



## Pre-Departure Information

MONT BLANC TO THE MEDITERRANEAN



# Table of Contents

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## TRAVEL INFORMATION

- Passport
- Visas
- Money
- Tipping
- Special Diets
- Communications
- Electricity

## MEDICAL INFORMATION

- Inoculations
- Staying Healthy
- Getting In Shape

## HELPFUL INFORMATION

- Photography
- Being a Considerate Traveler

## PACKING LIST

- The Essentials
- WT Gear Store
- Luggage
- Notes on Clothing
- Layers
- Clothing
- Hiking Boots
- Equipment
- Personal First Aid Supplies
- Optional Items

## READING LIST

- Essential Reading
- Also Recommended

# Reminders Before You Go

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## WELCOME!

We're delighted to welcome you on this adventure! This booklet is designed to guide you in the practical details for preparing for your trip. As you read, if any questions come to mind, feel free to give us a call or send us an email—we're here to help.

## PLEASE SEND US

- Trip Application:** Complete, sign, and return your Trip Application form as soon as possible if you have not already done so.
- Medical Form:** Complete, sign, and return your Medical Form as soon as possible if you have not already done so.
- Air Schedule:** Please forward a copy of your email confirmation, which shows your exact flight arrival and departure times. Refer to the Arrival & Departure section of the Detailed Itinerary for instructions. Please feel free to review your proposed schedule with Wilderness Travel before purchasing your tickets if you have any questions about the timing of your arrival and departure flights or would like to confirm we have the required minimum number of participants to operate the trip.

## PLEASE CAREFULLY REVIEW

- Travel Documents & Medical Information:** Carefully review the Travel Documents and Medical Information sections of this booklet to familiarize yourself with Passport and Visa entry requirements for your destination, as well as any recommended inoculations.
- Optional Travel Insurance:** Review the Trip Cancellation & Transfer Fee Schedule included in the Detailed Itinerary. We recommend that all trip members purchase Travel Insurance.
- Extra Services:** Request any Extra Services (hotel nights, transfers, extensions) with your WT office contact using the Extra Services Request Form sent with your confirmation packet.
- Final Documents:** Approximately three weeks before your trip, we will send you final departure documents, including hotel and local contact information and rendezvous instructions.

## QUESTIONS?

Call: 1-800-368-2794, go to our **website** ([www.wildernesstravel.com](http://www.wildernesstravel.com)) or e-mail us at: [info@wildernesstravel.com](mailto:info@wildernesstravel.com).

# Travel Information

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## PASSPORT

A valid passport is required for your trip. Be sure to check the expiration date. Your passport must be valid for three months after your date of exit from France. In addition, we recommend your passport have at least two completely blank visa pages for every country you will be visiting. It is very important that the blank pages say “Visas” at the top. The last few pages of your passport, which say “Amendments and Endorsements,” and the final page of your passport, which may not have a page number, are not considered to be legitimate visa pages. The service of adding pages for visas was discontinued as of January 1, 2016. You can request a new passport through **US Passport Services Office** (<http://travel.state.gov/passport>) or use a visa service agency, which can take care of your passport renewal and expedite the process, if needed. We recommend **Passport Visas Express** (<http://www.passportvisasexpress.com/?affId=2120>). Be sure to allow sufficient time to acquire this before your trip.

It is a good idea to carry photocopies of your passport’s photo page and any acquired visa pages for your trip (if applicable) in case your passport is lost or as an additional piece of identification, as well as two extra passport photos.

## VISAS

US citizens do not need a visa for countries visited on this trip. If you are a citizen of any country other than the US, check with a local consulate for entry requirements.

## MONEY

The Euro is the official currency of France. The most convenient way to obtain Euros is to use your debit card at ATMs found throughout Europe. If you plan to get cash this way, it’s wise to get a list of ATM locations in advance online or from your bank. Traveler’s checks are not recommended as they can be difficult and time-consuming to cash. Your Trip Leaders will advise you where and when money can be changed. Major credit cards are accepted in most shops in cities and larger towns, but only for larger purchases—a cup of coffee and a sandwich is still best paid for in cash!

To use an ATM internationally, you must have a four-digit PIN. If you plan to use your credit cards, inform your credit card company before your departure that you will be using the card abroad.

You will need to budget spending money for gratuities, any meals not included in the trip itinerary, international and domestic airport departure taxes, and personal items such as beverages.

