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2024 WINTER MOUNTAINEERING

Level 1 - 2 in Alpinism

BEGINNERS IN WINTER MOUNTAINEERING

Mont Blanc is the best mountain to experience the world of winter alpinism. Mixed itineraries, snow and ice are the ideal terrains for those who want to move in the high mountains in winter.

This mountaineering course is designed for those who have no previous winter mountaineering experience or for those who want to brush up on their summer mountaineering knowledge by trying the experience of the winter high mountains.

LOCATION	**Mont Blanc Massif**
TECH LEVEL	**1**
DURATION	**4 days**
GROUPS	**2 peoples**
DATES	**01-11/14; 01-25/28. 02-08/11; 02-22/25**

THE PROGRAM

DAY 0.

Around 6.30pm: Briefing with Guide

Your guide will run through safety routines and kit checks, as well as hand out rental equipment for the week, before we go on to a detailed discussion of everyones ambitions for the week. Overnight in the valley.

DAY 1.

9.00am – 3.30pm: Introduction to Rock Climbing

Move to a local valley crag and do some top roped climbing with an introduction to basic climbing and ropework techniques. Practice abseiling. Most likely venues are the famous valley crags of the Courmayeur Valley e.g "Palestra Adriano Jordaney". Around 3.00 PM transfer to Courmayeur. Overnight in the valley

DAY 2.

9.00am – 3.00pm: Glacier Training around to Punta Helbronner 3462m

Essential snow and ice training, including crampon and ice axe skills, glacier travel and crevasse rescue – taught on the Glacier du Geant. These essential snow and ice skills are best learned on an accessible glacier.To start the day we look at roping up for glacier travel, practicing knots and ropework before travelling across the glacier to a suitable training venue, practicing how to negotiate crevasses and other hazards along the way. Overnight in the valley.

DAY 3.

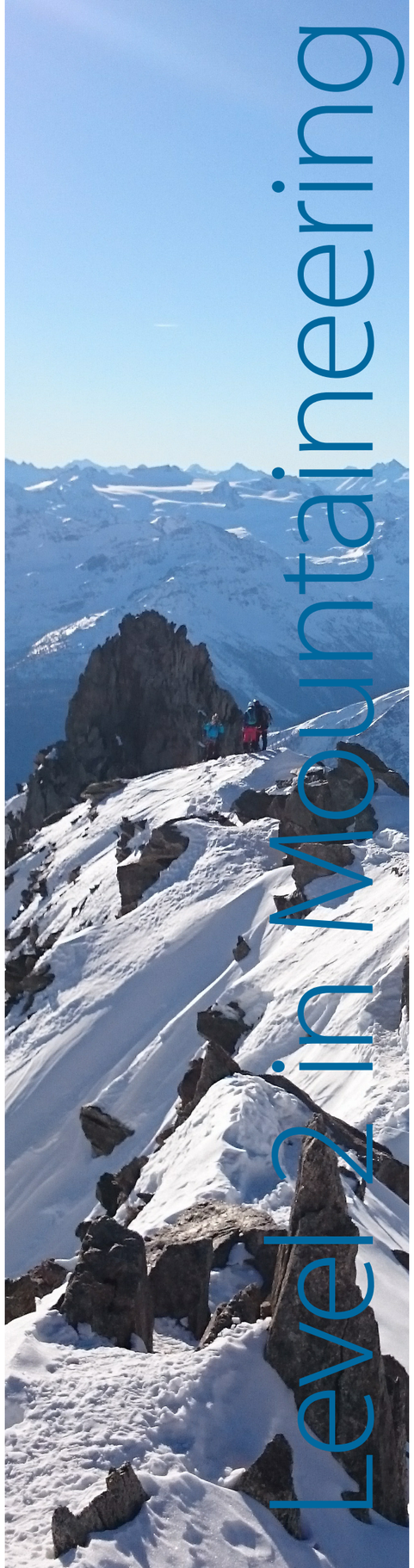
9.00am – 4.00pm: Aiguille du Toula 3534 mt normal route

Classic first alpine summit, with spectacular views across the central heart Mont Blanc Range.The Aiguille du Toula itself is a relatively short climb, following a mix of snow and mixed terrain depending on conditions, which gives of time to practice moving together on alpine terrain. Overnight in the valley

DAY 4.

