

Classic Climbs in the Alps: Mont Blanc, the Jungfrau, and Zermatt climbs

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Dear Climber,

Thanks for your interest in climbing in the Alps. The following material contains all the information you should need to answer your questions about the upcoming program. This includes general information regarding climbing in the Alps with International Mountain Guides, an itinerary and equipment list. If you have additional questions after reviewing this, feel free to contact the IMG office, office@mountainguides.com or reach me directly at george@mountainguides.com. There is limited participation in the program so I recommend an early application.

—George Dunn, Program Director

About the program:

This is the perennial favorite trip to the Alps. We enjoy pleasant lodgings and charming restaurants; take in the sights in three of the most beautiful centers of the Alps; yet still have time to climb three or more outstanding peaks. Good summer snow, glacier travel and granite ridges: we'll climb it all. Places visited during the course of this program include Zermatt, Switzerland, Grindelwald (Wengen) Switzerland and Chamonix, France.

For this trip you will need to use all of the glacier travel skills you have learned on a previous course on Mt. Adams, Mt. Rainier, or other glaciated peak in the States - cramponing, use of ice axe and rope travel. You'll learn some new techniques as well. I would rate most of the climbs as a step in difficulty above Mt. Rainier. The terrain is a bit steeper with more exposure in places and some rock scrambling. Persons who have summited Mt. Rainier usually do well on this series of climbs. No previous rock climbing experience is required other than a stout heart, legs and a desire for adventure.

The climbing in the Alps is more fun because we eliminate arduous approaches with heavy packs. By utilizing mountain huts we eliminate the need for sleeping bags and cooking. The huts provide dinners and breakfasts as well as bunks with blankets and mattresses. This is a great trip to bring along a non-climbing spouse.

Dates: July 24 - August 4, 2012

Landcost: \$5,400 (includes all lodging and hut fees)
Guiding Only: \$4,500

Group maximum size: 6 climbers, 3 guides.

Non-climbing spouse fee \$3,000 includes lodging

The Alps: Just The Facts

Mont Blanc: 15,771' • 4807m

Jungfrau: 13,642' • 4158m

Castor: 13,871 • 4228m

Breithorn: • 4164m

Pollux: • 4092m

Size Matters:

The Alps are the largest mountain system in Europe. The mountains begin near the Mediterranean Sea and form a border between France and Italy. They extend northward and eastward through northern Italy, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, southern Germany, Austria, and Slovenia. The range forms a chain about 660 miles long, covering an area of about 80,000 square miles.

Size Matters (cont.):

Mont Blanc is the highest in all of Western Europe. There are 60 other major peaks in the Alps reaching over 4,000 meters (13,123'). We'll attempt at least 4 of them!

Scientist Hardguys:

Few people attempted climbing in the Alps until the 1700's, when scientists began to study the land and the biology of the region. In 1786, two Frenchmen, physician Michel G. Paccard and his guide, Jacques Balmat, became the first to reach the top of Mont Blanc. They recorded scientific observations along the way.

First Boot-Prints on Top:

Many of the Alpine peaks were climbed for the first time during the mid-1800's, when mountaineering gained popularity as a sport. In 1855, a group of Swiss and British men made the first successful climb to the top of Monte Rosa. In 1865, climbers reached the top of the Matterhorn. Most Alpine summits had been climbed by 1900.

Look for Summit Seashells:

Geologists believe that a 100 million years ago, a large sea covered what is now the Alpine region. When land masses north and south of this sea slowly began colliding, the pressure forced the seabed to fold into ridges and valleys. The highest parts of the Alps include rocks such as gneiss, granite, and schist, which were formed deep within the earth. Many Alpine ranges consist chiefly of limestone that also formed in the seabed. Most of the Alps were formed about 15 million years ago.

It Really Is A Small World:

The Alps have a perennial snow cover at altitudes above 3000m and frequently experience warm, dry, violent winds, called Föhns, that sometimes carry red dust from the Sahara and blow downward along mountain slopes. These melting winds are a major cause of avalanches.