## TIPPING

Tipping is completely discretionary, but over the years, clients have asked us for tipping guidelines to reward guides for outstanding service. A range of reference would be \$125-150 USD per trip member for each Trip Leader, which can be given in USD or Euros. The Trip Leader takes care of gratuities for luggage handling, waiters at restaurants, and local guides and drivers who may be with the group for only a short time.

## SPECIAL DIETS

We will do our best to accommodate special dietary needs, however, please keep in mind that certain cultural differences or limitations due to logistics can make it extremely difficult and at times impossible to accommodate dietary restrictions. Please inform us at least eight weeks before your trip if you have a restricted diet. It is important to bring a flexible attitude and supplemental snacks.

## COMMUNICATIONS

### **Telephone**

The international dialing code for France is 33. Please contact your cell phone company for specific instructions for international use.

### **Email & Internet Access**

Internet access is available at all of our lodges but can be spotty and unreliable.

## ELECTRICITY

Europe has 220-volt current. Plugs usually have two or three prongs.

# Medical Information

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The following recommendations should be used as a guideline only; consult your physician for medical advice. It is vital that you let Wilderness Travel know of any medical problems, allergies, or physical limitations you may have. Please fill out and return the personal medical questionnaire, and feel free to consult us if you have any questions about your ability to undertake this particular trip.

Wilderness Travel is not a medical facility and has no expertise or responsibility regarding what medications or inoculations you and your physician decide are necessary for your safe participation in the trip.

Traveler's health information is available from the **Centers for Disease Control**. (<http://www.cdc.gov/travel/index.htm>) Medical travel products are available from **Travel Health Medicine** (<http://www.travmed.com>) and from **Magellan's Travel Supplies**. (<http://www.magellans.com>)

## INOCULATIONS

No inoculations are required. However, it is easy to get a small cut, so a tetanus booster is strongly recommended (good for 10 years). If you take prescription medicines, be sure to bring enough for the duration of your trip.

## STAYING HEALTHY

You can reduce your risk of getting a cold on the trip by washing your hands often and not touching your face with unwashed hands. If you arrive on the trip with a cold or feel the symptoms of a cold, avoid close contact with others and move away from people before coughing or sneezing. The CDC recommends coughing or sneezing into a tissue or into the crook of your elbow or upper sleeve, not your hands.

## GETTING IN SHAPE

We strongly urge you to “train up” for your trip. The best training for hiking is hiking, especially over hills or rough terrain. Next best are running, swimming, bicycling or other sports exercise (stair-climbing machines are excellent preparation for hiking uphill). Try to incorporate exercise into your daily schedule at least a couple of months before departure. Your feet should also be well prepared—make sure your hiking boots are sturdy and thoroughly broken-in.

# Helpful Information

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## PHOTOGRAPHY

### Camera Recommendations

With the many advances in digital technology, a simple compact digital camera or even your smartphone is capable of taking pictures suitable for the needs of most people. For higher quality images and the ability to use long lenses for closer wildlife pictures, a DSLR camera is well worthwhile, though heavier. Most digital cameras and phones have good video options, but you may want to consider a GoPro for a lightweight, waterproof option. Always practice ahead of time with new equipment and bring your manual with you. Camera equipment is available for rent from **Borrow Lenses** (<https://www.borrowlenses.com/discount/wildernesstravel>), with a 10% discount offered to Wilderness Travel clients. This is an especially good idea for renting large zoom lenses that you may need for just one trip.

### Camera Accessories

We recommend bringing at least two large capacity memory cards or a small digital storage unit (or tablet) to back up your photos, freeing space on your memory cards. Don't forget to bring a battery charger and a backup battery so one is always charged and ready to use. For trips where you may be away from power sources for multiple days, consider looking into a solar-powered battery charger or buying additional backup batteries, and check that you have the appropriate adapter for the electrical outlets in your destination.

### Sharing Your Images

We would love for you to share photos from your trip, and with your permission, may even use your photos in our marketing materials or on our photo blog. We request that you send us a small sample of your best images. Please email your photos to [wtphotoblog@gmail.com](mailto:wtphotoblog@gmail.com) or tag us **@WildernessTravel** on social media.

### Photography Etiquette

When taking pictures of local people, be aware of cultural considerations. Approaching people with a warm smile and using polite gestures or simple phrases to ask permission to photograph them usually works well. It is always recommended to engage people in conversation before asking to photograph them, but if people do not wish to have their photo taken, please honor their requests. We urge travelers to avoid giving money in exchange for photo opportunities, which makes it harder for future travelers to have a meaningful personal interaction with local people. Please always heed your Trip Leader's guidelines for what is appropriate.