8.00am – 5.00pm: Ice fall climbing in the Gran Paradiso Valley

The goal today is to climb more ice. To do this you will drive from Courmayeur to the village of Cognes - Lyllaz, which is a paradise for ice climbers. There are approximately one hundred routes to choose from! PM – Return to Courmayeur. Course debrief and advice for the future. End of program



BASIC IN WINTER MOUNTAINEERING

Our basic winter mountaineering course is aimed at those who wish to improve their mixed and snow/ice mountaineering skills to become more independent mountaineers.

In this level 2 winter mountaineering course, evolution of the level 1 course, you will refine your progression techniques and safety management fundamentals for mountaineering in the winter season.

LOCATION	**Mont Blanc Massif**
TECH LEVEL	**2**
DURATION	**4 days**
GROUPS	**2 peoples**
DATES	**02-29/03-03; 03-14/17; 03-21/24**

THE PROGRAM

DAY 0.

Around 6.30pm: Briefing with Guide

Your guide will run through safety routines and kit checks, as well as hand out rental equipment for the week, before we go on to a detailed discussion of everyones ambitions for the week. Overnight in the valley.

DAY 1.

9.00am – 3.30pm: Retraining to Rock Climbing

Move to a local valley crag and do some top roped climbing with an retraining to basic climbing and ropework techniques. Practice abseiling. Most likely venues are the famous valley crags of the Courmayeur Valley e.g "Palestra Adriano Jordaney". Around 3.00 PM transfer to Courmayeur. Overnight in the valley

DAY 2.

9.00am – 3.30pm: Aiguille du Toula 3534 m north - northwest face

The day starts with a cable car ride from Courmayeur-Entreves up into the Helbronner Peak. From here we cross the glacier and make a face of Aiguille de Toula, in order to get to grips with moving to gether on a wider variety of alpine terrain. In the afternoon we do a crevasse rescue session, covering skills appropriate to your ability and experience before heading to the winter hut . Overnight in the winter Torino Hut.

DAY 3.

9.00am – 3.30pm: Aiguille du Marbrée 3535 m normal route

With a short half hour approach is a good training climb to the Hellbronner Lift on the Italian side of the range. The route is good for practicing leading and moving together on mixed alpine ridge terrain. After we return at Torino Hut, for second night in the winter hut, we do a crevasse rescue session, covering skills appropriate to your ability and experience

DAY 4.

8.00am – 3.00pm: Aiguille d'Entrèves 3604 m normal route

A great day out, one of the best granite ridge crests in the range. The route isn't overly long, making it ideal for a shorter day, or practicing leading on some varied alpine terrain. In PM – Return to Courmayeur, course debrief and advice for the future. End of program.

Specific Information

Groups:
2 people.
Cost:
Euro **850** par person for the level 1 course.
Euro **950** par person for the level 2 course.

What the cost includes:
√ 4 days guiding and instruction with IFMGA Mountain Guide.
√The provisions for the Winter refuge only for the Level 2

I costi non includono:
X Transfer
X Cable car tickets
X half board in the valley
X Lunch
X **Mountaineering and travel Insurance. Read Insurance Section**
X Aything not specified
The expenses of the Guide are at the expense of the participants

Technical Level:

Technical level 1 for the level 1 course.
You are a hiker who can walk for 6/8 hours, also on exposed trails at medium altitudes (2000-2800m.) and, in some cases, on stony ground or short stretches of moraine.

Technical level 2 for the level 2 course.
You are capable of walking, with crampons, on a glacier with a 20°/25°-angle slope and can climb on rock and on a "via ferrata" ,in ascent and descent of I°-II° degree difficulty on rock face of maximum 20/25m. in length with only short vertical stretches. You've already climbed a few easy peaks in the high mountains where, on ice, you had to use an ice-axe for support and on rock, for stretches of 10-15m., you had to use your hands for grip and balance.

Fitness level 2 for both Courses.
You run/cycle (or equivalent) 2- 3 sessions per week. Ie you climb/ bike/walk or run regularly at the weekends, plus once or twice during the week. At this level you should be happy doing either a 4-5 hr hillwalk, cycling 30 miles or mountain biking 2-3 hours without being exhausted.
On a ski holiday – you are capable of off piste skiing all day or doing a couple of hours skinning with out finishing up exhausted – ie you can do this for a number of days without taking a rest day.

