The Tour de Mont Blanc
The Classic European Hike – France, Switzerland, Italy
Sunday July 25 – Friday August 6 2021 (trip #2146)

OVERVIEW

Join us for the classic Tour de Mont Blanc (“TMB”), a ten-day circular trekking route (plus one rest day) around the base of Mont Blanc in France, Italy, and Switzerland. The trip is rated 6: Strenuous which is the most physically demanding with hikes up to 15+ miles, and over 5,000’ of elevation gain and/or loss on some days (not all days). We have baggage transport most days so our packs will average 15 – 18 lbs including lunch and water. There is no climb of Mont Blanc itself. The classic route is around the mountain and surrounding peaks. The route is fluid, changing some each year and with many “variantes” along the way. We occasionally take cable cars or other transportation, so this trip is not a “Purist’s” TMB for those who feel the need to step on every bit of trail. But, by the end of our 11 days we close the circle and can truly say that we hiked the beautiful Tour of Mont Blanc!

We hike from hotel to hotel or pension or refuge. Typically, we sleep in small villages in the valleys (with one night at back country refuges). We hike up and down high passes or high points most days as we pass from valley to valley. Most of our hiking is on trails, but at times there may be road-walking, ski lifts, cable cars, buses and/or taxis. It is important all group members be in good hiking condition for this trip. Strenuous terrain (lots of elevation gain and loss), and hiking at a moderate pace for 10 days, with the need to keep on schedule for lodging and logistical reasons, means every group member needs recent multi-day hiking/trekking experience. Over the 10 days, we hike 100+
miles and 35,000’+ feet of cumulative elevation gain and loss – quite a lot of up and down! While some days are less strenuous, we do have some hikes of 13-15 or even as much as 17 (optional) miles, and elevation changes (up and/or down in the same day) of over 5,000 feet. We carry day packs as we do have luggage transfer for all but one night. Typically, our packs will weigh about 15 – 18 pounds – more than a typical daypack, but lots lighter than for a similar length backpacking trip.

Our travel arrangements facilitate a unique exposure to this remarkable area:

- English-speaking guide throughout. Malcolm, our guide, is from England, but has lived in France for over 20 years.
- Custom itinerary based on the classic “Tour de Mont Blanc”.
- One night at Refugio Bonatti in Italy
- Rest day in Courmayeur, Italy to take the Monte Bianco Skyway high speed tram high above the glacier with amazing views to Mont Blanc.

**Resources:** Kev Reynold’s book “Trekking the Tour of Mont Blanc”, published by Cicerone Press, is a great hiker’s reference for this trek. The book describes each daily stage of the trek in detail. While our itinerary varies slightly from his stages, in general we follow his counter-clockwise description of the trek. This book is a great pre-trek read and is also available as an e-book including on the Kindle app for smartphones, which is a great way to bring it on the trek without weighing down your pack. The website [http://www.autourdumontblanc.com/en/](http://www.autourdumontblanc.com/en/) has interesting information and resources about the TMB, including information on some of our huts and hotels.

**Daily Itinerary** Please note times listed are estimated hiking time. Our time on the trail may be up to 2 hours longer adding in photos, meals, etc. This itinerary is subject to change due to safety, transportation or lodging availability, and unforeseeable circumstances such as weather, natural disasters in areas to be visited, or recommendations of governmental agencies. The leader reserves the right to make such changes as necessary, both before and during the trip. All lodging is subject to confirmation/alteration (it can be difficult to get preferred lodging on the TMB 😞).

**Day 0, Saturday July 24 - Depart USA:** (usually on an overnight flight to Geneva, Switzerland, often via Zurich). Do not purchase flights until you have been advised the trip is a definite “go”, and have been given specific arrival and departure time parameters.
Day 1, Sunday July 25 - Arrive Geneva, Switzerland airport; Van or shuttle bus transfer to Les Houches, France: Group orientation meeting tentatively at 5 PM. There is a supermarket down the street from the hotel, where you should buy items for tomorrow’s trail lunch and possibly for two days trail lunch. There is a smaller market/bakery in tomorrow night’s village, but it is more limited. If you arrive outside of the group transfer time parameters (because of the flight you purchase, or delays en route), you will be responsible to get to the hotel on your own.