Alps Programs – General Information

This prospectus includes an itinerary of the forthcoming trip along with a number of tips and details to help you prepare for it. Please read over the materials carefully. Should you have any questions, feel free to contact us at IMG.

Conditioning

The best training program for such a climbing trip is one that includes aerobic activities such as running, swimming and bicycling. Get in plenty of time hiking with a pack or running up and down hills. Strive for longer training sessions - over an hour - and go on hikes during the weekend that gain a thousand vertical feet per mile for several miles whenever possible. Muscle strengthening exercises for the legs, arms and back are also important. Adequate preparation will insure a safe and enjoyable trip for all.

Climbing

Knowledge of basic mountaineering skills, including ice axe arrest, cramponing and roped glacier travel is required. Previous participation in an IMG Mt. Adams Seminar, a Mt. Whitney Climb (with training day) or a Mount Rainier climb is recommended. The climbing will involve glacier travel and cramponing on moderately steep snow and ice slopes, as well as rock scrambling of moderate difficulty. No previous rock climbing experience is necessary but certainly would help with your confidence level. Prior participation in a rock-climbing program such as the IMG Joshua Tree or the Smith Rocks Seminars is suggested for this reason.

Equipment

The enclosed list of items is required of each individual. I have attempted to give a brief description of each piece of equipment so there should be no difficulties in compiling your gear. Read over the list carefully and pack your gear well in advance.

Accommodations

All accommodations are included in the landcost fee. We overnight in climbing huts on each peak and hotels between the climbs. The European huts are quite luxurious compared to those in the States and their convenience has made them popular with climbers throughout the Alps. Sleeping bags and pads are not needed on this trip. Bunks with blankets and pillows are provided by the staff at each of the huts.

Between climbs we will stay in hotels in Zermatt, Wengen and Chamonix. Three star hotels are selected if at all possible, and the accommodations are very comfortable and picturesque. Normal arrangements will be a shared room with private bath. Accommodations prior to the starting date and from the evening of the ending date on are not provided and must be arranged by each individual.

Switzerland: Just The Facts

They Speak Your Language:

Switzerland is one of the most multilingual countries in Europe with three official federal languages. 66% of its population speaks a dialect of German known as Schwyzertütschis, 18% speak French, and 10% Italian.

When In Switzerland:

Swiss folk culture includes yodeling, the alp horn, and Swiss wrestling.

Cheese & Chocolate:

Swiss cuisine is generally a combination of elements from German and French traditions with cheeses holding a prominent role. Emmenthaler and Gruyère are combined with white wine to create fondue. Rosti (crispy, fried, shredded potatoes) is German Switzerland's national dish. Fresh fish from the numerous lakes frequently crop up on menus, especially perch and trout. And then there's the chocolate.

A Few of the Locals:

The most famous and distinctive Alpine animals are the ibex (a mountain goat with huge curved horns) and the Chamois (a horned antelope good at cleaning cars). Golden eagles and peregrine falcons live among the highest peaks, but despite strong environmental legislation, birdlife is on the retreat in Switzerland with 81 species currently threatened with extinction.

And a Few of the Local Customs:

In the lower Valais, from March to October, some Swiss have their cows battle it out in the Combat de Reines to see which is most suited to lead the herd up to the summer pastures. National Day (August 1) is celebrated with fireworks and Swiss wrestling in the Emmenthal area east of Bern. On the fourth Monday in November, Bern hosts its famous onion market (Zibelmarit), where traders take over the whole town centre and many a tear is shed.

Food

Each person is responsible for his or her own meals during the course of the program except at the climbing huts. At the huts, breakfasts and dinners are prepared by the hut personnel and are included in the cost of the program. Between climbs we will have the opportunity to sample local specialties in some of the many excellent restaurants and specialty shops. We normally eat out together as a group when in town, and the camaraderie of sharing an evening meal with the team is an enjoyable part of the trip. Restaurant prices are similar to those in tourist areas in the U.S. There will be opportunity to purchase lunch food in town prior to each of the climbs and the guides will be happy to assist you with this. The hotels include a substantial continental breakfast in the price of lodging.

