EUROPEAN ALPS
DESTINATION GUIDE

Tour du Mont Blanc | Italian Dolomites | Swiss Alps
The European Alps are a vibrant part of the world, overflowing with mesmerising mountains. From the thrilling Tour du Mont Blanc and mighty Italian Dolomites to the impressive valleys and trails of the Swiss Alps, they are as enticing in summer as they are under three feet of snow.

I lived in the French Alps for two years and have recently completed the Dolomites Circular Trek and the Tour du Mont Blanc. This region holds a special place in my heart. The feeling of waking up to towering mountains each day will invoke a deep happiness in your soul. Trekking over and around these spectacular mountain ranges will give you a great sense of achievement. And at the end of each day as you enjoy a 3-course meal prepared by our local hosts you will have time to reflect on your time on the trail.

All our guided treks are led by experienced and passionate International Mountain Leaders who have an intimate knowledge of the region. They take safety very seriously so you know you will be in good hands.

If you love vast landscapes, the great outdoors, experiencing new cultures, taking in nature, breathing in fresh alpine air, and the company of like-minded walkers, then trekking in the European Alps should be the next adventure on your list!

I’d love to help you plan your journey. It’s what I do best!

Jodie

European Alps Destination Expert
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www.montblanctreks.com.au
EUROPEAN ALPS: QUICK LOOK

TOUR DU MONT BLANC
World-famous route that circles the highest mountain in Western Europe, crossing from France into Italy and Switzerland. Offers all the excitement of a high mountain trek, with few of the worries. Guided and self-guided options available. No technical mountaineering skills required.

- Starting point Chamonix (France)
- Best time to go June to September
- Difficulty Strenuous (7)*
- Duration 13 days
- Total distance 170km (anti-clockwise)
- Daily distances 12–20km
- High point 2500m
- Highlights 7 valleys, 3 countries and 3 cultures

SWISS ALPS
Adaptable day hikes (2 to 7 hours) and mountain excursions, using cable cars to speed you to the best high-altitude hikes. The Matterhorn (4478m) is a hypnotic pyramid of a mountain and the most famous of Switzerland’s peaks. Enjoy the car-free village of Zermatt and the rustic character of rural Engelberg, with its Benedictine monastery and monks, and farmer’s life that take you to unspoilt areas of magical beauty.

- Starting point Zermatt (Switzerland)
- Best time to go June to September
- Difficulty Challenging to Strenuous (6–7)*
- Duration 8 days
- Total distance 75km
- Daily distances 10–20km
- High point 2750m
- Highlights Swiss cuisine, overnighting at Melchsee Frutt, the Matterhorn

ITALIAN DOLOMITES
Circular trip, custom-made by our expert in-country lead guide; encompasses some of the best sections of the Alta Via 1 and 2. Our route uses the most scenic paths while avoiding the higher, more serious and difficult mountain terrain. Enjoy classic Dolomite peaks and green mountain meadows.

- Starting point Calalzo (Italy)
- Best time to go June to September
- Difficulty Strenuous (7)*
- Duration 8 days
- Total distance 118km
- Daily distances 16–22km (6 to 8 hours each day)
- High point 2540m
- Highlights Italian cuisine, modern accommodation, unique itinerary

* All our trips are graded from 1 (Introductory) to 10 (Tough). Grading systems are always arbitrary. However, having an indication of the grade may help you choose between our walks. See p22 for more information.
A FABULOUS, ONCE-IN-A-LIFETIME EXPERIENCE!
OUR DOLOMITES GUIDE WAS PROFESSIONAL, KNOWLEDGEABLE AND INSTILLED COMPLETE CONFIDENCE IN ALL MEMBERS OF OUR GROUP.

– Therese Corrigan, Surrey Hills (VIC)
WHY EXPERIENCE THE EUROPEAN ALPS WITH RAW TRAVEL?

- **Natural wonders**: Impossibly jagged peaks and panoramas, iconic peaks reflected in tranquil mountain lakes, the iconic Matterhorn, thrilling cliffs and soaring limestone pinnacles.
- **Wildlife watching**: Encounters with ibex (those enormous curving horns!) and friendly marmots.
- **Food**: Culinary specialities from each country and region, including apple strudel with an afternoon coffee, prosecco cocktails and cheese.

WHY YOU’LL LOVE THE EUROPEAN ALPS

- **History**: High-altitude tracks once trudged by First World War soldiers
- **Diverse scenery**: Forested hillsides, open rocky mountainsides, glaciers, rock spires, abundant colourful summer wildflowers and lush meadows.
- **Guides**: International Mountain Guides to lead, inspire and inform.
- **Views**: Spectacular towering mountain scenery that will take your breath away, including the Italian Val Ferret, offering unrivalled views of Mont Blanc.

Raw Travel has operated active walking trips in the European Alps for many years. We are one of the most experienced Australian operators you can choose and enjoy providing a friendly, personal service where you’re treated as an individual. We pride ourselves on our staff’s intimate knowledge of the European Alps: we really do ‘know because we go’ and have created walks that show you the best of the Alps.

Our European Alps Destination Expert, Jodie, will design an unforgettable walking adventure for you. Jodie has completed all the walks and can answer your many questions. As well as speaking to someone in the same time zone as you, you can come along to our free talks on the European Alps.

Why people choose us

- We are an Australian tour operator with expert first-hand knowledge of the European Alps, plus local contacts in Europe to provide assistance.
- We pre-book your accommodation, transport and luggage transfers; all you carry is your daypack.
- We book great local accommodation in hotel and mountain refugios.
- Most meals are included in your booking, so you can look forward to hearty mountain cuisine.
- Our in-house travel agent books your flights and pre/post-travel arrangements.
- Our self-guided clients are provided with a guidebook, phrasebook, luggage tags, detailed itinerary, maps, track notes and orientation pack.
- You have access to insider information and tips from our European Alps Destination Expert and on our dedicated information website: [www.montblanctreks.com.au](http://www.montblanctreks.com.au)

The Dolomites or Tour du Mont Blanc?
The ascents and descents of the TMB and Dolomites are very similar. The big difference with the Dolomites is the paths: they are a little narrower and steeper in sections than the TMB and sometimes more exposed. Dizzying heights and steep slopes are a feature of the walks in this area, so you need to be prepared for this. The Dolomites are not suitable for people who experience vertigo!

Trek description – TMB circuit

Rated as one of the top 5 mountain treks in the world, the Tour du Mont Blanc is one of Europe’s finest. You’ll get to appreciate different cultures, food and people while trekking through glorious Alpine scenery.

The Tour du Mont Blanc trek is demanding – climbing six passes, traversing around huge glaciers and hiking though spectacular alpine scenery – but incredibly rewarding.

For the full guided circuit trek allow 13 days in total: 10 days of walking, plus a rest day and arrival and departure days.

**Stage 1: Chamonix to Les Houches**

- 13 km, 5 hours
- Ascent 525m / Descent 1400m

To start the trek, what better viewpoint than the Brevent! From the summit (2525m) the view of the Mont Blanc is incomparable. Descend via Bel Lachat and Merlet.

**Stage 2: Les Houches to Les Contamines**

- 18km, 7 hours
- Ascent 700m / Descent 1050m

A beautiful walk across the south-west face of the Mont Blanc massif. Includes a charming traverse that passes at the foot of the Bionnassay Glacier, a swing bridge across a river, an ascent up the Col du Tricot (2120m), then a zigzagging path down to the Val Montjoie.

