

ALPINE COURSES AND GUIDING - DETAILS

1. Guides

Alpine tuition and guiding will be directed by myself.

2. Preparation

It would be beneficial to have:

- (a) become reasonably fit by doing some general hill walking and possibly some cycling, jogging or running.
- (b) acquired some familiarity with ropework techniques.

We use techniques in the Alps which may not be familiar even if you are a regular climber, for example moving together. You may wish to consider an Alpine Preparation Course to get some practice in advance, and in any case we recommend that you read an instructional book such as "The Handbook of Climbing" by A. Fyffe and I. Peter. (Pelham Books).

3. Budget

I generally use credit cards for most purchases and take out some cash. There are cash machines in most resorts including Saas Grund and Chamonix, so it's worth bringing a debit card to obtain Euros or Francs.

In addition to the course fees, you could expect to spend the following

Accommodation in the valley	Please see the links below for a range of prices Gites or camping offer cheaper alternative to hotels
Hotels	Typically €70-€100 B&B for 2 people in a twin/double www.hotel-du-bois.com www.etoile-des-neiges.fr/English/index.asp www.hotellesmelezes.com
Gite	www.gite-fagot.com
Camp Sites	www.chamonix.net/english/accommodation/camping.htm
Mountain Huts	
Hut fees full price	€50-€60 per night Dinner B&B
Hut fees with reciprocal rights	€40-€45 per night Dinner B&B
Cable cars and travel	Very variable depending on your itinerary. Please ask if you need a detailed estimate.
Chamonix Valley lift info	Typically £50 to £100 per week www.chamonix.net/english/chamonix/lift_systems.htm

Of course you also need to budget for travel to the Alps, your insurance, new equipment (!) and for your food. It is no problem to buy your food locally, but it's worth bringing hill food for the first few days if possible in case the shops are shut when you arrive. If travelling by car you may find it convenient to bring supplies from home rather than spend time shopping when on holiday, but these days, prices aren't too high for shopping in supermarkets even in the mountain villages.

The course fee includes IFMGA/BMG qualified instruction and guiding, car journeys normally necessary for the proposed itinerary and use of technical equipment. It does not include your accommodation and food, holiday insurance, travel to the Alps, airport transfers or out of the ordinary car journeys. You pay for expenses such as hut fees and meals, telepheriques, trains, buses, road tolls and parking fees for yourself and for me (ie my guiding expenses). If a night is spent away from my normal valley accommodation it will be treated as a guiding expense. You provide your own personal gear as per the equipment list.

4. British Mountaineering Council membership and Reciprocal Rights Card

I recommend anyone interested in mountains and mountaineering to join the BMC. It is the body set up to represent and safeguard the interests of all mountain goers, and membership gives access to many services and benefits. Visit their website for full info www.thebmc.co.uk (tel. 0161 445 6111). You need to be a BMC member to buy the Reciprocal Rights Card and to take out BMC insurance.

Members of the UIAA (Union Internationale des Associations Alpinisme), of which the BMC is one, have negotiated a scheme under which members of the National Mountaineering Councils may buy a hut card which entitles them to a substantial reduction in the price of staying in huts, (usually about 50%). These cards are available from the BMC. It should be noted that at current rates the card becomes cost effective if you stay more than about five nights in huts. You are unlikely to break even unless you spend more than two weeks in the Alps. Please contact the BMC for full details.

Also note that you might be able to obtain discounts with other club cards you already possess, namely an Alpine Club card or the standard BMC membership card.

5. European Health Insurance Card (EHIC)

The UK has reciprocal health service agreements with most European countries, under which visiting nationals can get free or reduced cost emergency medical treatment. Patients may still have to pay for the medical care, which they receive, but can obtain a refund when they return to their own countries. The European Health Insurance Card (which replaces the old form E111) can be applied for at a Post Office or from the DSS. It entitles the holder to claim a refund, but it must be obtained before the overseas visit is made. **It is likely that your travel insurance will not pay out for any unnecessary medical expenses incurred if you fail to obtain a card.**

The procedure for obtaining a refund is different from country to country and it is important to be familiar with the correct procedure for the countries you visit or travel through. For example, if you present your card to a hospital in France BEFORE you receive treatment, it could mean you only pay the reduced fee and avoid the hassle of having to claim money back. Also, if you do need to apply for a refund you should do so whilst still in France.