Travel Arrangements

The train system in Switzerland and France is functional and efficient. The group will travel together by train between each of our climbing destinations. The train journey will allow us time to socialize as a team and sightsee without the distractions of driving. Each person is responsible for the purchase of their own train and cog rail tickets as well as telepherique fares on approaches to climbs and for general sightseeing. The rail pass you buy is dependent on the amount of travel you will do before and after the program in Europe, but the minimum pass needed is a 4-day Swiss Flexi Pass. You can buy this pass, or another Swiss pass or Eurail pass upon your arrival in Switzerland at any train station. For more information on train fares, visit www.raileurope.com or www.rail.ch. With the pass you get a further reduction of 25% on some gondola and cog rail train rides required for access to the climbs. If two or more people purchase their passes together, they qualify for a saver pass price which is about \$40 cheaper, but this requires that you travel together at all times.

You are responsible for your own travel to and from Zermatt. There are several direct flights from the U.S. to Geneva, the closest major destination. You may also choose to fly to another city such as Zurich, Frankfurt or Brussels on a more economical flight and then take a train to Zermatt. Participants should be sure to make allowance for the significant time change when arranging a flight to Europe. Plan to arrive at least a day in advance in order to overcome jet lag. Please notify the IMG office of your arrival time and flight plan prior to the start of the program.

IMG's travel agent, CTT Destinations is well versed in our European operations. Please contact them directly at 800/909-6647 or img@cttdestinations.com for help in booking airfare, lodging before and after your program and train transportation. They'll be glad to help.

Travel Insurance

We require that you insure yourself against potentially expensive difficulties that may arise. First, Trip Cancellation Insurance may provide financial relief should you be forced to withdraw from the program before it even happens. Next, make sure you have adequate Travel Insurance for coverage should you have a problem during the trip. Medical care and evacuation in remote locations can be expensive. For more info, please see: [Trip Cancellation and Travel Insurance](#).

Rescue insurance is also available in Switzerland and France. The Swiss national rescue insurance is Rega, and can be ordered in advance online at www.rega.ch. Cost is 30 Swiss Francs for the year. **Please allow several weeks advance time to receive your card!** The French national rescue insurance is Carte Neige, and is available in Chamonix at the tourist office. Both Rega and Carte Neige are good throughout the Alps, so only one is necessary. You must have your own rescue insurance, and make sure you are clear about what it covers and does not cover.

Weather

The weather in the West Alps is similar to that of the Cascades in the Pacific Northwest. One can experience several days of beautifully clear skies or be plagued by storms. However, late July, August and September is generally the best time to climb in this area, for reasons of weather and snow conditions. By bringing the proper clothing we will be prepared for all types of weather. The enclosed itinerary is designed with some allowance for bad weather but may require further alterations. We will attempt to adhere to the schedule as closely as possible, but our goal is to have a safe, fun climbing trip. Some flexibility is important for the smooth operation of the program. The guides will be open to input throughout the trip.

Passports

If you do not have a passport, or if your current one is due to expire before, or during the trip, you must obtain a new one. Passports are required to travel in Europe. Passport information is available from your main post office or your local passport agency. At this time, visas are not required for travel in France and Switzerland. It is a good idea to carry Xeroxed copies of your passport and birth certificate to ease matters in case of loss or theft of your passport.

Luggage

For travel to Europe, it is a good idea to have just two pieces of luggage: your pack with all of your climbing gear inside and a medium duffel bag for extra clothing and items to be strapped onto your pack at a later time, such as crampons and ice axe. A wheeled duffel is helpful when lugging your gear between train connections. The weather in this part of Europe is much like that of the Pacific Northwest, be sure to bring appropriate summer clothing for travel to the mountains. Keep your street clothes simple and bring a good pair of light comfortable hiking shoes. A sweater should be sufficient for evenings in town. Casual dress will be fine for all of our dining. Hand washable clothing allows you to do laundry in your room and get by with less. There are self-service and full-service laundries at each of the towns we visit.