**Stage 3: Les Contamines to Les Chapieux**

- 19km, 7 hours
- Ascent 700m / Descent 1050m

A beautiful walk across the south-west face of the Mont Blanc massif. Includes a charming traverse that passes at the foot of the Bionnassay Glacier, a swing bridge across a river, an ascent up the Col du Tricot (2120m), then a zigzagging path down to the Val Montjoie.

**Stage 4: Les Chapieux to Tour du Mont Blanc**

- 18km, 7 hours
- Ascent 700m / Descent 1050m

A beautiful walk across the south-west face of the Mont Blanc massif. Includes a charming traverse that passes at the foot of the Bionnassay Glacier, a swing bridge across a river, an ascent up the Col du Tricot (2120m), then a zigzagging path down to the Val Montjoie.

**Stage 5: Mtb to Cervinia**

- 22km, 7 hours
- Ascent 700m / Descent 1050m

A beautiful walk across the south-west face of the Mont Blanc massif. Includes a charming traverse that passes at the foot of the Bionnassay Glacier, a swing bridge across a river, an ascent up the Col du Tricot (2120m), then a zigzagging path down to the Val Montjoie.

**Stage 6: Cervinia to Chamonix**

- 12km, 4 hours
- Ascent 700m / Descent 1050m

A beautiful walk across the south-west face of the Mont Blanc massif. Includes a charming traverse that passes at the foot of the Bionnassay Glacier, a swing bridge across a river, an ascent up the Col du Tricot (2120m), then a zigzagging path down to the Val Montjoie.

For more information, visit our website: [www.montblanctreks.com.au](http://www.montblanctreks.com.au)
Stage 4: Les Chapieux to Val Veny
- 16km, 6 hours
- Ascent 950m / Descent 600m

A climb to the Val d’Aosta via the Col de la Seigne (2516m) gives you the most imposing view of the south face of Mont Blanc, then a path leads you around the Limestone Pyramids to reach the moraine of the Estelette Glacier. Continue down the valley to your overnight stop by the glacial Lacs de Miage.

Stage 5: Val Veny to Courmayeur
- 17km, 5 hours
- Ascent 400m / Descent 1300m

Today is a slightly shorter day to Courmayeur. It starts with an ascent to the Arp Vielle and then on to Col Chercrouit (1956m), before a descent to the village of Dolonne and then Courmayeur.

Stage 6: Courmayeur to Italian Val Ferret
- 12km, 6 hours
- Ascent 900m or 1300m / Descent 550m or 950m

Start with a charming forested ascent, then summit Tete Bernada (2534m), one of the most beautiful lookouts on the whole Tour du Mont Blanc. There is an alternative path on a glorious contouring trail with flower meadows, milky streams and clanging cowbells while descending into the Italian Val Ferret.

Stage 7: Italian Val Ferret to La Fouly
- 20km, 8 hours
- Ascent 900m / Descent 1000m

The day starts with an easy walk up the valley. The ascent to the Col Ferret (2537m) is steep but enjoyable. Crossing the Grand Col Ferret takes you out of Italy and into Switzerland. The walk down into the Swiss Val Ferret is through pastureland and on a mixture of paths, tracks and through valaisan pastures to the charming village of La Fouly.

Stage 8: Champex-Lac to Trient
- 16km, 6.5 hours
- Ascent 800m or 1200m / Descent 950m or 1140m

The classic Tour du Mont Blanc takes the Bovine route. This part of the trail passes near meadows, forests and high alpine pastures. Enjoy spectacular views across to the Bernese Alps before mostly downhill woodland walk that will take you to Col de La Forclaz, then into Trient. There is a possible variation via the Fenêtre d’Arpette d’Arpette (2671m) – a tough climb, reckoned by many to be the hardest part of the Tour du Mont Blanc.

Stage 9: Trient to Argentière
- 13km, 6 hours
- Ascent 980m / Descent 900m

The walk up to the Col de Balme (2131m) via les Herbageres brings you back into France. There are superb views of Mont Blanc and the Chamonix Valley. Enjoy panoramic views of lovely snow domes that will remain in sight for most of the descent into Argentière.

Stage 10: Argentière to Chamonix
- 13km, 5–8 hours
- Ascent 850m or 1100m / Descent 400m or 500m

From Argentière you climb up to Cheserys, a balcony offering grandiose views. Marvel at the many glaciers and of course Mont Blanc. The trip ends at Flegere and you return to Chamonix by cable car.

See our Tour du Mont Blanc website trip page for the full itinerary.

TMB signs and waymarks
For self-guided walkers, the TMB is well signed – especially compared to what we are used to in Australia. The route is variously indicated by finger-post signs, red and white bands or yellow diamonds outlined in black, usually with the letters TMB, painted on rocks, trees or buildings, or the silhouette of a walker in black on a yellow diamond. Many signs also include the TMB trademark logo.

If you keep a diligent eye open for these signs and waymarks, navigation should not pose undue problems. If you are unsure of the way forward at any point then look around in the vicinity for markers – if you have not seen any for a while it may be that you have taken a wrong turn. In this instance the best idea is to retrace your footsteps to the last visible marker and look to see if you made a wrong turn, or see if you can see walkers on a nearby track that may be the TMB.
SECTION 1: INSPIRATION

TREK DESCRIPTION – DOLOMITES CIRCULAR

The Dolomites are part of the Alps but with their own unique geology and landscape. They are best known for their incredible sheer peaks, the startling colours of their rocks at sunset and the idyllic beauty of their flower-filled meadows.

This original and varied landscape in north-eastern Italy has now been given UNESCO World Natural Heritage status. The network of trails we use show off the beauty of the landscape and are enriched by the historical interest of the sites.

For the full guided circular trek allow 8 days in total: 6 days of walking, plus arrival and departure days.

Stage 1: Calalzo to Borca Di Cadore

- 21km, 7–8 hours
- Ascent 1100m / Descent 1100m

A hike up through larch forests then to the high point at San Dionisio to see the magnificent view of the Monte Antelao and Marmarole massifs. Then a long descent to a river valley.

Stage 2: Borca Di Cadore to Flames

- 16km, 5–6.5 hours
- Ascent 700m / Descent 550m

A gentle walk that steepens amidst dramatic scenery. You will thread your way through a spectacular and demanding landscape, before descending by cable car.

Stage 3: Flames to Fanes-Sennes-Braies Natural Park

- 20km, 7 hours
- Ascent 1100m / Descent 400m

The ascent begins in shady larch forests, then descends past a magnificent gorge, then climbs higher, in more open country, with magnificent views of the stark Dolomites limestone.

Stage 4: Fanes-Sennes-Braies Natural Park to San Cassiano

- 22km, 7 hours
- Ascent 600m / Descent 1200m

This walk crosses high Alpine meadows and rocky tracks before ascending to a mountain pass. The trail then leads downhill, steeply in parts.

Stage 5: Trek San Cassiano to Cinque Torri

- 18km, 5–6 hours
- Ascent 800m / Descent 800m

Today you ascend to Passo Falzarego and cross high ground to the Cinque Torri area. Visit the trenches dug into the mountains in WWI.