## BEING A CONSIDERATE TRAVELER

Please show respect for the cultures we are visiting by observing local customs concerning appropriate dress, particularly in sacred places. Your Trip Leader is always available to answer any questions that you may have regarding this. If it is necessary to use a cell phone during the trip, please do so privately. Smoking is rarely an issue these days, but if you do smoke, please do so only away from the group.

# Packing List

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## THE ESSENTIALS

- Air tickets (or E-tickets)
- Passport
- One other picture ID, such as a driver's license
- Expense money

## WT GEAR STORE

To help you prepare for your next WT adventure, we've put together a great collection of top brands including Patagonia, Outdoor Research, Eagle Creek, and more at our **WT Gear Store** (<http://wildernesstravel.newheadings.com>).

## LUGGAGE

We have limited space for luggage in our vehicle, so we ask that you restrict your luggage to one piece plus your daypack. Most of the small family-run inns we use on this trip do not have elevators or luggage porters and we need to rely on your trip leaders for luggage service, so please keep this in mind when deciding how big and heavy your packed luggage is. Additional luggage can be checked at the airport if you plan to return to the same airport for departure. It is a sensible precaution to wear or hand-carry your hiking boots on the plane. Nearly everything else can be replaced in case of baggage loss, but not a pair of well-fitted, fully broken-in hiking boots.

- Medium-sized daypack or backpack, large enough for a fleece jacket, rain gear, water bottle, camera, and other items you want on the trail. A padded hip belt and padded shoulder straps add greatly to the comfort.

## NOTES ON CLOTHING

Warmth and comfort are the main priorities. Weather conditions will vary greatly. On a hot and sunny day, you might want to hike in shorts and a t-shirt, but remember that in the French Alps, rain and cold weather can occur at any time. Dressing in layers is the best way to stay comfortable.

**Note on laundry:** The hotels where we stay two consecutive nights should be able to do laundry for you, but it's a good idea to consider doing your own (bring soap, clothesline, etc.).

## LAYERS

An insulating base layer (top and bottom) beneath your hiking clothes will keep you warm and comfortable. Capilene, fleece, and other synthetic fabrics are excellent, as are lightweight wool insulating layers by Patagonia, Icebreakers, and SmartWool. Cotton is not a good insulator, especially as a first layer next to the skin. Once it gets wet from perspiration, it stays wet and keeps you cold. (Cotton is fine for city wear and touring.) As your insulating layer, we suggest a fleece jacket and pants, which are lightweight, warm, and breathable, or wool, which also keeps you warm even when wet. Finally, a good outer layer is necessary to block the wind and keep you dry in case of rain. Gore-Tex and equivalent fabrics are waterproof and breathable and are a practical choice. Your outer layer should be roomy enough to fit over other layers of clothing.

## CLOTHING

The clothing list below is provided as a guideline only.

- Gore-Tex rain/wind shell jacket with hood, and Gore-Tex rain/wind pants (preferably with leg zippers so that they can be taken off without removing your boots). Important: Whether you choose Gore-Tex, Supplex, or a similar fabric, make sure your jacket has a hood and sealed seams to prevent leaking.
- Thick fleece jacket or heavy wool sweater
- Fleece vest—optional (great for layering)
- Fleece sweater or sweatshirt
- Polypropylene, Capilene, or wool long underwear, bottoms and tops
- Long-sleeved shirt—wool, fleece, or quick-drying “travel” fabrics like nylon
- T-shirts
- Hiking pants, one or two pairs. Jeans are not suitable because they are made of dense cotton, and once wet, will stay wet. Pile pants or synthetic hiking pants are a practical choice, as are “convertible” pants.
- Hiking shorts, two pairs. Quick-drying nylon shorts are great.
- Shade hat with a wide brim
- Fleece hat for warmth
- Fleece mittens or gloves
- Medium to heavyweight waterproof hiking boots designed for on- and off-trail hiking with multi-day hikes in mind
- Comfortable walking shoes
- Hiking socks. Thick pairs (Thorlo-type) as well as synthetic liner socks.
- Underwear—synthetics dry faster
- Bathing suit (for hotel pools)
- Sleepwear (long underwear can double)
- Casual city/hotel attire (for certain evenings when we dine in some quite fine restaurants, you might feel more comfortable wearing dressier, non-hiking clothes. Khakis and a nice shirt will suffice for men; coat and tie not necessary).