Meals included: Evening meal

Day 2, Monday July 26 - To Les Contamines (France): 9 miles, 5 hrs, 2200 ft ascent; 4300 ft descent

Walk up the street to the Bellevue Cable car, which we take up to Bellevue (1800 m), cross suspension bridge at nose of Bionnassy Glacier and pass Refuge de Miage before descent to Les Contamines village.


Meals included: Breakfast and Evening Meal

Day 3, Tuesday July 27 – To Chapieux (France): 13 miles, 7 hrs, 4600 ft ascent; 3400 ft descent

A long well graded climb through alpine meadows.


Meals included: Breakfast and Evening Meal

Day 4, Wednesday July 28 To Courmayeur (Italy): Possibly Two Options:  
11 miles, 5 ½ hrs. 2700 ft. ascent; 3100 ft. descent or,  
17 miles, 8 ½ hrs. 3900 ft. ascent; 5800 ft. descent

A short bus ride and then a climb to the Col de la Seigne, crossing in to Italy and down to La Visaille where it is possible to catch a bus to Courmayeur or, for some, perhaps, to hike direct via Plan Chécrouit. There are some small markets and bakeries to shop for lunch/snacks.


Meals Included: Breakfast.
Day 5, Thursday July 29  A day off in Courmayeur

We’ll take the Monte Bianco Skyway high speed, two stage tram [http://www.montebianco.com/en/](http://www.montebianco.com/en/) which gets us high above a glacier with amazing views over to Mont Blanc (or, Monte Bianco on this Italian side of the mountain!). If the weather is clear, we will see the Matterhorn in the distance.

**Lodging:**  Hotel Crampon B&B founded and still run by the Grivel family, makers of mountaineering crampons! Private en suite twin rooms.  [http://www.crampon.it/datapage.asp?id=32&l=3](http://www.crampon.it/datapage.asp?id=32&l=3)

*Meals included: Breakfast*

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Day 6, Friday July 30  To Refugio Bonatti (Italy):

10 miles, 5 ½ hrs, 3600 ft ascent; 2800 ft descent

A short bus ride, then a gentle climb to the Refuge Bertone with great views over to the Mont Blanc massif. We then turn north-east up the Mont de la Saxe with time to include a TMB variant to the summit of the Testa della Tronche from where there is a stupendous panoramic view before continuing on to the refuge situated at an altitude of nearly 7300 ft.

**Lodging:**  Refugio Bonatti, Aosta valley.  Large public dorm rooms with shared co-ed bathroom facilities, possibly private rooms, shared facilities.  [https://www.rifugiobonatti.it/?lang=en](https://www.rifugiobonatti.it/?lang=en)

*Meals included: Breakfast and Evening Meal*

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Day 7, Saturday July 31  To La Fouly (Switzerland):

12 miles, 6 hrs, 3100 ft ascent; 4600 ft descent

After descending from the refuge to the road-head at Arnuva (small café/auzergue with great coffee and cake and bathrooms!), we then hike up to the Grand Col Ferret, the highest point of the official TMB & then into Switzerland.

**Lodging:**  Hotel Edelweiss private en suite twin rooms.  [https://www.fouly.ch/en/](https://www.fouly.ch/en/)

*Meals included: Breakfast and Evening meal.*
Day 8, Sunday August 1 To Champex (Switzerland): 10 miles, 5 hrs, 1500 ft ascent; 1900 ft descent.

A gentle day passing through some delightful Swiss villages arriving in time to explore the lakeside village.

**Lodging:** Hotel Les Glaciers, Champex
Private en suite twin rooms. [http://www.hotelglacier.ch](http://www.hotelglacier.ch)

**Meals Included:** Breakfast and evening meal.

Day 9, Monday August 2 To the village of Trient (Switzerland): Two options:
1. 14 miles, 6 ½ hrs. Total 2900 ft ascent; 3500 ft descent OR
2. 10 miles, 6 ½ hrs. Total 3900 ft ascent; 4500 ft descent

An easy day Via the Col de Bovine with a delightful extension along a water channel towards the Glacier de Trient OR we can take the famous & magnificent, but more difficult, Fenêtre d'Arpette.


**Meals Included:** Breakfast and evening meal.

Day 10, Tuesday August 3 To Argentière (France):
11 miles, 5 ½ hours. Total ascent 3600 ft. Descent 3700 ft. OR, via the Aiguillettes de Posettes
11 miles, 6 hours. Total ascent 4200 ft. Descent 4300 ft

Climbing through forest and then stunning views above the Col de Balme, the border between Switzerland and France, and then on to the Col de Posettes before an interesting descent to Argentière.