Stage 6: Cinque Torri to Calalzo

- 21km, 7–8 hours
- Ascent 700m / Descent 1000m

The final day's walking takes you through incredible mountain scenery, with sheer cliffs and towering peaks on both sides as you traverse the Croda da Lago then descend to the Cadore valley.

See the Dolomites website trip page for the full itinerary.

Landing in the Dolomites!

Trekking in the Italian Dolomites offers an exhilarating, unforgettable alpine summer holiday, but not just because of the impossibly jagged peaks and panoramas. In the rocky post-apocalyptic landscape in the Fanes-Sennes-Braies Nature Park and Cortina area you'll find contemporary art installations, like this one.

EUROPEAN ALPS

TREK DESCRIPTION – SWISS ALPS DISCOVERY

Prepare to be awestruck. Exhilarated. In this place where trails lead to remote hamlets, glacial lakes and green pastures, over hidden mountain passes and beside immense glaciers. Where chalets welcome you with a cold beer or a rich hot chocolate.

RAW Travel can adapt walking days in the Swiss Alps to suit your timeframe and ability so that the trip matches your desired length.

Stage 1: Zermatt to the Five Lakes Walk

- 10km, 4 hours
- Ascent 600m / Descent 600m

This trail is full of variety. The path leads past mountain lakes, each with their own shape, colour, character and size.

Stage 2: Zermatt to The Schonbielhutte

- 22km, 7.5 hours
- Ascent 900m / Descent 1200m

Point-to-point hike with stunning views of the Matterhorn, Dent Blanche, the Ober Gabelhorn massif and the Zmutt Glacier. The day starts with a gondola ride then you follow a trail through meadows, mixed larch, pine forest and alpine pastures.

Stage 3: Zermatt to the Gornergrat

- 17.6km, 6.5 hours
- Ascent 1400m / Descent 900m

Breathtaking hike up and over the Widdersfeld Stock Mountain and through the Brosti Stock Pass, descending down the Melch valley to the Stockalp Lift.

Stage 4: Zermatt to Engelberg

- 15.5km, 7.5 hours
- Ascent 700m / Descent 1550m

The Four Lakes hike is one of the most beautiful hikes in Switzerland. Make your way towards the stunning Jochpass region and the Titlis massive, while taking in the incredible scenery.

Stage 5: Engelberg to Melchsee Frutt

- 15.5km, 7.5 hours
- Ascent 700m / Descent 1550m

The Four Lakes hike is one of the most beautiful hikes in Switzerland. Make your way towards the stunning Jochpass region and the Titlis massive, while taking in the incredible scenery.

Stage 6: Melchsee Frutt to Four Lakes Hike to Engelberg

- 15.5km, 7.5 hours
- Ascent 700m / Descent 1550m

Prepare to be awestruck. Exhilarated. In this place where trails lead to remote hamlets, glacial lakes and green pastures, over hidden mountain passes and beside immense glaciers. Where chalets welcome you with a cold beer or a rich hot chocolate.

See the Swiss Alps website trip page for the full itinerary.

See www.montblanctreks.com.au
INTERNATIONAL MOUNTAIN LEADERS

We are proud to have a team of International Mountain Leaders who lead all our guided trips. They have many years of experience in the European Alps and are expertly qualified to lead challenging treks. In mountain environments like the Alps where the weather can change quickly it is essential that you have an experienced leader who is well versed in mountain safety and navigation – the International Mountain Leader qualification is the gold standard.

Our mountain leaders are English-speaking/bilingual professional guides, trained in first-aid and fully versed in the local environment and evacuation procedures, so you are in safe hands and will be well looked after. Most of our guides originate from the UK. They are passionate about the mountains and have each led many successful Mont Blanc and Dolomite treks.

We also have our own coordinator and luggage driver based in Chamonix (France) who provides the back-up for our TMB groups and self-guided walkers, should they require assistance.

Our European Alps Team

Jodie Mayo
Destination Expert

Diane McGuinness
Lead Guide

Dave Norris
Leader

David Barber
Leader

Gary Daines
Leader

Gary Hodgson
Leader

Dale Webb
Driver

THIS WAS AN ADVENTURE TO REMEMBER. THE TREK WAS VERY CAREFULLY PLANNED TO PROVIDE A VARIETY OF EXPERIENCES INCLUDING DIFFERENT TERRAIN, SCENERY, TOP QUALITY FOOD, HOSPITALITY AND ACCOMMODATION. OUR LEADER WAS FANTASTIC AND FLUENT IN ITALIAN.

– Frances Rogers, Fremantle (WA)
The Alps have played a significant role in European history, particularly since the time of the Roman Empire. Paths in the Alps probably first appeared during the Neolithic age as the first farmers established lines of communication between small settlements.

With the spread of Celtic tribes, paths became more common. The Romans constructed well-graded and paved routes to facilitate trade and the rapid movement of armies. Little changed through the Middle Ages.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, travel for pleasure and discovery became popular among the wealthy and leisured classes, and climbing Alpine peaks became increasingly popular. In the late 1930s Alpine walking reached the masses. Paid holidays for workers allowed many more people the time and money to visit the Alps.

After WWII the popularity of walking increased further and the network of paths expanded both under the pressure of feet and through the endeavours of local clubs. In the latter half of the 20th century, classic modern routes like the Tour du Mont Blanc achieved international recognition.

Alpine trails became the focus of world-wide tourism, particularly in the 1990s with the boom in walking holidays.

The European Alps arose as a result of the collision of the African and European tectonic plates. The mountains are made of limestone, formed from sediments deposited in the ancient Tethys Ocean basin about 200 million years ago, during the time of the dinosaurs. The Tethys separated the ancient supercontinents Laurasia (which included modern-day Europe) and Gondwana (which included modern-day Africa and Australia), until the African plate began to push northward into the Eurasian plate around 30 million years ago. That closed the Tethys sea and lifted the sea floor up, forming the Alps.

The intense tectonic forces created massive recumbent folds in the limestone, called ‘nappes’, which were then carved extensively by glaciers over the past 2 million years to form the extreme peaks and valleys seen today. Crystalline basement rocks, which are exposed in the higher central regions, are the rocks forming Mont Blanc, the Matterhorn, and high peaks in the Pennine Alps and Hohe Tauern in Austria.

Mont Blanc area

The geology of the Mont Blanc area is a product of the dynamic and complex geology of the Alps as a whole. Around the fringes of the mountain and then many of the areas where TMB walkers will find themselves a rock faces are principally limestone and schist. Things are the results of a rock building process that took place of 700 million years ago. The Mont Blanc massif and the Aiguille Rouge are composed of granites which pushed through the older rocks some 300 million years ago. The actual tectonic process of mountain building began about 100 million years ago when the African and European plates collided and forced these rocks upwards.

This period of mountain building in the Alps is thought to have ended 6 million years ago and since then the effect of successive periods of glaciation have created the land forms we see today. However, Alpine glaciers are currently in rapid retreat and have been for over a century. In 1645 Bishop of Geneva perform the exorcism at the snout of the Mer de Glace after it had bulldozed through chalets and farmland in the Chamonix valley. The glacier, which is the second longest in the Alps has since then retreated several kilometers.