## HIKING BOOTS

**Your boots must be waterproof, warm, comfortable, and broken in, with an excellent tread!** If you are uncertain about the tread quality of your boots, buy a new pair rather than risk slipping on rocky trails and scree. Please choose your boots carefully. It is a sensible precaution to wear or hand-carry your hiking boots on the plane. Nearly everything else can be replaced in case of baggage loss, but not a pair of well-fitted, fully broken-in hiking boots.

For this trip, you need medium- to heavyweight hiking boots designed for on- and off-trail hiking with multi-day hikes in mind. Lightweight boots don't offer the high degree of ankle support and foot protection you need. Full-grain leather is extremely water-resistant and durable and is preferable to split-grain leather or nylon. Remember that full-grain leather boots tend to be stiffer and will need a break-in period. If you are shopping for new boots, ask your store about boots with built-in Gore-Tex-type waterproof barriers that enhance water-resistance. If you have old full-grain leather boots, coat them with silicon waterproofing material to increase their water resistance. Waterproofing materials wear off over time and need to be re-applied. Gore-Tex boots are considered waterproof for one year unless the membrane is punctured.

If you're buying a new pair of boots, make sure a qualified salesperson gives you proper guidance in determining fit. Don't buy any boots that you are not permitted to return after wearing for several hours around the house. Blisters caused by improperly fitted or insufficiently broken-in boots are the most common and painful problem normally encountered on hiking trips. Before you depart, you should be able to wear your boots for a full, active day with no discomfort. Even boots you have owned for years can sometimes produce blisters when you are doing this amount of hiking. Limber up feet and boots before departure, and bring a good supply of Second Skin.

Running shoes are not sufficient for the hiking conditions you'll encounter, although they are comfortable to change into at night.

## EQUIPMENT

- Hiking poles (must have rubber tips for hiking in the Vallée des Merveilles)
- Two reusable water bottles, 1 qt. capacity.
- Good quality sunglasses with case. A spare pair of sunglasses is a good idea should your first pair be broken or lost.
- Bandannas (many uses)
- Stuff sacks or plastic bags to compartmentalize items in luggage
- Small amount of detergent for hand-washing clothes

## PERSONAL FIRST AID SUPPLIES

Every trip member must bring a small kit for personal use. Your own experience will influence your choices.

- Sunscreen SPF #30 or higher and lip balm with sunscreen. We recommend mineral-based sunscreens with zinc oxide or titanium dioxide because they do not contain harsh chemicals that are harmful to the environment. Brands such as Honest Company, Badger, and Alba Botanica are found in most sporting goods stores and drugstores.
- Aspirin, ibuprofen, or Tylenol for muscle pain or headache, Tylenol PM for sleep
- Blister kit. Look for the long-lasting gel-type bandages that you can apply directly on blisters, such as Band-Aid Advanced Healing Bandages or Curad Gel Multi-Day Bandages. "Liquid band-aids," such as New-Skin, are useful because they dry rapidly to form a tough protective cover over a blister.
- Prescription medications properly labeled
- Spare contact lenses or spare prescription glasses

## OPTIONAL ITEMS

- Voltage converter and plug adapter for appliance use in hotels
- Flashlight or headlamp with extra batteries
- Fleece neck gaiter
- Camera, spare batteries and memory cards
- Reading/writing material
- Small umbrella
- Money belt or neck pouch. Always carry your passport, credit cards, and cash with you in a money belt or neck pouch tucked down inside your shirt or blouse.
- Washcloth, if you like to use one (most European hotels do not provide them)

# Reading List

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## ESSENTIAL READING

### **Killing Dragons, The Conquest of the Alps**

*Fergus Fleming*

2001, 398 PAGES

Fleming spins lively tales of man against nature in this entertaining history of the eccentrics, adventurers and publicity-hounds who sought to conquer the Alps, including Whymper and his first ascent of the Matterhorn 150 years ago.

### **Solo Faces**

*James Salter*

1998, 218 PAGES

The story of an American climber who, dissatisfied with his everyday life, travels to the Alps of southern France to tackle mountain peaks. The prose is glorious and the mountain-climbing scenes are as vivid as they get. Much of the action takes place in and around Chamonix.

### **Alps Map**

*Freytag & Berndt*

2010

This regional map (1:500,000), centered on the Alps, includes portions of Austria, Slovenia, Italy, Switzerland, Germany and France.

### **The GR5 Trail, Through the French Alps, Lake Geneva to Nice**

*Paddy Dillon*

2013, 320 PAGES

A compact guide to hiking in the French Alps, covering the GR5 trail from Lake Geneva to the Mediterranean.

