



## **Aficionado's TOUR DU MONT BLANC**

### **Detailed itinerary, 10-day trip:**

#### **Day 1: Chamonix / Les Houches**

Meet in Les Houches, a small, typically Savoyarde town 6 kilometers south of Chamonix in the shadow of Mont Blanc. Welcome dinner and drinks, overnight in a small hotel.

#### **Day 2: Les Houches to Chalet de Miage**

A short walk to the Bellevue cable car and a scenic ride up to the ridge overlooking Les Houches with stunning views from the top.

Mont Blanc and its satellite peaks tower above, as the river Arve rushes below. Our hike today is moderate, with a gentle descent to a pasture where 'fighting cows' from the Val d'Herens in Switzerland can often be seen asserting their dominance over the herd.

We then climb to a pass and take in the views out to the Domes de Miage and its glaciers. We descend steeply to a hamlet of stone homes where cows and horses graze peacefully surrounded by hanging glaciers.

Overnight in a small, family-run inn. Dormitory accommodation. No luggage transfer.

#### **Day 3: Miage to Nant Borrant.**

The day starts with a short climb before reaching a plateau and our traverse under the dramatic peaks of the Aiguille du Glacier and of Tre-la-Tete. The trail follows a contour line with little altitude gain, meandering in and out of a lush pine and larch forest. Our home for the night is a privately run inn, one of the oldest in the area. Private dormitories for families are available. Inn with small dormitories. Luggage transfer.

#### **Day 4: Nant Borrant to Les Chapieux.**

One of our longest hikes begins easily enough with a gentle climb along a wide jeep trail. On both sides of the path, the chime of cow's bells can be heard and marmot's strident whistling echos all around. Our climb continues until we reach the Col du Bonhomme and then on to a French Alpine Club hut.

A short stop allows us to have a refreshing beverage and admire the Ibex, large mountain goats which are often found lounging near the hut. A steep descent takes us to the hamlet of Les Chapieux.

Double rooms are available. No luggage transfer.

### **Day 5: Les Chapieux to Courmayeur.**

We begin the day with a short mini-bus transfer to Villes-des-Glacier where we will tour a small cheese factory producing one of the most famous cheeses in the French Alps, the Beaufort.

Six massive, 40 kilogram wheels of the “queen of the Alps” are produced each day on this small farm. Cheese tasting and a guided visit are offered. From the farm we head towards Italy and onto one of the oldest trading routes in the Western Alps. Crossing the Col de la Seigne we can actually have one foot in each country. A long, gentle descent leads to the medieval town of Courmayeur, a former Roman military garrison with a pedestrian only core.

Time to enjoy the gastronomic delights of Italy, the ancient stone streets of the town and the impressive south face of the Mont Blanc range with jagged peaks such as the Dent Du Geant, Grande Jorasses and Aiguille Noire de Peuterey jutting up above our heads. Hotel in Courmayeur. Double rooms. Luggage will be delivered to your hotel.

### **Day 6: Courmayeur to Rifugio Bonatti**

After a hearty breakfast, we begin along the cobble stone streets of the old town before heading steeply up to the Mont de la Saxe, a massive lateral moraine, which towers above the town of Courmayeur.

Once on top, the views are probably the most spectacular of the entire trip. A majority of the hike is spent on the spine of the ridge, enjoying the roar of serrac avalanches breaking off from glaciers below. Our evening's destination is the Bonatti hut, more of a hotel than mountain refuge.

Named after one of Italy's most famous mountaineers, the hut is a beautiful structure strategically placed looking out toward the Grandes Jorasses where the alpenglow paints the mountains a palette of bright colours. Double rooms. No luggage transfers.

### **Day 7: Rifugio Bonatti to Champex-Lac.**

Continuing along the ridge for a short time, we descend to the Val Ferret only to climb again to the Rifugio Elena and possibly the best hot chocolate in the world.

Today's climb is short and sweet with the last views of this side of the range.

Once at the pass, we say ciao to Italy and bonjour to Switzerland.

Weather permitting, we will scout the hills for Ibex before settling down for lunch before enjoying the views at the pass.

A short descent brings us to a working farm where local cheese called raclette is produced and we can observe the milking of cows and the labour intensive process of making cheese.

Then we head down to La Fouly, where we get on the Swiss Post Bus to Champex, our final destination for the night.

Champex-Lac, as the name says it, has a large, trout filled lake, which is the centre point of the village.

Luggage transfer.

**Day 8: Champex-Lac to Col de la Forclaz.**

Leaving Champex-Lac, our trail takes us through forests and meadows on the Bovine trail, where herds of fighting cows from the Val Herens graze lazily.

Lunch will be taken in a small hut overlooking the Rhone Valley where Romans introduced vineyards over 2000 years ago. After lunch, two hours will be all we need to reach the Col de la Forclaz, where we will be staying for the night.

Luggage transfer.

**Day 9: Col de la Forclaz to Les Praz.**

The final day, the Massif du Mont Blanc awaits and the last obstacle is the Col de Balme and the gentle descent into the village of Le Tour and then into Argentière for a much-deserved beer, after which we will go and take the train for a very short ride to our Hotel in Les Praz.

Farewell dinner in our hotel in the Chamonix valley.

Walking time: 5 hours

**Day 10: Departure day**

Transfer to international airports or carry on exploring Europe.