The following activities are usually available and can be arranged locally. Costs are estimates only and based on per person, and may depend on the number of participants.

- Aiguille du Midi – panoramic views of Alps €59
- Mountain biking – full day’s hire €25
- Rock climbing – half day €40
- Rafting – 1½ hours / €40–60 per person
- Public swimming pool – €6
- Paragliding – 1000/2550m vertical descent €100/220

What to do in Chamonix

There are lots to see and do in Chamonix.

- Find out more on Mont Blanc is growing with help from its glaciers.
- Mont Blanc Trekking
- Dolomites

The Dolomites are widely regarded as being among the most attractive mountain landscapes in the world. Their intrinsic beauty derives from a variety of spectacular vertical forms such as pinnacles, spires and towers, with contrasting horizontal surfaces including
ledges, crags and plateaux, all of which rise abruptly above extensive talus deposits and more gentle foothills.

A great diversity of colours is provided by the contrasts between the bare pale-coloured rock surfaces and the forests and meadows below. The mountains rise as peaks with intervening ravines, in some places standing isolated but in others forming sweeping panoramas. Some of the rock cliffs here rise more than 1500 m and are among the highest limestone walls found anywhere in the world.

**WILDLIFE**

After years of retreat, populations of wild animals are making a comeback in the Alps as a result of protective measures. You will come across marmots, Ibex and mountain hare on your walk on the TMB plus you may see ravens, Alpine chough, buzzards, eagles and more rarely a bearded vulture with a 2m wingspan overhead. If you are lucky you may spot a ptarmigan in the thickets above the treeline.

The Alpine Ibex (mountain goat) are not shy creatures and are often seen on or above the paths. While they are quite used to walkers it’s best not to get too close to a wild animal with horns.

They can be easily identified by the male’s large scimitar-shaped horns, which have ridged lines on the front. There are more than 40,000 ibex in the Swiss Alps alone!

Easily confused with the ibex, the chamois is a rarer and smaller goat-like animal found at moderately high elevations throughout the Alps. They are easily recognised by their white facial markings and the brown stripe that runs along their backbone.

The Alpine marmot is common in the Swiss Alps between 750m and 3000m in elevation. The marmot is the largest member of the squirrel family. You’ll often see an alpine marmot ‘standing’ while they keep...
a look out for potential predators or other dangers. Warnings are given, by emitting a series of loud whistles, after which members of the colony may be seen running for cover.

ALPINE FLORA
The European alpine flora has recently been estimated to be in excess of 2500 species and subspecies! The Alpine zone begins above the treeline, and varies from 1700m to 2000m. It’s here you’ll find shrubs like Bilberry and dwarf willow, and the best displays of wildflowers among the meadows.

Passing upwards into an area where shrubs such as Rhododendron and Myrtle abound, the subalpine level gives way to the alpine level. The alpine meadowland is populated by many species with spectacular flowerings on the TMB route, including Gentiana acaule and Gentiana Clusii, the famous Edelweiss and the rare Campanulathyrsoides. Edelweiss blooms from July to September. It is quite rare nowadays, and walkers often still pick it in ignorance of its protected status.

ARE THESE TRIPS RIGHT TRIP FOR ME?
When considering booking a trip it is important that you look at the descriptions in this Destination Guide about accommodation, food and level of physical difficulty to ensure that the trip matches your expectations. Particularly with the physical difficulty rating, it’s vital to select a trip that is realistic for your ability. Read through this Destination Guide and the specific trip itineraries on our website before booking.

RAW Travel Grading
• Swiss Alps 6–7 Challenging to Strenuous
• Tour Du Mont Blanc 7 Strenuous
• Dolomites 7 Strenuous

Treking in the European Alps is demanding but offers a rewarding physical challenge.

Grading systems are always arbitrary. However, having an indication of the grade may help you choose between our walks. We have used several criteria to assess the difficulty of our walks, including the number of hours walking required each day, terrain and conditions underfoot, weather, gradient, altitude, signage and facilities along the trail.

To prepare for walks of this grading, we recommend completing 2 to 3 walks per week, increasing distances while carrying an 8kg pack, with some hill walking or heavy sand walking included. Please note these gradings are a guide and will depend on your individual experience, fitness level and mental attitude.

Regular training
While we often see amazing improvements in people’s fitness with a program of regular exercise before a trip, you have to be realistic about whether you can commit to regular training with your current lifestyle. If you feel you are unable to commit to doing the training needed to achieve the level of fitness required then you should consider another trip that is less demanding. This is the only way to accurately judge whether you can cope with the demands of any given trip.

WHAT’S IT LIKE UNDERFOOT?
Tour du Mont Blanc
The Tour du Mont Blanc is a high-altitude trail around the entire Mont Blanc massif. The terrain is mountainous, rocky and often rough underfoot, but there are also plenty of graded paths. There are sometimes long steady ascents and descents, and the odd steep climb, as well as pass crossings. Depending on spring weather in Europe, there may be snow on the passes.

On self-guided trips there are some optional sections where you can use metal ladders and fixed chains and cables to aid negotiation of steep or challenging passes. You don’t have to do these sections, and a lot of people choose to bypass them. You will also come across gravel forest roads, ski pistes and rough tracks for vehicles over agricultural land. There are a couple of points where cable cars are an option.

Self-guided walkers should check the latest trail conditions for snow cover and weather.
TOUGH AND AWESOME TREKKING. THE REWARDS OF SEEING MAJESTIC MOUNTAINS AS YOU CREST THE COLS IS UNFORGETTABLE. LUSH GREEN GRASSES, COLOURFUL EARLY SUMMER FLOWERS, CLEAR BLUE SKIES... GREAT FOOD AND WINE, WONDERFUL LIKE-MINDED PEOPLE!

– Andrew Macdonald, Rokeby (TAS)

Tough and awesome trekking. The rewards of seeing majestic mountains as you crest the cols is unforgettable. Lush green grasses, colourful early summer flowers, clear blue skies... great food and wine, wonderful like-minded people!

RAW Travel offers a range of guided and self-guided options in the European Alps:

**Guided trips**
- Mont Blanc Circuit Trek (13 days)
- Mont Blanc Highlights (8 days)
- Dolomites Circular Trek (8 days)
- Swiss Alps Discovery (8 days)

**Self-guided**
- Mont Blanc Circuit Trek (13 days)

**WHAT WE OFFER**
RAW Travel offers a range of guided and self-guided options in the European Alps:

**Italian Dolomites**
The Dolomites are very steep and rocky mountains. You need to be prepared for this. The terrain is often uneven, rough, stony and hard underfoot and some of the paths are narrow and exposed. There are also vast scree slopes. To get the most from the hikes on this trip you will need to be fit, experienced and free from vertigo.

**Swiss Alps**
The terrain in Switzerland includes well-maintained paths and rugged mountain trails, with some steps, rocky sections and steep descents. Most activities on this trip take place at elevations of 1200m to 2100m; sometimes up to 3000m, which can make the routes feel more challenging than the mileage may suggest. Thanks to the marvels of Swiss transportation, no support van is needed on this trip; we often use cable cars to access the best high-altitude hikes.

**SELF-GUIDED WALKING EXPLAINED**
Travelling self-guided allows you to walk from place to place progressing from one accommodation to the next in your own time. You walk without a guide, following our trail notes, guidebook and area maps. Luggage transfers are included on all trekking days (except one night where you stay in a lovely mountain refuge) meaning you will only trek with a daypack.

