

NAVIGATING WITH CARE: MOUNTAIN SAFETY, WILDLIFE AWARENESS, AND ETIQUETTE

# SELF GUIDED TREKKING: MOUNTAIN MINDFULNESS

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## WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A SELF-GUIDED TREKKER?

Being a self-guided trekker means embarking on a journey through nature and remote landscapes independently, without the assistance of professional guides. It's a highly rewarding and adventurous way to explore the great outdoors, as it grants you a sense of self-sufficiency and the freedom to set your own pace and route. As a self-guided trekker, you are responsible navigating the terrain and ensuring your safety throughout the journey. However, it demands careful preparation, including researching the area, understanding the local environment and weather conditions, and carrying the necessary gear and supplies to make the trek a success.

It is mostly common sense but there are a few things that are good to bear in mind. It's often more exerting travelling uphill so when you're traveling downhill it is a nice courtesy to step aside to let uphill travellers pass (if the trail is too narrow to accommodate two people side-by-side.)

You will be walking on well-trodden paths and for the large part they are safe and easy to navigate. There are some sections where there is some exposure so it's important to pay attention here and be sure of your footing – these sections usually have some form of handrail to assist you. Don't be tempted to veer off the path as you can quickly get lost or find yourself in dangerous terrain. It is also important to be aware of other people on the trail and be careful not to dislodge any loose stones and rocks (if you do accidentally dislodge one, be sure to shout "cailloux" (french) or "rock" to warn those around you) – equally watch out for stones or rocks dislodged by those around you.

## SOLO TREKKERS

We have many solo trekkers on our trips and love getting more people into the mountains. A few things to note when you're out on the trails alone. It's a very popular trail and there will be many people around. However, stay within your skill level, and be cautious of pushing your limits. Always trust your instincts and turn back if conditions become dangerous. Solo trekking can be a transformative experience, but it's vital to prioritise safety, be self-aware, and make responsible decisions throughout your journey to ensure a memorable and safe adventure.

## EMERGENCIES

Whilst we have done our utmost to ensure that your trip will go according to plan, there are certain elements that are beyond our control. We recommend that you carefully read and understand the following section in case you find yourself in need of assistance.

The mountains, if not treated with complete respect, can be a dangerous place. Weather can change quickly and terrain can quickly become treacherous. Making good safe decisions based on the weather forecast and your energy levels when on a self-guided trip is paramount to making sure you have a successful trip.

We have two numbers you can call if there is an emergency but if the situation is critical and requires immediate support then please call 112. This is a European emergency number and will connect you to someone who can then redirect you to the local service you need.

- In resort phone: 0033 (0) 7 49 77 67 71
- UK Office: 0044 (0) 20 3813 4779
- High Mountain Office. Track rescue : +33 (0)4 50 54 04 73. Rescue : 112.

## **NAVIGATION**

Adventure Base will provide you with with the GPX file within our travel app. It's important you study the route before you set off, preferably the evening before each day of hiking, so that you have an idea of what your day will entail. Take into consideration distance, elevation gain and loss, and exposure to elements (will you be up high in terrain exposed to the elements, or lower down in perhaps more sheltered terrain) when studying these.

Phone signal is not always available on the trails and battery life on your mobile device can quickly be drained when using a navigation app (especially in areas of weak phone signal, where your phone has to work harder to find signal), as well as by colder temperatures (such as in cold winds). It is a good idea to carry an external battery charger as a backup so that you can charge on the go if necessary.

Trails are well sign-posted but they often present various options. Often there are variation routes that get you to the same place. For example there might be a high pass or a low pass. Deciding which one to take will depend on weather conditions and/or your preference on the day. Each sign will also provide a rough estimate of the time it takes to get to the next stop.

## **WEATHER/CONDITIONS**

The weather is one of the most important factors to look out for on your trip. The weather in the mountains can change quickly so making sure that you're prepared is important. We advise carrying multiple layers regardless of what the forecast says and don't forget to wear sunscreen. A great app for checking the weather forecast is Meteoblue as it provides detailed and easy to understand data on your specific location.

When bad weather or thunderstorms strike in the Alps, it is crucial to prioritise safety and take appropriate measures. In such conditions, it's advisable to seek immediate shelter and get off exposed or high-altitude areas. Lightning can pose a severe threat in mountainous terrain. Avoid being the tallest point in the landscape and stay clear of metal objects. If you're hiking, climbing, or engaged in any outdoor activity, consider turning back to lower elevations or a designated safe area as quickly as possible. Always keep a close watch on the weather forecast before heading into the mountains and have a reliable means of communication in case of emergencies, such as a satellite phone or a GPS device. Your safety during thunderstorms depends on your ability to respond swiftly and sensibly to changing weather conditions.

How to deal with early or late season and walking in the snow. First and foremost, choose appropriate footwear, like insulated, waterproof boots with good traction to prevent slipping. Take smaller steps and walk with a slight bent-knee posture to maintain balance. Utilise trekking poles for added stability, especially on uneven terrain. Be aware of the depth of the snow and watch for hidden obstacles underneath. When possible, walk in already established paths or trails. Finally, use trail micro spikes for extra stability and grip in the snow.