Reciprocal rights are now available in Switzerland as well as the EEA countries. Form E111s will cease to be valid from 1 January 2006, when the European Health Insurance card will replace them. UK issue of these new cards started in 2005.

Full information can be obtained in a leaflet from the Post Office "Health advice for Travellers" (also available free by ringing 0800 555 777). It is also available and kept constantly updated at www.dh.gov.uk/travellers or on pages 460 to 464 of CEEFAX.

You still need to take out medical cover as part of your travel insurance, since the reciprocal rights will not usually refund the full cost of your treatment. Also, it is likely your insurance company will pay up front for any large hospital bills, sparing you the financial worry in an emergency situation.

6. Travel

Most people either fly or drive to the Alps these days. Driving is most likely to be cheaper if there are 2 or more of you travelling together, and the car is an advantage if you will not be based in one place, or

if you are camping and have a lot of kit. If you are flying remember to take into account the time and cost of your transfer to the resort. It is worth considering hiring a car at the airport. If you do this at Geneva, hire the car on the French side – it's far cheaper! We've used and can recommend Nova RentaCar (Telephone +44 28 4272 8189 (International) 0800 018 6682 (Freephone in UK) Fax +44 (0)28 4272 9798 <http://www.rentacar-europe.com>). Also try <http://www.travelsupermarket.com/c/cheap-car-hire/>

I cross the Channel by Dover Calais ferry or the tunnel and allow one day to drive to the Alps. This is ample time to travel by the "routes nationale", which is slower but pleasant and avoids the hefty French motorway tolls. It is possible to drive to Switzerland and Austria via Brussels and Luxembourg using toll free motorways in France, Belgium and Germany. In Austria and Switzerland you have to buy a vignette (windscreen sticker) to use the motorways. In Italy there are tolls similar to the French system. Ring me if you need information on the route.

Flying is the best way to get to the Alps if time is limited. It's worth shopping around or using your air miles. Easyjet to Geneva is the most popular. Coming from the north of England, we've found flights from Manchester convenient for a little extra cost. It's cheaper to fly from Luton or Stansted, and recently we've found good deals flying into Basel. Transferring from Geneva to Chamonix can be problematical to say the least by public transport. We use www.chamexpress.com

Travel by coach is cheap and perfectly acceptable still, though people tend to use budget airlines nowadays. The real advantage of the coach is you can board it at London Victoria and get off in the centre of Chamonix, convenient if you live or work in London and can sleep on buses! Contact the BMC for details of current arrangements/discounts for members, or ring Eurolines direct on 01582 404511 for info on all their routes.

I've not travelled out by train because the other options above have always seemed a better bet. There are good, fast services to the Alps from London by TGV, but I think these are more set up for travel to ski resorts in winter.

It is worth enquiring about Swiss Rail Passes if you are going out by public transport and anticipate much travelling in Switzerland. There are various deals available. We have used the Swiss Card, which gives 24 hours free travel at the start and end of your trip and discounted travel on trains, buses and cable cars etc for the duration of your stay. The Swiss Card can be ordered in advance from the Swiss Travel Centre (allow at least a week) or bought at rail stations in Switzerland, including at Geneva Airport.

More information on Swiss Cards, and other aspects of travel in Switzerland, may be obtained from the Swiss Travel Centre, telephone: 020 7 420 4900, websites www.switzerlandtravelcentre.co.uk and (for bus/train timetables) www.rail.ch.

For information, timetables and railcards etc throughout Europe contact "RailEurope" [http://www.raileurope.co.uk/](http://www.raileurope.co.uk) telephone 08705 848848. You can buy tickets and Swiss Cards etc at their shop at 178 Piccadilly, London W1.

7. Accommodation

Camping is traditional and perfectly acceptable! Sites cannot normally be pre-booked and can be busy during the peak season, but this has not led to insurmountable problems in the past. The cost is from £35 to £50 per person per week depending on country, number of people sharing a tent, whether you've got a car etc.

Dormitory or hostel type accommodation is available in all the climbing areas. The cost is approximately £15 per night.

Self-catering apartments/studios are a very good option in France, where the availability is good.

Of course, hotels and guest houses are available everywhere.

8. Equipment

Ice-axe. For general mountaineering 50cm to 65cm in length with a curved pick is best.

Boots. Make sure your boots fit your feet! Rigid sole to take crampons (ie 3/4 or full metal shank).
Leather or plastic. See further notes below. Spare laces!