**MONT BLANC INFORMATION WEBSITE**
On our dedicated TMB website you’ll find all you need to know about this classic mountain walk, including a photo gallery, videos, and detailed information about the route, history and lots more.

**RAW TRAVEL INSIGHTS (BLOG)**
Written by our European Alps Destination Experts, our RAW Insights are great background reading.

- Ask the expert – Layering clothes
- Ask the expert – How do I choose and fit a rucksack?
- Ask the expert – Do I need trekking poles and which ones should I buy?
- Ask the expert – What boots should I buy and how do I look after them?
- Mountain thrills on Italy’s dramatic rocky rooftop
- Thinking of trekking the Dolomites?
- Mouthwatering Mont Blanc mountain food
- Mont Blanc weather and other wonderful things!
- On top of the world! Discover Zermatt
SECTION 1: INSPIRATION

BACKGROUND READING

Guidebooks

There are several good English-language guidebooks available that are dedicated to the TMB. They have additional information to the track notes we provide for our clients. While not essential, they can enable a more fulfilling experience on the walk.

- **Tour du Mont Blanc**
  by Jim Manthorpe (Trailblazer Publications, 2008)
  Includes 50 trail maps, itineraries and comprehensive background information. This is the guidebook provided to our clients when the book a TMB trip with us. It has very detailed maps.

- **The Tour of Mont Blanc**
  A quality publication with a lot of useful information, although the maps are high level.

- **Explore the Tour of Mont Blanc**
  by Gareth McCormack (Rucksack Readers, 2005)
  A ring-bound, smaller publication suited to carrying in the rucksack.

Other titles

The many triumphs and tragedies of Alpine mountaineering history have inspired a rich library of literature on the subject.

- **Scrambles Amongst the Alps in the Years 1860-69**
  by Edward Whymper (Penguin Random House, 2002)
  This classic book first published in 1871 during the heyday of Alpine exploration is still in print.

- **The High Mountains of the Alps**
  by Helmut Dumler (Diadem Books, 1993)
  A lavish periodical guide to the 4000m-high peaks of the Alps; great inspiration even if you’re not a mountaineer.

- **Alpine Wildflowers Nature Guide**
  by Christine Jaitner (Kompass Karten GmbH, 2004)
  Compact and pocket-sized format, published in English, with colour photos and descriptions of 70 alpine flowers.

RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL

The popularity of walking in the Alps puts enormous pressure on the natural environment. You can help preserve the fragile ecology by making an effort to use toilets in huts and refuges, and by making an effort to pick up rubbish left by others.

Responsible travel means more than staying safe and respecting the local cultures and customs in the countries you are visiting. You are responsible for making this trip the best it can be – read all your notes we send you, do the right pre-trip training, read our blog posts, buy the right gear, wear in your boots, practice walking with poles. The more prepared you are, the more you will enjoy trekking in the European Alps.

EXTENDING YOUR HOLIDAY

Double your holiday experience by including a stopover on your journey! A city break is a great way to explore another place, indulge in some extra shopping, dining or sightseeing and is a great way to break up a long flight. Our fabulous RAW Travel city breaks can be designed to your requirements and usually include an arrival transfer, 2 nights accommodation and a city sightseeing tour.

The exquisite Italian cities of Florence, Venice and Rome are ideal for a city break before or after your trek in the European Alps, and from the romantic setting of the Seine to the iconic sight of the Eiffel Tower dominating the skyline, there’s nothing quite like the magic of Paris.
A very well organised adventure. Listening to others who were doing similar trips I felt that we were definitely the best looked after in relation to accommodation and guidance.

– Jodie Turner, Sydney (NSW)
WHEN TO WALK

Tour du Mont Blanc
June through September is the recommended time to travel if you want to walk the circuit. Outside of these times the passes are most often blocked with snow and it is not recommended for people not experienced with Alpine walking and snow conditions, plus many of the refuges will be closed. So the summer really is the time to aim for safe and enjoyable walking with the maximum options for sleeping. June can still be quite cool and it is not unusual for snow to be on the passes in mid-June but generally speaking during this period you can expect 20–30°C at lower altitudes and at night temperatures can fall below 10°C.

Italian Dolomites
The European summer months (June through September) have warm temperatures and plenty of sun – perfect for hiking. While the average maximum temperature may reach some 25°C on the valley floors, the gentle wind of the Dolomites guarantees refreshing moments in the shade of rich green woods. In autumn the temperature drops, but weather conditions remain stable and pleasant, making the Dolomites a perfect place to plan a late summer adventure!

Swiss Alps
June through September is the best time to walk in the Swiss Alps. July is the warmest month (it doesn’t get that hot in the mountains) and the wildflowers are in bloom; usually there is not much rain in July. The winter starts early and ends late in the mountain towns. August is also a good month for hiking, but you can get snow. September is also good weather, but by October it can get very cold.

GETTING FIT FOR HIKING IN THE EUROPEAN ALPS

Walking is one of the most natural things to do, so you may feel that you are already in good enough shape. However, you will be walking for many hours over successive days carrying a daypack, which is likely very different to your current walking schedule.

We recommend that you undertake a training program according to your level of fitness for at least 3 months leading up to your departure. Regular exercise prior to the trip will allow you to build your fitness steadily so that you will enjoy and complete the trip with a smile and energy left over.

Moderate activities such as walking pose little health risk but before starting any new exercise program we recommend that you see your doctor for a check-up, particularly if you have a medical condition, are aged over 40 years, are overweight or haven’t exercised in a long time.

• Find out more: Getting Walking Fit for the European Alps: How to prepare for your multi-day trek.

ACCOMMODATION STYLE

Tour du Mont Blanc & Italian Dolomites
We use long-established family run 2-star (equivalent) rustic hotels and refuges, chosen for their stunning location and most offer spectacular mountain views. While representative of the country, culture and environment in which they are located, all are clean, well run and set up with the trekker in mind. The atmosphere is friendly and jovial as hikers from many nationalities gather to spend the night.

The accommodation we book for our clients is mostly half-board (demi-pension), meaning dinner and bed & breakfast.

Room sizes (twin, double or very occasionally triple or quadruple rooms) and facilities will vary from hotels to hotel and sometimes from room to room in the same hotel. On some nights, facilities are ensuite while others have the possibility, depending on availability and group size, of shared bathroom and toilet facilities. Some nights you may be in triple or quad share. Please refer to individual trip itineraries for full details.

All bookings are based on twin share, so you will be matched with another solo traveller of the same gender if you are travelling by yourself. We do not have the option for single supplements on these trips.

Swiss Alps
In Switzerland we use comfortable 3-star family run hotels that are chosen for their stunning location and offer spectacular mountain views. They are located close to the centre of Zermatt and Engelberg and have private facilities and also spa/wellness facilities for some well-deserved pampering!

FOOD & DRINKS

Tasting the local cuisine is an enjoyable and important part of any holiday, and RAW Travel ensures that particular emphasis is placed on local food on our tours. Our included meals enable you to enjoy truly authentic, locally sourced and produced cuisine. Furthermore, throughout our tours you’ll dine in small, authentic restaurants, frequented by the locals, and guaranteed to give a true reflection of the tastes of the region.