Spending Money

For spending money, ATM's are found almost everywhere in Europe and give the best exchange rate. Mind the exchange fee and your maximum daily withdrawal limit! Check with your banker to understand the costs and fees associated with using your card in Europe, and then you can get by with bringing less cash or traveler's checks. Visa, MasterCard, and American Express are accepted in most shops and restaurants, Visa probably more often than American Express. Be sure to notify your card company that you will be traveling in Europe to avoid a hold being placed on your card when charges are placed on it from a foreign country. Train fares along with related gondola rides and cog rail trains will cost from \$300-\$500 total and can all be charged on a Visa. I would plan to spend from \$1,500 to \$2,000 total during the trip for all meals, train fares and personal expenses.

I encourage you to do as much reading on the area as you can. A little research on the history of Alpinism in Europe can add greatly to the experience once you are there. A good basic guide book that describes the climbs we will attempt is [The Alpine 4000m Peaks by the Classic Routes](#), by Richard Goedeke, 1991.

I hope this information will help you in preparing for the trip. If you have any questions at all, please contact us at IMG.

Sincerely,
George Dunn, Program Director

The Alps Classic Climbs Itinerary

- Day 0** Plan to arrive in Europe at least the day prior to the start of the program. An extra day to work through jet lag is best. Best arrival point is Geneva, Switzerland. If you arrive in Geneva in the morning, there are hourly trains to Zermatt from the airport. Contact IMG's travel agent, CTT Destinations, IMG@cttdestinations.com for help in booking your hotel stay in Zermatt prior to the start of the program. IMG groups stay at the Hotel Alpenblick, address: Oberdorfstrasse 106, CH - 3920 Zermatt. Spend the day relaxing about town and sight seeing. The team will meet at 7:00 p.m. out on the hotel terrace (weather permitting) for a team intro, meeting and briefing on what to bring/wear on the following day.
- Day 1** Program begins at the Hotel Alpenblick in Zermatt, Switzerland. Meet at 8:00 a.m. for breakfast. Come prepared to climb for the day with complete daypack and clothing. The group will ride the gondola up to the Kleine Matterhorn (3820m) to access the Breithorn Plateau for a day of refresher training, acclimatization and perhaps an hour's jaunt up the easy face of the Breithorn. Return to town and overnight at the Alpenblick.
- Day 2** Early a.m. departure from the hotel and gondola ride back up to the Kleine Matterhorn. We'll attempt one of the classic 4,000 meter peaks, either Pollux or Castor, "the twins". An overnight in the Val d'Ayas Hut (3425m) will help us to work on our acclimatization and allow easy access for the following day's climb.
- Day 3** Another day, and another enjoyable ascent of a 4,000 feet. Either climb the second twin or a more difficult route, the "Half Breithorn". This partial traverse of the Breithorn involves a steeper snow/ice approach with an airy rock ridge traverse to the summit. Only members with previous experience on rock will want to tackle this option. The guides can accommodate all interests and abilities and usually split up for different climbs. Descend to Zermatt, and overnight at the Alpenblick.
- Day 4** After breakfast, the group will travel by train to Interlaken then on to Lauterbrunnen and switch to a cog rail train for the last leg up to the high alpine village of Wengen, Switzerland (near Grindelwald). We'll walk up the hill to our hotel, and enjoy a drink out on the terrace before dinner. Overnight at hotel.
- Day 5** Cog rail train ride on the world's highest railroad from Wengen to Kleine Scheidegg, then upwards through the world famous tunnel bored through the Eiger to the Jungfrauoch, at 11,333'. After touring the Jungfrauoch, we'll take a short 30 minute hike on a groomed snow trail to the Monchjochhutte (11,903'), our lodging for the night.
- Day 6** Pre dawn wakeup to climb the Jungfrau (13,642'). The ascent involves a long, easy glacier approach, then a spectacular summit of mixed snow and rock scrambling. This is a full and strenuous 8-hour day. We will return to the Jungfrauoch and ride the train down to Wengen for a celebration dinner and night at the hotel.
- Day 7** Train ride to Chamonix, France, with the afternoon available to stroll the streets of Chamonix. Overnight in hotel.
- Day 8** Ride the telepherique to the top of the Aiguille du Midi (12,333'), one of the world's most spectacular gondola rides to a facility perched on the very top of a lofty rock spire. We will spend some time here taking in the awe inspiring scenery, with views of the Mont Blanc Massif and all the way down into Italy. We'll walk out of a tunnel carved through the rock, rope up, then make an airy descent to the glacier plateau just below. A 45 minute hike brings us to the Cosmiques Hut, our lodging for the evening. If time permits we'll take a short hike across from the hut to do some training on ice.
- Day 9** Summit day. This will be a long, arduous 12-hour day, with a pre-dawn wake up. We will traverse the Mont Blanc massif climbing over Mont Blanc du Tacul, Mont Maudit, and on to the summit of Mont Blanc (15,771'). From the summit, we'll descend via another route, most commonly the Gouter Route, and down to town or the lowest hut possible for the evening.
- Option for Day 8 and 9:** In some years, or after new snow, the traverse is not safely climbable. An alternate climb can be made up the standard route, via the Gouter Hut.
- Day 10** Descend to Chamonix. Free day and an evening to celebrate.
- Day 11** Optional storm day for Mont Blanc. We can spend an additional night on the mountain if weather requires a storm day. If we have good success on Mont Blanc, today can be used as a sightseeing/shopping day or the guides will lead a fun day climb out of the Valley for those who have energy left. There are countless options.
- Day 12** a.m. departure via train to Geneva, end of trip.