Crampons. With front points. Please ensure that your crampons fit your boots securely with the buckles on both sets of straps on the outside of the boot. Also make sure that the straps will not be too short when you have gaiters on. "Step-in" bindings on rigid boots are suitable providing they are adjusted correctly and have a safety strap around the ankle. Bring any spare screws, straps and tools you need to adjust them.

4 Karabiners (minimum), 2 should be screwgates

1 x 8ft tape sling

3 x 135cm 5mm/6mm line for prusik loops

Helmet

Sit Harness

Rucksack, medium size (approx 50 litres capacity), with waist/hip belt and compression straps for ice-axe attachment.

Cooking gear. Camping Gaz is almost universally available. Other brands, including gas in self-sealing containers is fairly easy to obtain. Methylated spirits (alcohol a bruler) and paraffin (petrole) are obtainable from drugstores and most supermarkets. In French huts, where individuals may usually cook their own food, wardens prefer gas to be used, due to the fire risk and smell from liquid fuels. In staffed Swiss huts, individual cooking is not usually allowed - the guardian will cook your own food, or you can buy a meal.

Bivi bag A poly bivi bag is best for emergencies. For a planned bivouac, a Goretex bivi bag plus sleeping bag is preferable.

Head torch, batteries and spare bulb

Water bottle, 1 litre

Glacier glasses/goggles, which should be capable of screening out maximum ultra violet light. Many ski goggles or sunglasses are not adequate.

Personal first aid-kit

Waterproof and windproof jacket and over trousers, light and breathable.

Climbing trousers, salopettes, breeches or tracksuit bottoms

Fleece or fibrepile jacket, jumpers or equivalent

Thermal underwear

Shorts and T-shirts

It is of course useful to have some spare clothes. Bring a range to suit from very good to very bad weather! There is normally opportunity to wash and dry clothes.

Gaiters

Socks, 2 sets

Gloves, 1 pair

Mitts, 1 pair

Warm hat/balaclava

Sun hat

Whistle

Compass

Watch

Penknife

Sunscreen - very strong sun protection cream essential on glaciers

Lip Salve

Camera and film

Training shoes

Washing kit

Towel

Mending kit

Sheet sleeping bag (for use with hut blankets).

Tent, sleeping bag, sleeping mat plus all usual camping equipment if camping.

Passport
Form EIII
BMC/BMG insurance or similar
Cash
(BMC Reciprocal Rights Card)

All technical equipment will be provided, but IF YOU ALREADY POSSESS IT, please bring what you have eg Ice hammer, slings, karabiners, belay plate, nuts, pegs, ice screws and other climbing hardware, rock boots, maps and climbing guidebooks. Ski sticks are an optional extra which many people like to have, especially for easier snow ascents and glacier treks. Choose 3 section collapsible type with baskets. They will save your knees and are good for balance when walking over hard terrain.

Equipment for hire and loan

Specialised items can be loaned. Ice tools and crampons are available for hire at £15/item/week with a deposit of £20/item fully refundable on its return. All equipment will be issued, and payment required, at the start of the course.

If you need to borrow or hire equipment, please phone to reserve it as early as possible. If you need any advice at all on choice or suitability of equipment, do not hesitate to phone me.

Further notes on boots

Essentially, the boots must have rigid soles which are stiff enough to take crampons: if the sole flexes more than the crampons there is a danger that they will fall off or break. It is also very difficult to "front point" in bendy boots.

If you need to obtain rigid boots, then a choice will have to be made between plastic and leather. Plastic boots are light and waterproof, but they have virtually no "give" in the uppers. This is fine for snow and ice, but below the snow line the feet can get squashed and blistered as well as overheated.

In the UK, this is not a problem, because distances covered below the snow line are not usually very long and are often soft and muddy. In the Alps, approach walks are often longer; one answer is to wear training shoes and carry boots in the rucksack.

The ultimate decision is a matter of personal preference. I like to use leather boots on rocky terrain, but prefer plastics on snow/ice, especially on cold 4000m peaks, or on routes with a lot of front pointing. I now use a stiff leather boot with a deep protective rand for virtually all my summer Alpine mountaineering.

ROBIN BEADLE, BARE SYKE, BACKBARROW, ULVERSTON, CUMBRIA LA12 8QF
tel. (015395) 31598 - email info@robinbeadle.com