On guided trips, most meals are included while trekking. On self-guided trips, lunches are not included and can be purchased at refuges or in the towns and villages. Refer to individual itineraries to see meal inclusions. Breakfasts are served each morning at the hotels and refuges and generally include coffee, tea, cereal, yoghurt, fresh fruit, bread and conserves. Lunches consist of a baguette with cheese, meat and a selection of fillings.

Evening meals can be a 3-course affair: often soup, salad or charcuterie; then a main course of meat with one or two vegetables, rice or pasta; and dessert. Soft drinks and alcoholic beverages are available at an additional charge.

If you have specific dietary requirements, please ensure that you discuss these in depth with your Destination Expert at the time of booking.
AWESOME TRIP! OUR GUIDE WAS OUTSTANDING: PROFESSIONAL, WHILE BEING LAID BACK, ORGANISED WITHOUT BEING TOO RIGID, AND VERY MOTIVATING.

– Michele Beard, USA

Mountain food
Mountain food is traditionally based on what can be grown or reared at altitude, and what can be kept through the harsh winters. In the Mont Blanc region you will find dishes like the French Tartiflette, which is potatoes, onions and bacon baked in the oven in a cheese sauce, or the Italian Carbonada, which is a stew in white wine sauce traditionally served with polenta.

Our personal favourite is the Farciment Savoyarde, which comes from the French alpine valleys and is a grated potato and plum loaf, wrapped in local bacon, and cooked and served in slices. The local salamis and cured hams are likewise excellent.

There are many other local cheeses, though, which are noted for how well they melt and are ideal for cooking the traditional local dishes such as Croute or Tartiflette; or for melting into a fondue pot.

Wine
Red wines are ideal to accompany hard cheeses, but many people do not know that white wine is actually a better accompaniment for cooked cheese dishes. The Mont Blanc region can provide both; the surprisingly good wines of the Swiss Rhone Valley (Dole for red wine and Fendant – a version of Sauvignon Blanc – for white) are sold in many of the places we stay at and are definitely worth a try.

There are many very good wine varieties grown in Trentino and Alto-Adige and the Veneto, in the foothills or just outside the Dolomites.

ACCESS POINTS AND ARRIVAL HOTELS
Tour du Mont Blanc
We recommend you arrive in Chamonix at least one day prior to your trek to explore the village at your own pace and acclimatise to the mountain conditions. You will need to make your way to our base hotel and meeting point in Chamonix. These details will be provided to you at the time of booking.

Access to Chamonix
Geneva International Airport is easily the most convenient place to fly into for access to Chamonix. We can book your international flights from Australia to Switzerland if you are an Australian resident. Other possible entry points include Grenoble in France, Zurich in Switzerland or Milan in Italy.

Getting from Geneva to Chamonix
Geneva Airport is 4km from the Geneva city centre. It is easily reachable by train or bus using the united network of public transport, Unireso. All trains stop at Geneva–Cornavin station (city centre). You can pick up a free ticket for public transport from the machine in the baggage collection area on the arrival level.

This Unireso ticket, offered by Geneva International Airport, allows you to use public transport in Geneva free for a period of 80 minutes. We suggest you pre book a shared return transfer to Chamonix before you leave home.
SECTION 2: TRAVEL ESSENTIALS

Chamonix is 1½ hours drive from Geneva. Mountain Drop Offs are our preferred partner and bookings can be made via their website: www.mountaindropoffs.com/
Choose the super saver option and use promo code ‘RAWTR’. This is pick-up and drop-off at the airport in Geneva to our base hotel in Chamonix.

Italian Dolomites
You will need to make your way to Hotel Ferrovia, our base hotel and meeting point in Calalzo. It is a traditional Dolomite hotel in a historic building with a great location by the train station in Calalzo. If catching the train, upon arrival at Calalzo train station (Calalzo-Pieve di Cadore-Cortina), exit onto Via Stazione and turn right along the road. Continue for 200m along Via Stazione, and you will see Hotel Ferrovia on the left hand side.

Access to Calalzo
The nearest international airport to Calalzo is Verona (Italy). We can book your international flights from Australia to Italy if you are an Australian resident. It is possible to reach Calalzo from a number of other gateway cities.

Getting from Venice to Calalzo
The best way to reach Calalzo is by train through Venice (£9). Two changes are required.

Other access points to Calalzo
If travelling from elsewhere the train is a good way to go. Travel times from some popular Italian cities are:
- Venice (recommended) – 3½ hours
- Verona – 4 ½ hours
- Milan – 6 hours
- Rome – 7 hours

Train tickets and timetables can be found at www.trenitalia.com. It is also easy to buy tickets at the train station.

Swiss Alps
You will need to make your way to the meeting point (our base hotel) in Zermatt (Switzerland) by train. Details will be given to you when you book.

Train to Zermatt
Arriving by train is convenient, and the train trip is beautiful because it goes through the deepest cleft valley in Switzerland. Left and right are the highest mountains in Switzerland, including the Taschhorn, Dom and Weisshorn.

With trains leaving for Zermatt every 30 minutes, the train journey from the Swiss airports and the border is comfortable and straightforward. An electric hotel taxi will pick you up from the Zermatt train station.

From Geneva and Zurich
Trains leave frequently from Zurich and Geneva to Zermatt via Visp. The journey from Zurich takes ~4 hours. From Geneva, travel time is approximately 3½ hours. There is a narrow-gauge and cog railway from Visp to Zermatt, with the train climbing almost 1000m from Visp to Zermatt.

From Bern
Trains depart frequently from the central Bern train station to Zermatt. The trip takes ~2 hours. You’ll change trains in Visp.

Buying train tickets
We suggest purchasing rail tickets and making reservations through your RAW Travel Destination Expert or the Swiss Federal Railways (SFR) website at www.sbb.ch/en

Another option is to wait until you arrive in Switzerland to purchase your rail tickets. In most stations there are reservation counters with agents who speak English. These counters are often located away from the main departure area. Many stations also have automatic ticket machines that sell tickets and reservation coupons for travel in Switzerland and for principal cross-border routes. The machines accept cash and credit or debit cards. Your seat reservation will usually appear as a separate coupon along with your actual train ticket. It will specify the train number, the coach number, class of travel and seat number.

Boarding the train
Your platform number will generally be listed at least 10 minutes prior to departure on the small television screens on the larger schedule boards in the main station area (larger stations only). Four columns will be listed: destination, type of train, platform number and departure time. It’s possible that not all cars on your train are continuing to your destination. Therefore, it’s important to make sure the nameplate on your car (usually posted outside near the door) corresponds to your travel destination. Once inside the car, look for your reserved seat. If it’s a small train and reservations are not required, you can sit anywhere. Keep your bags in sight, if possible, and stay alert; many luggage thieves and pickpockets specialise in dashing on and off trains.

MAPS FOR TMB SELF-GUIDED TRIPS
Many maps are available covering the TMB. Two are recommended, both of which are readily available in Chamonix:

Pays du Mont Blanc (Rand Eds Edition in conjunction with IGN). This map contains the complete route at 1:50,000 scale highlighted in purple and designated “TMB”, variations of the route and other tracks in the area. This map is useful if you want a greater perspective of the TMB.

