the guardian and his team to a minimum – they are usually very busy sorting out groups, cooking meals, keeping the hut clean
- In the morning your guide will often want to leave early – be sure to have all your kit ready to go the night before. Be organized and everything will be much easier!

What to wear in the hut - we are often asked by people what they should wear in the hut. It's a good question as you don't want to carry many or any extra clothes with you if they are not required. In the winter you will probably end up wearing your base layer thermals (top & bottom) or you can carry a lightweight pair of loose trousers to wear around the hut in the afternoons/evenings. Your base layer top is what you will probably wear on your top half or you can carry a t-shirt to wear in the hut that can double to sleep in.

Meals

Breakfasts: in the huts a typical breakfast will consist of coffee, tea, hot chocolate, orange juice, bread, butter, jam and some kind of sweet biscuits. It is simple and often uninspiring but it's essential that you try to eat as much as you can each morning. Sometimes in the Swiss huts you will be served cereal.

Evening meals are a set menu of 3 courses. Typical menu will be soup to start, a main dish of meat or pasta with mash or rice and vegetables. Dessert will be fruit or mousse. Most huts now cater well for vegetarian, vegan and gluten free diets; however you need to remember that they don't have an unlimited supply of fresh food and subsequently choice can be limited, you cannot afford to be fussy!

Lunch: huts offer a basic packed lunch which you can order the night before, this will usually consist of bread with cheese, salami and/or a sandwich plus a chocolate bar, crisps and fresh fruit if they have it available.

Drinks and snacks: the huts serve tea, coffee, bottled water, soft drinks, beer and wine. They also sell some snacks. Items sold in the huts are expensive and we do recommend you bring some of your favourite hill snacks with you on the trip.

Please note that lunches, drinks and snacks are not included in the price of the trip and need to be paid for individually.

Typical Day on the Haute Route

When staying in huts the usual wake-up time is between 6 and 7am. You'll have breakfast and be on your way by 8-8.30am. If the weather is forecast to be warm in the day time then you may well start as early as 6am to complete the ski day before it gets too hot. Days tend to be around 6 – 7hrs in length and so you'll arrive at the next hut by mid afternoon. You will stop a number of times to eat and drink but there is no "official" lunch stop each day. It is essential you eat and drink regularly to keep your energy and strength levels up.

When you arrive at the hut you need to store your stuff in the boot room, it's a good idea to get everything ready for the next day before you have dinner so you do not have a rush in the morning. Hot and cold drinks and food is available to order when you arrive at the hut, dinner is served around 7pm and most people will turn in to bed by 9 – 10pm. As the accommodation is dormitory style with up to 20 people in the same room, it can be noisy and ear plugs are recommended!

Preparation for the Haute Route

It is essential that you prepare yourself well in advance by taking regular aerobic exercise so you arrive on the trip as fit as you can. Ski touring and off piste skiing is physically demanding and with the big ascents, varied snow conditions and the rucksack you need to carry on this tour, you'll soon be found out if you're not in tip-top condition!

Doing sports that increase your aerobic fitness and leg strength are key. So when preparing for this trip nothing beats activities that increase your heart rate and build your aerobic levels e.g. running, cycling and swimming.

Movement skills - agility, balance, flexibility - which allow you to turn your skis and adjust to uneven terrain - are also very relevant. If time permits try to include some yoga or pilates into your training schedule.

Frames of reference:

- If you are a long distance runner, triathlete or engage in another endurance sport and you're training or competing within 4 -5 months of doing this trip, then you can stop reading now, just keep up the good work!
- If you have run a few 10ks or compete / train for similar sporting events then you will be fine too but try to fit in some longer sessions to build your endurance levels a little.
- If you have done very little apart from the occasional 30 minute jog, short cycle ride (mountain bike or road) or you occasionally go to the gym after work – then you have some work to do! But fear not, you can attain the fitness levels you need by increasing the amount of exercise you do each week and doing this well in advance of your trip (ideally 3-4 months out).

For any ski touring trip you will be doing exercise that requires you to operate for long periods of time at a relatively low intensity. You will be carrying a rucksack which will mean you may have to adapt your skiing but it's a lot easier if you have strong core muscles (stomach and back).

It's best to get prepared in plenty of time, not by trying to pack in as much training in the last 2-3 weeks as it takes about this length of time for the body to adapt to an increase in exercise.

Don't think that you will get fit during the programme you won't and don't think that simply going to the gym to run on the treadmill for 40mins twice a week will be enough – it won't! In the last 2 weeks you can decrease the amount and intensity of the exercise you do; so you arrive fresh and ready for the challenge.

Good fitness will make your trip overall much more enjoyable and you will get more out of it! If you wish to discuss a training plan and your current fitness then please do get in touch.