Personal climbing equipment:
- Clothing
Work on the principal of wearing 3 or 4 thin layers, which complement each other, as opposed to one layer of bulky clothing, which restricts movement and does not allow for adjustment according to the weather. Do not wear cotton, especially sweatshirts or jeans. Once wet with sweat or rain, cotton becomes very cold and does not dry easily.

Specific Information

-Head :
Sun hat, Sun block, Lip salve, Warm hat/balaclava, Neck scarf/buff, Glacier glasses or mountaineering sunglasses, Snow/ski goggles
-Hands :
Light gloves, Thermal gloves, Mitts
-Top wear:
2 Base layers, 2 Mid layers , 1 Mid-weight fleece, 1 Primaloft jacket, Waterproof jacket
-Leg wear:
1 light layers trousers, Softshell trousers, Waterproof trousers
-Feet:
2 pairs socks, Gaiters, Insulated rigid leather 'B3' mountaineering boots

Boots are rated from B0 to B3 and crampons from C1 to C3. For boots, the ratings are a reflection of the stiffness of the sole and the support the upper provides; for crampons it's about flexibility and the attachment method - C1 crampons are usually flexible with simple straps, C2 are usually articulated with heel clip and C3 are completely rigid with heel clip and toe-bail.
B1 boots can only be used with C1 crampons, B2 boots can be used with C1 or C2 crampons and B3 boots can be used with C1, C2 or C3 crampons. B0 boots are generally considered too flexible to be used with crampons at all.

-In the rucksack 40/45 lt:
Head Torch plus spare batteries, Thermos bottle 1 lt, Water bottle
energy bars, dried fruits, salted nuts, chocolate, a sandwich for your main lunch stop. (There is usually time to buy a sandwich in the morning on the way to the days climbing venue, but it's best to stock up on the other hill snacks/ energy bars that you may need at the start of the week).
Passport, money carrier, Camera, Swiss Army knife, Toilet paper
Personal first aid kit (you need a personal first aid kit to prevent or cure the main ailments, which seem to be: Headache, Blisters, Sunburn): paracetamol, bruphen or aspirin, plasters, compeed for blisters, items of personal preference.
-For hut use:
Silk sheet liner for use in huts ,Antibacterial gel, Ear plugs
- Technical equipment:
Ice axe 55 - 60 cm, two Ice Axe for level 2
crampons (12 point. One pair that fit boots reliably. Clip-on crampons are recommended)
Helmet
Harness (Sit harness with adjustable leg loops. Make sure it is fits over all layers of clothing)
2 Karabiners (screw-gate karabiners)
Walking Poles (One set, telescopic with ski baskets)
If you'd like to hire any of the following items of specialist climbing equipment: mountaineering boots, ice axe, crampons, helmet, harness, karabiners - this can be done in Courmayeur

Routes to be climbed

It is not possible to give a precise daily programme for each of the Alpine Programs. The weather and conditions on the mountains, as well as the personal aspirations of course members, will determine the best activity for each day. In consultation with members of the course and the mountain guide, the mountain guide will decide on the most appropriate activity and mountain route for each day. In doing so, he will keep in mind the prevailing conditions, the aims of the course and the wishes of the course participants. The Mountain Guide will choose the venue best suited to the group's needs and most appropriate to the instructional objectives for the day. This will all be done with safety as the governing factor.

Hazard Warning - Risk and Your Responsibilities - Please read this section

- Mountain activities include inherent risks. Many argue that these risks are an important part of the activity, and that some of the reward of climbing and skiing in the mountains is the successful management of these risks in an inherently dangerous environment. In any case mountain activities are not "safe", there is always some level of risk.

- As guides, we try to manage risk to acceptable levels. Managing risk to acceptable levels is occasionally very difficult and complex, involving the subjective assessment of many complex and changing variables, and often choosing between multiple "evils". The difficulty of managing risk is part of what makes mountain guiding a challenging, rewarding, and dangerous career.

- Even if we successfully manage risk to acceptable levels we cannot eliminate it completely. Risk means exposure to hazard; even very low risk still includes some degree of exposure.