## **VARIANT ROUTES**

All itineraries which include variants should not be attempted early season due to snow. We do not say this lightly – there have been many accidents on the trail early season with trekkers not realising the danger. Early season is generally considered the last two weeks of June into the first week of July although it does fluctuate according to how much snow fell during the winter and the spring melt rate.

There are many variant routes on the trek. These variant routes should NEVER be crossed in bad weather. While these alternative paths may offer a unique and thrilling experience under normal conditions, we strongly advise against crossing them in bad weather, particularly during thunderstorms. You will need to hike the traditional route around if the weather forecast predicts a thunderstorm.



Variant routes, often situated in exposed or elevated terrain, increase the likelihood of being caught in a storm. Poor weather conditions can drastically reduce visibility on variant routes, making navigation difficult and increasing the risk of getting lost. Navigating unfamiliar terrain under these circumstances can lead to accidents and injuries.

## **GUIDELINES FOR SAFE HIKING**

- \* **Monitor Weather Forecasts:** Stay informed about the weather forecast for your hiking area. If thunderstorms are predicted, choose the traditional route or consider postponing your hike to a safer time.
- \* **Plan Ahead:** Before setting out, familiarise yourself with the terrain and potential weather risks along both the traditional and variant routes. Have a backup plan in case weather conditions worsen.
- \* **Emergency Preparedness:** Carry essential safety gear, including a map, first aid kit, and communication devices.
- \* **Group Awareness:** If hiking in a group, communicate the importance of adhering to safety guidelines, especially during adverse weather conditions. Decision-making should prioritise the safety of all members.

Enjoy your hiking, adventure responsibly and return safely.

## **TRAIL ETIQUETTE**

Our mountains are like a special sanctuary for unique plants and animals. If we want to keep enjoying this awesome place and preserve it, here are two easy things to remember:

- Don't leave your trash behind.
- Exercise discretion and maintain a respectful distance from the local wildlife.

When you're in the mountains, it's crucial to stick to the designated trails and avoid taking shortcuts to avoid trampling fragile vegetation. Follow the "Leave No Trace" principle: don't leave any rubbish behind on the trails, including organic waste (such as egg shells or orange peels), and try not to disturb the natural habitat (this includes not wandering off the trail).

## **FLORA AND FAUNA OF THE ALPS**

Nestled within the landscape of the Alps, you'll discover a range of wildflowers that add their unique charm to this region. Amongst the familiar faces are the resilient Alpine Gentian, showcasing its rich, cobalt-blue blossoms, the vibrant Alpine Anemone, with its delicate white or pink petals dancing gracefully in the mountain breeze, the iconic Edelweiss, known for its fuzzy silver leaves and pure white petals symbolising the Alps' tough beauty, the friendly Alpine Forget-Me-Not, popping up in bright blue bunches all over the place, and the Purple Saxifrage, a little pink powerhouse that somehow manages to thrive in the rocky nooks and crannies. Together, these pretty flowers paint a picture of nature's beauty, transforming the Alps into a wildflower paradise.

## WILDLIFE OF THE ALPS

In the Alps, wildlife thrives;

- **Alpine Ibex:** The Alpine ibex (bouquetin) a subspecies of the ibex, is a true icon of the Mont Blanc region. With their impressive, curved horns and distinctive beard, they can often be found on steep slopes and rocky ledges.
- **Chamois:** Known for their sure-footedness and graceful leaps, chamois can be found traversing the alpine meadows and rocky terrain of the high mountains. Look for their distinctive short, hooked horns and light brown coat.
- **Golden Eagle:** As the king of the alpine skies, the golden eagle can often be seen soaring high above the mountain peaks along the trek. Keep watch for their massive wingspan and golden-brown plumage.
- **Marmots:** These adorable and sociable creatures are a common sight in the meadows and rocky areas of the the Alps. Listen for their distinctive high-pitched whistles and keep an eye out for their plump, brown bodies.
- **Alpine Deer:** Keep a lookout for alpine deer in forested areas, open meadows, and the transition zones between different habitats. Be alert for movement or rustling sounds and scan the landscape for these magnificent animals.
- **Alpine Cows:** originating from the Alps region, known for its adaptability to mountainous terrain and its production of high-quality milk used in cheese making. You'll hear the clanging of bells before you see them!
- **Patou:** Alpine sheepdogs... be warned! These cute looking Pyrenees mountain dogs also known as Patou's are very territorial sheepdogs and can become aggressive if these steps are now followed. 1. Avoid the flock 2. Stay calm 3. Avoid confrontational behaviour 4. Do not try and stroke the sheep!

These animals they are emblematic of the wildlife found in the Alpine environment of the Alps. Keep your eyes peeled and your camera ready to capture these remarkable creatures during your journey!