Snow Conditions and Climate

Ski touring in the high mountains can be affected by the weather and snow conditions and you are likely to encounter lots of different snow types during the route, everything from fresh powder to crusty, wind-blown snow. Occasionally if the weather is poor (heavy snow, high winds or high avalanche risk) the tour can be delayed or the route changed and you need to accept this as part of being in the mountains and trust your guide to do the best he or she can with the conditions at the time.

During the ski touring season, the mornings typically start cold and warm up as the day progresses. Sometimes temperatures can change by as much as 20°C through the course of the day, so it's essential that you have a good clothing layering system.

Ski Passes

The cost of any ski passes as outlined in our program are included in the trip price. Any other ski days before or after the tour or any changes in itinerary will incur additional costs paid directly by you.

Program Cost Inclusions:

6 full days guide fees and expenses for 1 IFMGA Certified Guide.

2 nights bed & breakfast hotel lodging on a shared basis in Chamonix.

Lift tickets during the program (2 days in Chamonix and 1 day in Verbier).

4 nights half board accommodation in mountain huts.

Ground transportation during the program (including luggage transfer to Zermatt).

Use of avalanche transceiver, shovel, probe and climbing harness for the duration of the trip.

Scheduled expenses

International travel.

Travel to Chamonix and from Zermatt.

Lodging in Zermatt after the tour.

Evening meals in Chamonix.

Lunches and drinks – 40 - 50CHF per day depending on consumption!

Personal ski equipment hire

Personal Insurance and rescue insurance

Single room occupancy if required (hotels only)

Spending Money

You should bring an allowance for lunches, drinks (including bottled water) which is brought in huts and can be expensive. We suggest around 80 – 100€ plus 300 – 350 Swiss Francs should be sufficient to cover all personal expenses. Please note that most of the tour is in Switzerland and you should bring most of your money in Swiss Francs. You will need some Euros for the start of

the trip while in France. There are cash point facilities in Chamonix and when you pass through Verbier and again in Zermatt.

Equipment and Kit Hire

A copy of our recommended ski kit list can be found on our website or you can call or email us and we will send you a copy.

Essential items you need to have:

- Skis with ski touring bindings (Diamir Fritschi or similar)
- Skins that are cut to fit your skis and couteaux (crampons for your skis)

NOTE *You cannot hire skins or couteaux on their own! If you are bringing your own skis you must purchase skins that are cut to fit and couteaux that work with your bindings.*

- Ski touring boots
- Ski poles
- Boot crampons
- Ice axe
- Harness with karabiner, sling and prussic loop
- 35 – 40 litre rucksack with straps on the side for carrying your skis
- Avalanche transceiver, shovel and probe.

If you need to hire skis and/or boots while in Chamonix then please contact us to discuss your requirements as soon as possible so we can assist you with this aspect of your holiday.

You will also need to ski with the 3 items of safety equipment, avalanche transceiver, shovel and probe plus a climbing harness, if you do not have your own equipment. We include the use of these items within the trip cost. Please notify us if you wish to use these.

Food

We suggest you bring with you or buy in resort snack food that you can take out on the hill with you each day. Things like cereal bars, dried fruit and nuts, chocolate, sugary sweets or your favourite hill snacks. When you're staying overnight in huts its best to take supplies for the days you are away. Huts do sell food but it's expensive and sometimes stocks run low.

If you have any food allergies or dietary requirements, especially if you are a Coeliac (Gluten free) or have a dairy allergy we recommend you bring some food with you so you can supplement your dinners. Most huts now cater well for vegetarian, vegan and gluten free diets; however you need to remember that they don't have an unlimited supply of fresh food and subsequently choice can be limited, you cannot afford to be fussy!

The huts can provide a small basic packed lunch of bread, salami, cheese and chocolate that you can buy each day but it's important that you don't rely on this option only. You do need to carry some snack food for each day.

You will also generally stop for short breaks each hour where you should eat something each time so you maintain your energy levels throughout the day.

Insurance

There are 2 different types of insurance: Travel or Trip Cancellation insurance and Rescue insurance. Typical travel insurance will cover the cost of the trip if you have to cancel before or during for any reason. There are many companies that offer this type of insurance such as Travelguard and Travelex. For rescue insurance, we recommend getting the Swiss heli rescue insurance (<http://www.air-glaciers.ch/sion/carte-de-sauvetage/charte-du-sauvetage/english>). If you have rescue insurance through an Alpine Club or your own provider, that may work also but you must check the policy to be sure.

More information

If you have any questions or need further details don't hesitate to contact us on

smartguides@mac.com

<https://www.smartmountainguides.com/>