- Different individuals have different definitions of "acceptable levels" of risk. Even for a given individual, the acceptable level varies with the rewards of the objective. For example, climbers and skiers on more difficult routes are usually willing to accept higher levels of risk in exchange for the greater rewards offered by achieving the more difficult objective. You need to think about your personal level of acceptable risk for a given objective.

- We, as guides and climbers, also have limits to the levels of risk to which we are willing to expose ourselves. These levels may be higher or lower than yours. We believe that usually, our level of acceptable risk is lower than most of our clients. Guiding is our job, and long-term exposure to risk means that we need to keep such risk low if we want to survive to old age (which we do). However, "usually" does not mean "always", and you need to speak up if you feel that the risks you are running are not within your definition of acceptability.

- Any member of any climbing team, be they client, guide or recreational climber, should have veto power over any objective. If the perceived level of risk becomes too high for you, then you can turn the party around. In a guided group, there are some limitations to your veto power. If we, as guides feel that it is more risky for the group to accommodate your veto, then it may be overruled.

- If we as guides find the level of risk too high for us (or for what we think is reasonable for you) we, too, can turn the party around. Of course, sometimes it can be less risky to continue on than to retrace our steps, but as guides, it is our job to make such determinations, and to try and convince you of their correctness. Also, in a group trip, such as a ski tour, if you wish to leave a trip you may need to accept levels of risk higher than those with which you are comfortable, in order to reach the next hut, or safe place from which you can leave the program.

- You are responsible for expressing your concern, and even exercising your veto power if the levels of risk become higher than those acceptable to you, or if you feel they may do so. Because we cannot know in advance what your levels of acceptable risk are, you need to tell us if you fear they may be exceeded.

Further Information

- Assessing and managing risk is part of our job, and we have plenty of experience with it. We may try to talk you out of your fear, if we think it is unreasonable. But at the same time, we also feel that nobody, including ourselves, should be forced to assume risks they believe to be unacceptable.

- During any climb or ski tour, or before or after, if you have questions about the risks we encounter or our assessments of them, please ask us. Believe it or not, we actually like to talk about these things. It is informative for you, a good exercise for us, and we believe leads to better understanding and decision making.

Rescue insurance

We do not provide rescue insurance as part of our fees

While we do not require rescue and evacuation insurance for participation in our programs, we strongly recommend that you have a policy in place. Helicopter rescue in the Alps can be very expensive, usually upwards of $5000 for a fairly straightforward pick-up, but it can be much more if an unusual amount of helicopter time is involved. At about $90 per minute, it can add up quickly. And the cost of the flight is just the beginning of the total expenses that may be involved in an injury in the mountains. If you need medical repatriation back home for example, this can run to tens of thousands of dollars.
Your own health insurance may cover rescue and emergency transport to the nearest medical facility, but if you have a large deductible policy, the greater part of this might come out of your pocket. You should check with your insurer to see what, if anything, they cover in the way of rescue and evacuation, as well as repatriation to your country of residence.

You might also want to purchase insurance against loss or breakage of equipment, or trip cancellation or curtailment due to injury. The discussion below should get you started sorting out a few appropriate options for insurance if your existing policy is inadequate.

Purchasing rescue insurance

The Rescue Insurance landscape seems to change daily, as clubs and insurers change their policies and offerings.

What you purchase depends mostly on where you are from and where you plan to go. Most national alpine clubs offer rescue insurance as part of, or as a supplement to the club dues. This is a good place to start looking.

A good option we have found is to enroll in the Austrian Alpine Club's UK section. Cheap, easy to sign up for online (though allow a couple of weeks for their material to reach you), this covers the initial rescue and evacuation from the mountains to the nearest medical facility, and repatriation. Note: it does not cover lost/broken gear, nor travel/trip cancellation. Anyone can join, regardless of residence, and the associated rescue insurance is valid worldwide (with a few exceptions, such as high altitude, flying sports, competitions; read their leaflet for more detail). Visit their website at http://aacuk.org.uk/p-benefits for more information..

Further Information

Climbing with a Mountain Guide.
Climbing with a guide is (or should be) a lot of fun. A few things are a bit different from going out with your pals.