Massif et tour du Mont Blanc (Editions Didier Richard in conjunction with IGN). This map contains the complete route at 1:50,000 scale highlighted in purple and designated “GR Tour du Mont Blanc”, as well as variations of the route and most of the other tracks in the area. It contains half of the TMB on one side of the sheet and the half on the other side and is a very convenient pocket size. This map is sufficient, in conjunction with our track notes, for a self-guided walker to navigate the route.

EUROPEAN ALPS
**RECOMMENDED APPS**

**Strava**
- [www.strava.com/mobile](http://www.strava.com/mobile)

People use Strava to record their activities, compare performance over time, connect with their community, and share photos, stories and highlights of their adventures with friends. You can start tracking your walk as a run and then - when uploading the data - choose from a drop down list of activities, including walking. If you upload automatically or track it as a run by accident you can always edit the activity on the website later to make it a walk. Strava is free to use and available for both iOS and Android.

**MapMyWalk**
- [www.mapmymap.com/app/](http://www.mapmymap.com/app/)

When you use the MapMyWalk app while walking it tracks where you are going and then produces a map. You can share that map publicly or with just your friends or not at all. You can see the distance and elevation of each walk and any notes that might have been added. MapMyWalk requires a GPS connection. The app is free and available for both iOS and Android.

**HEALTH**

**Vaccinations**

No vaccinations are compulsory. Tetanus is recommended.

**Physical health**

Although there are no specific health requirements for the European Alps, you need to be in good health due to the sometimes demanding days. You should consult your doctor if you have any medical conditions to assess your suitability before departure. You also need to declare, for assessment, any pre-existing medical conditions to your travel insurance provider.

If, in the opinion of our group leader, any traveller is unable to complete the itinerary without undue risk to themselves and/or the rest of the group, RAW reserves the right to exclude them from all or part of a trip without refund.

**Medical facilities and first aid**

Although your trek leaders will have a first aid kit for emergencies, we recommend that you carry first aid supplies for common ailments as well as any personal medical requirements.

You will be trekking in remote areas and away from medical facilities for some time during these trips. For legal reasons our leaders are prohibited from administering any type of drug including headache tablets and antibiotics.

Your first aid supplies should include (but not be limited to):

- headache tablets
- diarrhoea treatment (both a blocker to bring relief from the symptoms and an antibiotic)
- band-aids, bandages and dressings
- blister pads for your feet and zinc tape
- antiseptic for cuts and scrapes
- lip balm and high factor sunscreen

In the event of an incident or medical emergency on the walk, the default mode of evacuation is by helicopter. It is essential that all guests have comprehensive travel insurance, medical insurance or ambulance insurance that will cover the cost of mountain rescue.
SECTION 2: TRAVEL ESSENTIALS

Preventing blisters
The key to preventing blisters and avoiding unnecessary pain is to eliminate friction. Different things work for different people, but one thing's for sure: blisters can be prevented with a little bit of effort.

Here's a range of blister prevention strategies for you to test on your training walks.
1. Buy comfortable, well-fitting walking boots. For you to test on your training walks.
2. Toughen up. Condition your feet by walking, gradually building intensity, pace and distance. Remember to moisturise your feet with a good quality foot cream after showering.
3. Adjust your laces during your walk so that your shoes fit perfectly. Foot swelling and different temperatures and terrain will affect the fit of your boots.
4. Slather your feet thickly with a lubricant like Vaseline. You'll need to reapply it, and it doesn't wash easily out of socks.
5. Put cornflour or talcum powder in your socks to keep your feet dry.

Invest in good socks. Use moisture-wicking socks and consider double-layers. Experiment with the thickness of your socks, wicking socks and consider double-layers.

7. Apply tape (such as Fixomul) or dressings to reduce friction. It can be difficult to perfect that are not painful should be left alone because the best protection against infection is the blister's own skin. These will heal by themselves and will be reabsorbed in a few days. If you do have blisters, shower in the evening to allow your feet to be fully dry when you dress them and set off in the morning.

VISAS
Australian citizens visiting Schengen countries (of which France, Switzerland and Italy are part) do not need to apply for visas if staying for no more than 90 out of 180 days. All travellers must have a minimum of 6 months validity (after their date of return into Australia) on their passport. Please confirm these requirements with your chosen airline.

SMART TRAVELLER
Be informed. Be prepared. Stay smart while you are travelling. Smartraveller is provided by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. It provides up-to-date travel advice for Australians travelling overseas. You can subscribe to receive free updates, including about widespread health or security issues.

Find out more: www.smartraveller.gov.au

TRAVEL INSURANCE
If you are travelling on any trip with RAW Travel you will require comprehensive travel insurance. No one plans for anything to go wrong, but if it does we want to make sure that you have adequate cover. We strongly recommend that the policy also covers personal liability, cancellation, curtailment and loss of luggage and personal effects.

For our trips in the European Alps, clients must have insurance to cover themselves for helicopter search and rescue.

Our preferred insurance company is CoverMore as they provide an excellent service and include emergency evacuation. Apply for insurance online.

When travelling on a group trip, you will not be permitted to join the group until evidence of travel insurance and the insurance company’s 24 hour emergency contact number has been provided to RAW Travel. If you have credit card insurance we will require proof of purchase of the trip (a receipt of credit card statement) with a credit card in your name. Contact your bank for details of their participating insurer, the level of coverage and emergency contact telephone number.

We highly recommend you purchase insurance as soon as you start booking your travel arrangements, and include cancellation cover. It must include emergency evacuation and medical cover.

Any advice given here is a general guide only. Please research and purchase a policy best suited to your needs and circumstances.

• Find out more: 10 things you need to know about travel insurance

WHAT TO PACK
You should pack as lightly as possible (less than 12kg). There is limited space available in the vehicle for luggage transfers, so you should only bring essential items on the trip. If you need to bring a bag for extra items/clothing this can be left back in Chamonix or Calalzo.

Your main luggage is transported daily for you throughout the trip, so you carry only a daypack during the day. Suitcases are not recommended for this trip. Most travellers carry their luggage in a backpack or duffel, and you will need to carry this each night up stairs to your accommodation.

You will also need a good hiking day pack when out walking to carry clothing and personal effects such as camera, sunscreen, water, snacks, blister kit.

SPECIALIST GEAR RECOMMENDED

Treking poles
There are many steep ascents and descents in the Alps. Trekking poles will give you extra stability and are good for balance and taking weight off your knees on descents. We definitely recommend them if you have issues with knees, ankles or hips.

• Find out more: Do I need trekking poles and which ones should I buy?

Sunglasses
Sunlight can affect your eyes more at higher altitudes and when reflected off ice or snow. Bring sunglasses that have a high eye protection factor; look for sunglasses that have a lens category of 4 – they will provide a very high level of sun glare reduction and good UV protection.

Clothing you can layer
High altitudes will always be cool and if cloud sets in it can be cold and damp. The best way to stay protected from any weather and temperature changes in the Alps is to add and remove layers as required. You'll need a base layer to manage moisture, an insulating layer to
protect you from the cold, and an outer layer to shield you from the wind and rain. Avoid cotton; choose wool or synthetics instead.