Non-climbing Spouse Additions to the Group Itinerary

- Day 0** Same as group itinerary.
- Day 1** You will definitely want to ride with the group up to the Kleine Matterhorn. After seeing the team off you will want to ride the elevator up to the observation deck on the top of the Kleine Matterhorn. You'll be able to watch the group head out on the glacier and then enjoy the magnificent view. In addition to the close-by Matterhorn, on a clear day you can see Mont Blanc and a 360 degree panorama of the Alps. Then time to ride back down to Zermatt, have lunch at an outdoor restaurant and do some sightseeing in town.
- Day 2** A good day to say goodbye to the group as they depart in the morning, then take off on a local excursion. Recommendations include riding the Gornergrat cog rail train up to Gornergrat, another must-see view point and destination. If you are feeling adventurous, you can hike all the way back down to Zermatt in a couple of hours. Be sure to stop at one of the beer gardens along the way for refreshments. The Hotel Alpenblick is very helpful and solicitous of those staying in town while our group is away for the night. It might be comfortable to eat dinner "in house" at the Hotel restaurant this evening. Those feeling more adventurous can have their pick of eating establishments simply by walking back a short ways into the heart of Zermatt.
- Day 3** Another good excursion while the group is away is a moderate hike up valley to the small village of Zmutt. There are many good views of the Matterhorn on this walk in a pleasant pastoral setting. The early afternoon is a good time to take care of any shopping or gift buying you intend to do. Then have a drink out on the Hotel terrace and greet the group as they arrive back at the Hotel.
- Day 4** Same as group itinerary.
- Day 5** I would highly recommend accompanying the group to the Jungfrauoch and spending the night with them at the Monchjoch hut. This is a very easy half-hour hike over a snow trail groomed by a machine for hikers to follow. An overnight at this hut will give you an idea of what the huts are like throughout the Alps. Usually very neat and clean with a large common dining area. The sleeping rooms adjoining a common hallway are very Spartan with two tiers of padded bunks. Each space is provided two blankets and a pillow. At almost 12,000 feet, you will not sleep very well, nor will anyone else.
- Day 6** For this reason, you will want to descend to Wengen the next morning for a shower and a nice day in town. It is very reasonable to hike down alone to the train station and ride back down to Wengen after breakfast. The hotel will be expecting you. You can spend the rest of the day touring town, or there are several options involving travel by cograil train, gondola or foot:
- 1) Ride the cog rail train down to the valley floor, then the funicular back up the other side of the valley to the village of Murren and its breathtaking views.
 - 2) Ride the cog rail train up to Grindelwald then hike back down to Wengen for a casual lunch in one of the outdoor cafes.
 - 3) Hop the Mannlichen cable car up to the Lauberhorn for some hiking and photography.
- Whatever you choose, be sure to return to the hotel by mid-afternoon to meet the team out on the terrace as they arrive back from their triumphs. We'll all dine out on the town this night.
- Day 7** Same as group itinerary.
- Day 8** Definitely ride the gondola up to the top of the Aiguille du Midi. Spend a bit of time at the top with your spouse, then consider taking the cable car over into Italy for lunch (be sure to bring your passport). A hiking option involves riding the gondola part way back down to Chamonix, and getting off at the Plan de L'Aiguille. Hike down 5 minutes from the station to a rustic hut, the Refuge du Plan and enjoy an outdoor lunch as you gaze down at Chamonix far below. You may either opt to ride back down to town, or hike the easy Grand Balcon Nord trail high above the valley floor to the Mer de Glace glacier and its exhibits. Ride the train back to town.
- Day 9** A good day for shopping and exploring town. This is the place to do your major gift shopping In the bustling town of Chamonix. During the day, pick out the most charming restaurant to dine at that night, or have a cozy meal at the hotel and call it an early day.
- Day 10** The group will return early in the day. Let them get showered and then take them around town and show them what you have discovered. We will enjoy a dinner of typical French cuisine at one of the many restaurants in town.
- Day 11** A day of sightseeing, shopping or hiking with the members who choose to stay in town this day.
- Day 12** Train to Geneva, end of trip.