**Meals Included:** Breakfast and evening meal.
Day 11, Wednesday August 4 To Chamonix: 9 miles, 5 hrs, 3200 ft. ascent; 1700 ft. descent.

A short bus ride to Tré-le-Champ before ascending to the "Grand Balcon Sud" with unforgettable views across to the Mont Blanc massif. Some ladders to climb today and using the Flégère cable-car for descent into the valley.


Meals Included: Breakfast and evening meal.

Day 12, Thursday August 5 To Les Houches: 12 miles, 7 hrs, 2900 ft. ascent; 5800 ft. descent

Our last hiking day we use the cable-car back up to Flégère to continue up to pass Mount Brevent before a long descent back to the village of Les Houches, our starting point and ending point and completion of the TMB.


Meals included: Breakfast and evening meal

Day 13 Friday August 6 Les Houches: Trip concludes after breakfast

Departure. Van or bus transfer from Les Houches to Geneva, Switzerland Airport. You will be provided time parameters for flight departure, to match our shared group bus/van transfer to the airport.

Meals Included: Breakfast.

PARTICIPANT PROFILE, GROUP EXPECTATIONS, AND SHARED LODGING

This trip is rated a difficulty of 6: Strenuous hiking which is the most physically demanding. Expect to be active 6+ hours per day for back-to-back days. To fully participate in this group experience, you must enjoy strenuous hiking with a lot of elevation gain and loss, as part of a group. Expected group size is 10-11 trekkers, including your AMC Adventure Travel leader and professional guide. Recent multi-day hiking experience, good physical fitness, and ability to maintain a moderate pace at altitude are important. Our hiking days vary but we have days with elevation gain (and/or loss) over 5,000’ and some distances of 15 miles. Although the hotels and refuges supply bedding so there is no need
to carry a sleeping bag or sleep sack, still your backpack will weigh between 15-18 pounds including water and lunch.

A good attitude, friendly and cooperative manner, and interest in getting to know – and maybe even help – your fellow group members and leaders are key to a great experience for everyone. Our lodging includes twin rooms with beds very close to each other, large dormitories with no privacy and co-ed bathrooms. We cannot provide guarantees of a non-snoring room-mate, quiet room, etc, so a sense of humor will help tremendously with your trip experience.

When you participate in this activity, you should be in proper condition for the challenges outlined in this prospectus and equipped with the appropriate gear as stated. You should always be aware of the risks involved and conduct yourself accordingly. You are ultimately responsible for your own safety. Prior to your acceptance as a participant in this trip, you will be asked to discuss your capabilities and experience with us. We also request references to confirm your fitness level and suitability for participating in trip activities. This trip is designed so everyone experiences our adventure of the TMB through shared participation in activities and tasks in an organized group environment. AMC travelers are known for cooperative efforts, and expectations are that all participants will be considerate of others sharing this AMC Adventure Travel experience.

**LODGING AND MEALS**

As mentioned above, you will be in shared lodging. You will be assigned a room-mate unless you sign up with someone. Your room-mate will be of the same gender, unless you agree to share with someone of the opposite gender. Much of the trip we will have twin rooms, two people per room with separate beds and a private, en suite bathroom with shower. However in Europe, usually the two twin beds are pushed right up against each other so it’s quite cozy (sometimes you can pull the beds a bit apart, sometimes you cannot). In dormitories, beds or mattresses are also usually right in a row, no space in between beds, with shared co-ed bathroom/shower facilities a short walk away (sometimes even in a different building). We cannot accommodate special requests such as single room, non-snoring room-mate, etc. Bringing ear plugs is a great idea!

Our meals will vary by location/day and by meal.

**Breakfasts:** Always included. However please note that European breakfasts provided are much lighter than a typical American breakfast, sometimes a problem because of strenuous hikes. Usually there will be cereal, bread and/or pastries, often cheese, sometimes sliced meat. Rarely eggs or hot food. We suggest you look for what is offered that is more filling and has higher protein (for example, muesli rather than white toast) where there are choices. Carry some filling or high protein snacks for a mid-morning pick-me-up (or carry a large lunch and split it into late morning and mid-afternoon trail meals).