## ALSO RECOMMENDED

### **La Bella Figura, A Field Guide to the Italian Mind**

*Beppe Severgnini*

2007, 288 PAGES

Italians themselves love this guide to the Italian character, which addresses their never-ending passion for beauty, disorder and high emotion. The book opens with a snapshot of Malpensa Airport, then moves on to Tuscany, Rome, Naples and Sardinia.

### **The Cathedral Builders of the Middle Ages**

*Alain Erlande-Brandenburg*

2010, 175 PAGES

This pocket-size encyclopedia of the art, architecture and culture of the Middle Ages features hundreds of drawings, color illustrations and a brief chronology.

### **Birds of Europe**

*Lars Svensson*

2010, 416 PAGES

Featuring 3,500 glorious paintings by Killian Mullarney and Dan Zetterstrom, the second edition of this exquisite guide features updated text and maps.

### **La Place de la Concorde Suisse**

*John McPhee*

1994, 150 PAGES

McPhee deploys his usual insight and wonderful prose on the phenomenon of the Switzerland army to present an irreverent portrait of Switzerland and the Swiss mindset.

### **Eiger Dreams, Ventures Among Men and Mountains**

*Jon Krakauer*

2009, 192 PAGES

A collection of some of Krakauer's (Into Thin Air) best journalism, these stories and essays focus on the mindset and determination of world-class mountaineers, including Alpine and Himalayan climbers.

### **The Alps, A Cultural History**

*Andrew Beattie*

2006, 256 PAGES

Beattie explores the turbulent past and vibrant present of the Alps, where early pioneers of tourism, mountaineering and scientific research have each left their mark.

### **A Traveller's History of France**

*Robert Cole*

2008, 256 PAGES

This fast-moving survey covers the conquests of ancient Gaul through the heady days of revolution to modern times.

### **Cham**

*Jonathan Trigell*

2009

A young British author who lives in Chamonix, Trigell captures the beauty of the region, the allure of the slopes and the decadent vibe of the ski bum sub-culture in this edgy thriller.

### **Michelin Green Guide French Alps**

*Michelin Travel Publications*

2015, 520 PAGES

A compact, practical guide to the region in the classic Michelin style.

### **Cuisines of the Alps**

*Kay Shaw Nelson*

2004, 197 PAGES

Subtitled "Recipes, Drinks, and Lore from France, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Italy, Germany, Austria, and Slovenia," this colorful tour of the region's rustic cuisine offers more than 140 recipes, a section on regional wines and historical information.

### **The Food of France**

*Waverly Root*

1992, 450 PAGES

An evocative and beautifully written survey of French food. First published in 1958 and revised in the mid-1970s, the book covers the important regions of French cuisine by dividing them into domains of Butter (northern France), Fat (Alsace) and Oil (the south).

### **A Tramp Abroad**

*Kerry Driscoll*

2003, 400 PAGES

Written 11 years after *Innocents Abroad*, this is Twain's second foray into European travel. Filled with his characteristic wit and humorous observations, it documents his journeys through Germany, Switzerland, France and Italy. Now with an introduction by Dave Eggers.

### **Tour of Mont Blanc, Complete Trekking Guide**

*Kev Reynolds*

2015, 240 PAGES

A compact guide to the classic Mont Blanc circuit, which includes a detailed guide to each section of the tour, as well as the author's own personable, encouraging remarks.

### **Explore the Tour of Mont Blanc**

*Gareth McCormack*

2013, 64 PAGES

A compact, practical guide in the "Rucksack Reader" series, this book features a route map, photographs and practical details for the classic 11-day Mont Blanc circuit though France, Italy and Switzerland.

**Eyewitness Guide Provence & the Cote D'Azur**

*Roger Williams*

2013, 272 PAGES

This is an illustrated, colorful guide to the art and architecture, literature, history and attractions of Provence. With photographs and site plans, maps and sections on the Riviera, the Var, Bouches-du-Rhone, Vaucluse and the Alpes-de-Haute-Provence.

**Alpine Cooking: Recipes and Stories from Europe's Grand Mountaintops**

*Meredith Erickson*

2019, 352 PAGES

Beautifully photographed cookbook and travelogue showcasing the regional cuisine of the Alps.

Revised: January 22, 2019

**Tender is the Night**

*Charles Scribner*

1995, 317 PAGES

Fitzgerald's tragic tale of wealthy expatriate lovers living on the French Riviera. Dick and Nicole Diver fill their home with friends, but cannot find happiness and slowly slip into psychological despair.