Guide's job.
The guide's job is basically to help you have fun, get to the summit and down again, and to help you avoid the many hazards of the wild mountain environment. Usually these priorities don't interfere with each other. In fact, with the guide watching out for many problems, you can relax a bit more and concentrate on the fun part.

Fun.
"Fun" means different things to different folks. Some like a personal climbing challenge, other just being high up in the air. Some like to learn, others like to simply enjoy the experience. Almost all of our Alps climbing guiding is on a custom basis, so we should be able to get as close to your definition of "fun" as weather, climbing conditions and personal abilities allow. You can help us to do this by letting us know how you, in particular define "fun".

Famous summits.
Many folks come hoping to climb some of the big-name peaks, commonly the Matterhorn, Eiger or Mont Blanc. A couple words of caution:
The Matterhorn and Eiger are difficult climbs. They require an ability to move smoothly, steadily and relatively quickly over very steep, always exposed and occasionally technical terrain, and this for many hours on end. If you have never done anything quite like them before it is hard to know what to expect, and harder still to know if you have the necessary skills. An important part of your trip will be learning what these peaks require (by doing other ascents), while at the same time determining whether you have the needed skills and abilities. One of the main objectives for your trip should be to discover what, if anything, you need to learn or do to bring these peaks within your grasp.
Another important determining factor on these peaks is the current conditions. Even the smallest amount of snow on the extensive rock climbing of the Eiger and Matterhorn can put them out of condition by making them too time consuming, not to mention too slippery, to climb safely. Once the snow falls, several days of sunny weather is needed to put them back into condition. In a bad summer, the "in condition" days may number as few as maybe 12 to 15 days out of the entire summer season. When the Matterhorn and Eiger are out of condition we'll try to do other great climbs in the area that are not as conditions sensitive. Being psychologically prepared for this will help you enjoy your trip and appreciate all the variety and challenge that the Alps have to offer.
Mont Blanc, by comparison, is mostly a snow climb and is less prone to being out of condition. In fact, if the weather is good, snow conditions, whatever they may be, almost always permit an ascent.
All in all, the best strategy is to come with a flexible outlook, rather than a specific "hit-list".

Safety.
The guide also must help you to manage risk. There are quite a few ways to "get the chop" in the mountains. But the primary three are; falling off the mountain, getting hit by something from above, and freezing to death. We have different strategies to deal with these, worth discussing briefly here:
Falling is the greatest hazard climbers face and claims the most lives. We primarily avoid falling by climbing well and carefully. As a back-up, ropes and other gear can often reduce the likelihood of injury if we do fall. One of the protective techniques we commonly use on the broken terrain of the mountains is called "short roping". By using only a small amount of rope we can move together when the terrain is easy, and belay short harder sections, with little or no slowing down during transitions between the two. Short roping it means moving together, carrying the rope at the ready, and belaying as necessary. You still need to climb the mountain yourself, providing all the necessary skill, will power and upward momentum. Even the strongest guide can't drag anyone up a mountain.
Getting hit by something from above is best avoided by not being there when that thing falls; helmets only slightly reduce the risk of injury from getting clobbered. Avoidance depends on being

Further Information

able to move quickly through hazardous areas. Some of these hazards are time related, such as when afternoon warming releases otherwise frozen-in rocks. In such cases timing is critical. In general mountains are more "active" as the day warms. For this reason, and to take advantage of better snow conditions, we start early and try to finish early.
Freezing to death is best avoided by not going out in bad conditions, and this is our primary strategy. Also, we may choose a different objective, one where hands and body can stay warm though more continuous movement. But good equipment is also called for.

Prepare your adventure
It is of utmost importance when choosing your itinerary to bear in mind your own physical capacity and of course personal preferences. Don't forget being in altitude; camping in tent, extreme weather conditions; and group life, etc... Knowing ones own limits can make or break the adventures both for yourself and for others involved. So get ready and get fit. Should you have any further questions on any of the above please don't hesitate to get in touch... We are here to help.
Depending on which itinerary you choose the level of comfort varies in each case.
For trekking, mountaineering, ski mountaineering two or more days the sleeping quarters are either tents or refuges, the ability to readily adapt is often required.
Depending on your choice of programme, you could face uncommon situations. Please take into consideration the following points.

Cultural Preparation.
Culture-Read up on local culture and traditions in the Country to have chosen to visit. Make your visit more enjoyable. Both for yourselves and for the locals you come into contact with.