Alps Programs Required Personal Equipment List

- Boots: Rigid, insulated, lug-sole climbing boots. One of the new insulated, rigid soled leather/synthetic boots is perhaps best, but a plastic double boot will work as well.
- Socks: 2 changes of heavy wool or synthetic, with liners
- Gaiters: ankle length works well and looks more European
- Longjohns: Synthetic tops and bottoms
- Pants: Synthetic stretch climbing pants (Schoeller fabric) or light fleece
- Rain pants: Lightweight, waterproof/breathable with full length zippers to go on over boots and crampons
- Shirt: Expedition weight top (100 weight "Polartec" or light fleece)
- Fleece or soft shell jacket
- Rain/wind shell: Waterproof/breathable jacket with hood
- Warm parka: Down or synthetic filled with hood – should not be expedition weight. A sewn through down sweater or synthetic insulated jacket will do.
- Hat: Wool or fleece
- Sun hat or baseball hat
- Gloves: 2 pair. Gore-Tex ski gloves or fleece lined climbing gloves are best, along with a pair of lighter wool or synthetic gloves.
- Mittens: (optional) fleece or synthetic insulation with storm proof over shells
- Ice axe: 50-60 cm. preferred with a wrist leash
- Crampons: 12 point, reasonably sharp
- Seat harness
- Carabiners: One locking and two non-locking
- Climbing helmet UIAA rated climbing helmet
- Headlamp: Bring extra set of batteries and extra bulb. Flashlight is insufficient
- Sunglasses: Very dark, with side shields. Spare pair recommended
- Water bottles: 2 one-quart, wide mouth, plastic bottles
- Sun cream: And lip balm, SPF 15 or higher
- Pack: Internal frame pack with capacity of 30-35 liters (1800-2200 cubic inches) – NOT an expedition sized pack
- One (1) collapsible 3-section ski pole
- First aid kit: Each individual should carry a small personal first aid kit to avoid depletion of the group kit. Consider the following items: aspirin or Tylenol; ibuprofen; antacid (Pepto Bismol, Rolaids, etc.); Band-aids; athletic tape; moleskin or Compede.
- Hiking shorts
- T-shirts
- Lightweight toilet kit

Optional items:

- Small digital camera for the climbs
- Neck gaiter Or light balaclava
- Ski goggles
- Ear plugs: For those nights in the huts

“Every time I go on one of George Dunn's expeditions, I come back saying, 'that was the best adventure I've ever been on'!!!...”

—Bruce G.

For more comments from IMG climbers, please see our website at: www.mountainguides.com/comments.shtml