**Lunches:** We are building in the possibility for some group French picnic lunches depending if the group is so inclined and it works out, however, in general lunches are “on your own” and not provided. You will buy and carry lunches yourself. Most days there are bakeries or markets to shop the night prior. As noted in the prospectus, in some locations you may need to purchase enough for two days when we go into more remote areas. In some locations you can order a trail lunch the evening before (more often in refuges than in hotels).

**Snacks:** You can buy snacks at local markets most, but not all, days.

**Dinners:** Dinners are provided/included with the exception of two nights where dinner is not included. This is in locations where it may be fun for the entire group or sub-groups to explore local restaurants outside our lodging, on your own schedule and expense. When dinner is included (listed in the prospectus), usually it is a set menu and is included because there aren’t many nearby options this time of year. Vegetarians and vegans may find dinners lighter on protein than at home, so carrying a protein bar, nuts, or other high protein snack can be useful to supplement.
**Special diets:** We have less control over the menu than in some areas of the world. Vegetarian diet can be accommodated, but carrying some protein bars or snacks is a good supplement some days. Strict vegan diet is difficult to accommodate and protein sources other than grains will be difficult. Gluten free diets also are difficult in this land of breads and grains, but can be requested. Any food allergies or strict dietary restrictions need to be discussed prior to signing up for this trip, to decide whether they can be reasonably accommodated.

**SAFETY AND RISKS**

Participant safety is a high priority for all AMC-sponsored events. Participants should be aware that there are risks associated with outdoor adventure activities, including but not limited to adverse weather and environmental conditions, remote locations of our trips, and transportation in vehicles or on foot. Aside from any personal medical problems, participants should be aware of the possibilities of bug bites, dehydration, sunburn and other heat or cold related problems. You should regularly use sunscreen, take care to be adequately hydrated and bring water on all day trips.

Nonetheless, it may happen on any trip that a trip member is or becomes unable to participate in one or more of the planned activities. Leaders in their sole judgment have the right and obligation to refuse participation in any activity to any group member for reasons of group or individual safety. Illness, injury or lack of proper gear or fitness for a particular activity are examples of some conditions that might result in a participant’s being unable to perform one or more activity. Leaders may try to find a substitute activity for the trip member, but this may not always be possible. In some locations, public transportation may be available to the group’s next destination, but in other locations this may not be possible. Participants may incur costs of transportation and lodging if they need to skip a section or section(s) of trail due to inability to fully participate in the group hike on any day(s).

Prior to your being accepted as a participant in this trip, you will be asked to discuss your capabilities and experience with us. Please do not be offended by our questions.

Please carefully read and sign the AMC Participant Acknowledgement and Assumption of Risks and Release and Indemnity Agreement.

**AMC MISSION**

AMC Adventure Travel trips are run in a manner supportive of and consistent with the conservation, recreational and educational principles and mission of the Club. Trip leaders encourage participant conduct consistent with Leave No Trace environmental and conservation principles and local regulations.

**TRIP PRICE**

The trip price is $4,140 for AMC members and $4,240 for non-members. Non-members can join and get the member price for $50 for an individual or $75 for a family, or $25 for juniors (under 30) and seniors (over 69). You can join on line at the AMC membership page at [www.outdoors.org/get-involved/join](http://www.outdoors.org/get-involved/join).

Deposit of $1,000 is due with application. A check payable to the Appalachian Mountain Club should be sent to: Jeanne Blauner, 509 Neck Road, Unit 1, Lancaster, MA 01523. The balance of $3,140 ($3,200 for non-members) is due by February 1, 2021.

The price will be adjusted in accordance with the best final arrangements we can make and currency fluctuations. Any savings we achieve as well as cost increases, will be passed back to you. Our cost estimates are conservative, and so a refund is considerably more likely than a price increase. AMC
Adventure Travel trips are run on a non-profit basis and refunds, if any, are issued after the trip’s financial accounting is complete.

The trip price covers the following items:

- Lodging, all breakfasts and most dinners (all but two)
- Baggage transfer each day with the exception of day 4 (Chapieux) and Day 7 (Refuge Bonatti).
- Ground transfer from Geneva airport to Les Houches and return (only for those arriving/departing within time parameters given by the leaders)
- Cable car fees and bus fare when part of the group itinerary
- Emergency medical and evacuation insurance coverage

Lunches, trail snacks, beverages (e.g. coffee/tea, mineral water, alcohol, etc.) and other personal expenses are NOT included with the possible exception of a possible french picnic lunch or two or three, group dependent and interest.