Psychological Preparartion.
Depending on which programme you choose you may be expected to join in with day to day activities – is putting up a tent, helping in daily chores etc….In other words, adopting a team spirit, consideration for others is expected from each and every one of us. Pulling together and treating others as you would like to be treated can make or break the adventure.

Mountaineering Fitness Advice - Ski Fitness Advice
It goes without saying that arriving fit and well is important if you want to get the most out of your holiday - and is essential for succeeding on many of our objectives.
The 5 fitness levels and the the 6 technicals levels we use are designed to give you an idea of how active you need to be during the 2-3 months prior to your trip in order to be well prepared. You don't need to be an athlete, but you do need to be active and healthy (for our harder trips, so me regular training will be neccesary).

Checking Your Fitness
To check out how mountain fit you are, we suggest you get away for a weekend early in this period and do a couple of long mountain days to see how you get on. A part from being the ideal excuse to go and have some fun, it should help with your preparation and give you a good idea how much work you may still need to do . Please note that we are talking about cardiovascular exercise here - that gets your heart and lungs working hard for extended periods, in order to help you keep going for several hours at a time. This is very different from strength or power training such as weights/rowing etc, which do little to impro ve yo ur mo untain stamina.
Which Type Of Exercise?
The best preparation for mountain sports always involves good amounts of cardiovascular exercise (hillwalking, running, cycling, mountain biking etc) and getting out for long days in the hills whenever possible. We've noticed that people who always train indoors are never as mountain fit as those who regularly get their boots or trainers muddy - so unfortunately it seems that running on a treadmill just isn't as good for you as doing the real thing - ie to get hill fit, get outdoors as much as yo u can. Cardiovascular team sports (eg football, rugby, hockey etc) and racket sports (eg squash) are also good

forms of training if you enjoy playing hard. These have the advantage that you usually have a regular slot for doing them, so it tends to actually happen! Don't forget to read the trip descriptions carefully to find out what else is involved too , so you can tailor your preparation accordingly - eg if you are off on an expedition or a week of alpine climbing, then a few days spent walking or climbing in the mountains with your rucsac on wouldn't go amiss, whereas for a rock or ice trip then some regular visits to the local crag or climbing wall are advised. For technical climbing courses, we recommend regular visits to the wall or crag as the best way to develop your specific climbing fitness.

Finding Time To Train

Ok - so you've decided you need to get fit for the trip. The first thing to do is take a look at the required fitness levels for your chosen holiday - this will give you a guideline as to the amount o f weekly cardiovascular exercise you should be doing during the 2-3 months leading up to your trip. Once you've got this, take a look at your weekly routine and look for places where you may be able to find the time to train. Running or cycling to work a couple of times a week, training on a lunchtime etc are all places where you may be able to fit a good exercise session in without affecting other commitments. The best way to keep it up is to organise a regular group of friends to do sport with each week, or join a club in order to train with other people. That way you'll have a commitment to turn out each week, as well as enjoying the social aspects of sport as well.

Altitude and Acclimatisation Program

The effects of altitude are a significant issue when climbing in high mountain. How you acclimatize and cope with altitude is strongly determined by genetics, so it 's an area where age and fitness often makes little difference. For this reason it 's important to follow a sensible acclimatisation plan. Example – if you are going to climb Mont Blanc in just one weeks holiday – then who ever you book with, we recommend you always go for a six day itinerary as a minimum. You simply won't be acclimatised properly for Mont Blanc after just a couple of days climbing off cable cars and sleeping in the valley, or spending a single night up in a hut (we know there are companies out there offering 5 day itineraries and we could easily offer the same ourselves – but we don't run them, because they aren't in the best interests of our customers). A good acclimatisation program follows a staged approach – for Mont Blanc we spend 2 night s sleeping at altitude in a mountain hut, climbing first to 3600m and then to 4000m over a period of three days – this allows your body time to adapt properly to the reduced oxygen content of the air. Reaching 4000 m prior to the ascent of Mont Blanc makes a big difference on summit day – greatly increasing both your enjoyment of the climb and chances of reaching the summit. The more acclimatisation you do the better – so if possible, we recommend you arrive a few days early in order to spend some time at altitude prior to starting the week. Altitude adds a whole new dimension to the climbing realm, one that armchair mountaineers seldom comprehend. Although it is impossible to predict how severely altitude will affect you, there are measures you can take to minimize its effect.

