

A man with short brown hair and a beard, wearing an orange t-shirt, dark shorts, and sunglasses, is wading in a lake. He is leaning forward with his arms outstretched, looking towards the camera with an open mouth. The water is calm, reflecting the surrounding scenery. In the background, there is a large, multi-story wooden building with many windows and balconies, situated on a hillside. The hillside is covered in dense green forest. In the distance, more forested mountains are visible under a blue sky with some clouds. The overall scene is a vibrant, outdoor setting in a mountainous region.

SELF GUIDED TOUR DU MONT BLANC EPIC: WESTERN ROUTE 4 DAY ITINERARY

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While we try and stick to the tried and tested itinerary below, the mountain, the accommodation availability and the weather sometimes has other ideas. We will always remain as flexible as possible to make sure we can change any plans if required.

This is a proposed itinerary and where you stay is subject to change based on how far in advance you book your trip. There is limited availability on this trek so we highly recommend booking in advance.

DAY 1:

LES HOUCHES - REFUGE NANT BORRANT

Starting in the village of Les Houches at the end of Chamonix's valley, our itinerary takes the cable car up to the Bellevue Plateau (or add another two hours onto today's trek by hiking from the valley floor). Admire the Dome du Gouter and the Aiguille Bionnassay before descending to cross the raging glacial torrent by the iconic Himalayan suspension bridge. The route then passes the spectacular Bionnassay glacier before climbing up to the grassy saddle of Col du Tricot. This stage 1 variant should never be done in bad weather but is not particularly taxing. The descent into the Miage valley is however very steep. Book ahead for a table at Refuge du Miage to enjoy lunch overlooking the impressive Dômes du Miage. The trail then winds up briefly before descending to the French town of Les Contamines, traditionally the stop over point for the first stage. Our itinerary pushes on for a further hour on the trail to stop at the first refuge out of Les Contamines, charming Nant Borrant, one of the best refuges on the TMB. By catching the free navette to Gorge du Notre Dame and then climbing the steep hill up to the refuge, you'll an hour's head start on a challenging day tomorrow – tackling two cols in one day.

17.4km / 1040m up / 1240m down / 7 – 8 hours trekking

DAY 2:

REFUGE NANT BORRANT - LES CHAPIEUX

Today is a long, strenuous day which is duly rewarded with incredible views over wild desolate cols. This is truly les Alpes sauvages and your heart will sing to be far from civilisation. You'll climb over two mountain passes Col du Bonhomme (2329m) and Col de la Croix de Bonhomme (2483m), possibly still laden with snow, before descending into the French hamlet of Les Chapieux (1554m) in the Vallée des Glaciers.

13.4km / 990m up / 920m down / 6 – 7 hours trekking

DAY 3:

LES CHAPIEUX - ELISABETTA / CABANE COMBAL

Today you'll switch from Bonjour to Ciao as you climb the Col de la Seigne and walk over the frontiere into Italy. For those who want to shorten today's hike take one of the frequent shuttle buses from Les Chapieux along the tarmac road to La Ville des Glaciers or Les Mottets Parking cutting an hour off the traditional time. Tip: buy your ticket the night before if you want to bag a seat on the first bus at 8.30am otherwise you might have to wait until 9 or 9.30 to get a seat. From here the trail ascends to 2516m to the top of the Col de la Seigne and, leaving the Vallée des Glaciers and France behind, cross the unmanned border and descend into Italy! From the col it's all downhill onto the wide, flat valley floor of Vallon de la Lée Blanche. Pass Refuge Elisabetta (where you might stay), a basic cavernous refuge, commanding an exceptional view perched on a spur of the Pyramides Calcaires, with not one, but two glaciers (Glacier d'Estellette and Glacier de la Lée Blanche) spilling down behind it. The refuge has a good terrace if you need a refreshment before heading on the further 45-60 minutes along the ancient arrow straight Roman road to your accommodation for the night – the picture postcard A frame Refugio Cabane Combal.

16.9km / 990m up / 570m down / 6 – 7 hours trekking

DAY 4:

ELISABETTA / CABANE COMBAL - COURMAYEUR

There are no cols to climb on stage 4 of the Tour du Mont Blanc, so it's easy to presume that this stretch is not demanding. Think again. The formidable wall of rock holding up the Mont Blanc Massif on the opposite side of the valley highlights our minuscule selves. Prepare to feel humbled. The trail climbs up the side of the V shaped, moat like Val Veny to the highest point of the day, the Mont Favre spur (2430m). With every step along the high balcony path, the sheer southern flanks of the imposing Mont Blanc Massif range rising on the opposite side, take your breath away. Whilst not particularly challenging, the deceiving nature of this balcony trail leads to you believe you're almost there. Many times. It's a long day that should not be underestimated. During the peak summer weeks of July and August it is possible to take a gondola and chair lift from Maison Vielle down to Dolonne. From there it's just a ten minute walk into the centre of Courmayeur. This is a good option for those with delicate knees – the descent into Courmayeur is brutal. This would shorten today's hike to 7.5km and remove most of the descent.

16.9km / 490m up / 1250m down / 5 – 6 hours trekking