The best way to get to the area is to fly to Geneva, Switzerland. At this time, we estimate that the price for a round trip between USA East coast and Geneva, Switzerland will be ~ $1000 - $1,400. While participant airfare is not included in the trip price, leaders may assist participants in making suitable reservations. At a minimum, participants will be told when and where they must join the group for the official start of the trip’s planned activities. Once your air tickets are purchased they are your responsibility – do not make any non-refundable travel plans until told to do so by the leaders.

Please be aware that, in accordance with AMC policy, you are subsidizing the volunteer leaders’ costs. Beyond this, the leaders do not realize any profit from this excursion. The trip price also includes an AMC overhead fee to cover the administrative expenses of offering Adventure Travel excursions. The trip fee includes emergency medical and evacuation insurance coverage, which is required by the AMC. It does not include insurance for travel delay, interruption, or cancellation, or for baggage loss. If these possibilities concern you, individual travel insurance is recommended. More information about included emergency medical and evacuation insurance, as well as about optional and recommended travel insurance, will be provided to participants in their formal acceptance letters, which will be sent out when the trip has the required number of accepted applicants.

REGISTRATION

We expect a group size of 9 participants plus our leader for 10 plus our professional guide for 11 total. This trip is likely to fill quickly. If you are interested, you should apply as soon as possible.

To apply, please fill out the Application Form at this link [https://forms.gle/rdydufiyYTxrndK9](https://forms.gle/rdydufiyYTxrndK9) and follow the instructions.

You will not be accepted and your check will not be deposited until the leader has checked your references and determined by telephone conversation with you, that you and the trip are a good match. You will be formally accepted, and your check will be deposited, when the trip leaders confirm the trip has sufficient number of participants and is going as planned. Deposit checks from wait-listed applicants will not be cashed until we offer them a spot on the trip AND they accept.

TRIP CANCELLATION POLICY

The AMC Adventure Travel cancellation policy is based on the fact that your cancellation may not raise the cost to the other participants or to the leaders. Once you are notified the trip is declared to run as scheduled, the minimum cancellation fee is $200. If actual costs (expenses already incurred on your behalf and any unavoidable future expenses that will be incurred as a result of your registration and cancellation) are higher, they will be assessed instead, unless they can be applied toward another acceptable participant. Should the leaders be able to replace you, you may be
charged a reduced penalty. This will generally not be determined until after the trip. Failure to make trip payment(s) in a timely manner will be considered a cancellation.

On rare occasions AMC Adventure Travel may need to cancel all or a portion of a trip due to force majeure [e.g. terrorism, local health conditions, natural disaster, changes in local regulatory environment, etc.] In the event of such a cancellation, your trip fee will be refunded less any trip expenses already incurred plus any non-cancellable future trip expenditures. AMC Adventure Travel is not responsible for additional expenses incurred by you in preparing for the trip (including non-refundable air tickets, visa fees, gear or medical expenses, etc.

QUESTIONS
If you have questions, please contact Jeanne at the phone number or email address below.

TRIP LEADER – JEANNE BLAUNER

Jeanne has been leading outdoor adventures for over 40 years for AMC and Sierra Club among other groups. Jeanne is a backcountry leader with the AMC Boston Family Outings leading hiking, camping, canoe, and winter trips. Jeanne is past Chair of AMC Boston Family Outings and former Boston Chapter Membership Chair. She joined AMC Adventure Travel in 2014 and has led AT trips to the Jungfrau region in Switzerland, Machu Picchu, Morocco, New Zealand, and Fiji-Tonga. In addition, Jeanne has led over 30 national & international weeklong Sierra Club trips since 1980 including the Dolomites in Italy, the Dordogne region in France, and the Austrian Alps. Jeanne can be reached at: 978-202-5606; jablauner@comcast.net, 509 Neck Road Unit 1, Lancaster, MA. 01523

GUIDE

Malcolm, our guide, is originally from England, but has lived in France in the Pyrenees over 20 years. Malcolm is a UK Certified Mountain Leader who has been leading groups since 1994 and delights in showing people the areas he loves. Malcolm speaks fluent French and has an insider’s knowledge of the best hikes, local flora and fauna, and the area history and customs. Malcolm will join us at the start in Les Houches and stay on with us until the end of the trip, breakfast Day 14 in Les Houches.