Improving Altitude Performance

Countless hours of training cannot prevent acute mountain sickness (AMS) or other altitude illnesses (pulmonary and cerebral edema). Indeed, superb conditioning may underlie some of the problems. Young, healthy men are the mostly likely to experience difficulties at altitude due to testosterone-induced stupidity; because they are very fit and think they're invincible, they push too hard too fast.

Best advice: start slow and taper.

In addition to wisdom, age appears to confer other benefits for high-altitude travel, not the least of which is increased stamina. There is very little research on this, but old geezers frequently kick Young pups' butts when mountaineering and in ultra-endurance events. Still, going to the high mountains unprepared is foolish. It's pretty much a given that you will be working hard for 6 to 8 hours a day, perhaps more, day after day.

If you haven't worked up to this amount of stress beforehand, life is gonna suck. When mountaineering, the rule of thumb is to drink enough to pee "clear and copious." You should feel a need to pee almost hourly, and your urine should be pale yellow (barring mega-doses of vitamins that you don't need). If you are hydrating well, you will need to wake up at least once during the night to urinate, which is why most mountaineers carry a pee bottle.

Further Information

To achieve proper hydration requires consuming at least 1 gallon (4 liters) on mellow days (cool temps, moderate exertion) and over 2 gallons (8 liters) on intense days (sweltering heat, mega-work). Severe dehydration can shut down your summit bid faster than any snowstorm.

Emphasizing carbohydrates in the diet has numerous advantages when climbing at high altitudes. Although fat packs more calories per gram than carbohydrates, which makes it weight-efficient in your pack, it also requires more oxygen to burn.

Furthermore, one study has shown that a diet of more than 70 percent carbohydrates decreased AMS by 30 percent after a fast ascent to 14,000 feet (4,300 meters).

Anticipate a lot of knee strain from carrying a heavy pack up and, especially, down hills that seem to last forever (trekking poles are a good idea). You want to reach the mountains with a high performance threshold and sufficient muscle mass that you won't wither away. Use the approach trek to help prepare for what is to come. If you have a choice between a long or short route (such as hiking from Jiri or flying to Lukla to reach the Khumbu), take the extended option.

Each person has a unique pattern of adjusting to altitude. It is important to learn your own pattern and take it into account when making time estimates for a climb at altitude. You can't really learn these things without experiencing them. The trick is to gain this experience in a deliberate and controlled way—one that still allows you to effectively manage risk.

Mountaineer to Guide ratio

With few exceptions you should go with the lowest client to guide ratio you can afford. A low ratio (a small number of clients per guide) offers several extremely important advantages.

First, is safety. In mountainous terrain a small team moves much faster, avoiding all the bad things you like to avoid, like afternoon thunderstorms, nightfall, exposure to objective hazards, icefall, rockfall, avalanches, hypothermia and others unpleasantness.

On easy peaks and trekking, larger groups may be desirable. These groups offer greater social interaction and the increased party size can give strength to a rescue or other potential problem. But don't confuse party size with guide to client ratio. Even in a large group, try to go with a low ratio. Two guides with four climbers is a much stronger and flexible group then one guide with five climbers.

Speed and a greater range of available techniques the guide can employ are what makes the small ratio safer than the large.

Small teams generally move faster than large teams. This means you spend less time waiting for others, stay warmer, and have more time to spare at the end of the day, relishing your accomplishments.

Small teams offer greater odds of successfully reaching the summit or completing a tour. A team is only as strong or as fast as its weakest member. The larger the size of the team the greater the odds of someone keeping you back. Stack the odds in your favor and insist on a low ratio.

Small teams also have more inherent flexibility to accommodate adjustments in team composition. Compare a group with 2 guides and 4 clients to another group with 2 guides and 6 clients. If one of the climbers is ill or simply doesn't have the strength, will or desire to continue, with the 2:1 ratio one guide can take the healthy client, in addition to his or her other clients, on his or her rope and continue to the summit while the other guide heads down with the single client. In the 1:3 ratio, however, the guide going on to the summit may be unable to accommodate the healthy clients from the other rope. In this situation one or perhaps two perfectly capable climbers will be unable to summit because the higher ratios lacked the flexibility to adjust. Smaller ratios generally offer greater rates of summit success.

When shopping for a trip always inquire what the maximum client to guide ratio will be. In general, technical climbs should have a maximum ratio of 2:1 the Mont Blanc, and climbs with a great degree of exposed 3rd and 4th class terrain, such as the Matterhorn should be done at a 1:1 ratio. Low angle

glacier climbs can be done at higher ratios, but more than 4 or 5 people (including the guide) on one rope can be a frustrating experience for everyone. 1 or 2 climbers with 1 guide is a good number of a glacier climb.

Who is the Mountain Guide

Mountain guides are specially trained and experienced mountaineers and professionals who are generally certified by an association. They are considered experts in mountaineering.
Their skills usually include climbing, skiing and hiking. Their knowledge includes furthermore the topics rocks, snowcraft, weather, navigation, avalanches and health, each practically and theoretically. Most guides work only in certain (familiar) areas. The main issue is guiding through routes and the successful performance of a tour.

Mountain guides are employed by groups or individuals assuring the safety of the climbing party. This professional class of guides arose in the middle of the 19th century when Alpine climbing became recognized as a sport.

In addition to assuring safety, professional mountain guides frequently offer other desirable services to their clients. These services can significantly improve the alpine experience, especially when the client climber has limited time or equipment, lacks a qualified partner or is visiting an unfamiliar area. These additional mountain guide services may include:

Precise local knowledge of mountain routes, weather, snow & glacier conditions;
Specific training in alpine skills like off-piste skiing, avalanche awareness, rock climbing, ice climbing, mountain navigation & the proper use of mountain tools like ice ax, crampons, rope, climbing anchor systems, avalanche beacons, etc.;
The ability to contact helicopters for remote ski mountaineering access or heli-skiing;
Preferential access to various ski lifts & trams;

Mountain guides are commonly organized in national and international associations. The biggest international organization is the International Federation of Mountain Guide Associations.

The legal regulations pertaining to the Mountain Guide profession

National laws have stipulated parameters for this profession . A National Board and professional roll officially determine the competences and professional fields of the Alpine Guide, identified as follows:
1. The Alpine guide is one who practises the profession officially, though not necessarily full-time or exclusively, in:
a) accompanying clients to climb on rock or ice, or on mountain excursions;
b) accompanying clients on ski-mountaineering ascents or on skiing excursions;
c) teaching climbing and ski-mountaineering techniques, excluding those relative to downhill and cross-country skiing.
2. The practise as a professional of the aforementioned activities on every type of terrain, of limitless difficulty and, on skiing excursions outside of the ski resorts or cross-country circuits where the use of mountaineering technique and equipment may be deemed necessary, and reserved to professional Alpine guides who are officially enrolled.

IFMGA – International Federation Mountain Guide Association

The IFMGA world wide association, founded by guides from Austria, France, Switzerland and Italy, exists since 1965 and currently regroups mountain guide associations from more than 20 countries in Europe, Asia, the Americas and Oceania, representing a total of almost 6000 guides.
The aim of the association is to maintain close ties between all mountain guides; to harmonise the work regulations which govern the profession; to ensure better safety conditions for clients; and to facilitate the ability of mountain guides to work abroad, on mountains all over the globe. This last point materializes itself in the concrete solidarity which exists between all guides, no matter their country of origin, and the spontaneous assistance they provide to each other.

Further Information

Highly competent Mountain Guide

With a high level of training, the highest in existence, is required in four different disciplines in order to become a certified IFMGA mountain guide: rock climbing, ice climbing, mountaineering and ski mountaineering. IFMGA training gives a guide the ability to work on any mountain range whether they already know the mountain or not. It takes five to 10 years to become a mountain guide, from the moment they start serious mountaineering to the moment when they receive their guide diploma.

Proper training guarantees an international standard

The Technical Commission at the IFMGA looks to its permanent working party in order to study the evolution of techniques and how to improve the level of guide training. This commission, made up of national technical heads, meets twice a year.
Guides are trained via the training schemes dispensed by their national associations, sometimes in collaboration with an organisation such as a school or university.

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