- Find out more: Ask the expert – Layering clothes

**Waterproof walking boots**

Waterproof walking boots with full ankle support and good grip are recommended. Depending on spring weather in Europe, there may be snow on the passes. Make sure your footwear is well worn in and comfortable. We also recommend hiking socks with at least one spare pair, as you will find these minimise the chance of getting blisters (see p38).

- Find out more: What boots should I buy and how do I look after them?

**Good quality wet-weather gear**

A waterproof, breathable jacket and overtrousers are a must. Even if you don’t expect rain, carry your rain gear as an extra shell to protect you from cold winds.

**Maps and compass**

Maps and a guidebook will be provided by RAW Travel to clients on self-guided trips. Also consider an old-fashioned compass if you don’t have a GPS – they don’t run out of batteries.

**Mobile phone**

If you are on a self-guided trip you should carry a mobile phone with international roaming or buy a local SIM card; coverage can be very limited in the Alps.

**OTHER ITEMS TO PACK**

**Travel documents**

- Passport (with photocopies or scanned back-up copy)
- Copy of travel insurance policy and 24-hour contact number
- Airline and other ticket(s)
- Credit card and spending money

**Personal items**

- Comfortable hiking daypack (30L+) with padded shoulder support and waist straps
- Waterproof bags to protect your daypack from rain while walking
- Water bottle(s) or hydration pack (2–3 litres recommended)
- Blister kit, rehydration salts, mosquito repellent, sunscreen and first-aid kit
- Personal medications and toiletries
- Anti-chafe creams and body rubs (for thighs etc)
SECTION 2: TRAVEL ESSENTIALS

Clothing
- 3 pairs of walking socks
- 3 t-shirts (lightweight, quick drying fabric)
- Long-sleeved trekking shirts (avoid cotton)
- Shorts/lightweight trousers (avoid jeans)
- Warm fleece, sweater, hat, gloves (for cold evenings and passes)
- Thermals (for sleeping)
- Waterproof, breathable jacket and over trousers (Gortex or similar)
- Spare pair of trainers
- Broad brimmed sun hat
- Swimwear
- Long-sleeved trekking shirts (avoid cotton)
- 3 t-shirts (lightweight, quick drying fabric)
- 3 pairs of walking socks
- Thermals (for sleeping)
- Miniatures of your usual toiletries
- Hand sanitiser
- Bicycle gloves
- Knee brace – not essential but useful for injury
- Hand sanitiser
- Miniatures of your usual toiletries
- Snacks – though these can be purchased locally
- Swiss army knife
- Mobile phone and charger
- Padlock for bag
- Bike lock
- Bike helmet
- Bike pump
- Bike repair kit
- Bicycle carrier
- Bike lock
- Bike chain
- Bike lock

Miscellaneous
- Alarm clock and LED head torch
- Camera and spare batteries for camera
- Reading and writing material
- Spare pair of thongs / trainers for inside refuges and shared amenities, or if boots are wet
- Water bottles
- Snacks – though these can be purchased locally
- Swiss army knife
- Mobile phone and charger
- Padlock for bag

HOW TO BOOK YOUR RAW TRAVEL TRIP

Before making a booking, please read this Destination Guide thoroughly to make sure that the European Alps are right for you. We have compiled lots of important information about accommodation, food, fitness required, weather and what to expect so that you can make an informed decision. On our website, you’ll also find detailed itineraries and other important information.

A deposit of AUD$500 per person is due at the time of booking and balance of payment is required 8 weeks prior to travel. All quotes are subject to availability at the time of booking and valid for 7 days. Please contact your Destination Expert for your personalised booking link.

When you submit your booking form, you are committing to an itinerary and travel dates. When arrangements are confirmed, non-refundable deposits are paid to suppliers to secure these bookings. Any changes to the itinerary and/or travel dates after arrangements have been confirmed will incur additional charges.

PARTICIPATION CONDITIONS

To travel with RAW Travel you must accept the booking conditions (online at the time of booking), which include the following ‘participation conditions’:

When booking on one of our trips the applicant understands that RAW Travel operates adventure holidays worldwide. In developing countries, the standards of accommodation, transport, safety, hygiene, telecommunication facilities, level of infrastructure development and medical facilities are not equivalent to those familiar to the applicant’s usual living arrangements, or would find on a conventional holiday. This type of trip inherently involves a higher level of personal risk, which the applicant agrees to fully assume. The applicant acknowledges that travel on a RAW Travel trip requires a degree of flexibility, and understands that the trip’s route, accommodation and modes of transport are subject to change without prior notice due to local circumstances. Should RAW Travel deem it advisable to amend an itinerary for any reason, it may do so by shortening, varying or re-routing any trip. These changes are binding and additional expenses will be charged to the applicant if the reason for any major alteration is outside RAW Travel’s control.

RAW TRAVELLER’S CODE

By paying your deposit and completing your booking forms with us, you signal your agreement to the following RAW Traveller’s Code:

✔ I have chosen a trip that suits my abilities, level of fitness, and state of health.
✔ I do not have any physical conditions or disabilities that are a hazard to me or other RAW travellers
✔ I have a valid passport and all necessary visas and vaccinations required for travel.
✔ I will read the RAW travel pre-trip materials about clothing, medical requirements, and culture-specific etiquette.
✔ I will respect the laws and customs of countries visited.
✔ I will follow environmental guidelines and regulations while on the trip in accordance with the RAW Travel leader’s direction.
✔ I will respect the rights and privacy of other trip members.

I understand that travel within a group invariably involves compromise to accommodate diverse desires, travel goals, personalities, and physical abilities of all group members.

✔ RAW Travel leaders may be required to improvise and exercise good faith, use discretion and/or make decisions based upon group consensus. These decisions may not always please each individual, but are intended to satisfy the larger desires of the group.

✔ I understand that RAW Travel reserves the right to refuse participation during a tour to anyone whose health or behaviour could impede the welfare or enjoyment of fellow guests. An individual may be asked to leave a trip if the leader feels that the person’s continuing participation may prove detrimental to the individual or the group.

✔ I understand travelling off the beaten track means access to medical facilities and evacuation services may be limited.

✔ I understand the weather is out of RAW Travel’s control.

✔ I will always wear a helmet when riding bikes.

✔ I will drink alcohol responsibly.
# SECTION 3: ON THE TRAIL

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PASSPORT
On the TMB you will need to carry your passport as you will be travelling between France, Italy and Switzerland – although it is very unlikely to be checked as the border is usually just a stone on the passes. However, assistance from police or other unforeseen eventuality will require you to produce your passport, and France in particular has tightened up on border controls a lot, so you do need to take your passport with you.

YOUR FELLOW TREKKERS
On group guided trips we ask you to be understanding of the various needs and preferences of your group – patience with your fellow travellers is sometimes required for the benefit of everyone’s travel experience. Remember too that you have responsibilities to the group. If you are requested to be at a place at a certain time, ensure that you don’t keep the rest of the group waiting. We have found time and time again that the very best trips we operate are those where the dynamics within the group work well – this takes just a little effort on your part. Sometimes you may be trekking with people of a different nationality, language and cultural background, this is all part of the experience of trekking in Europe.

LUGGAGE TRANSFERS
Your main luggage will be transferred by private van on all trekking days. It will be picked up from your accommodation each morning, so you must have your main luggage packed and downstairs in time for the pick-up. In the evening your luggage will be waiting for you at your next accommodation.

On the TMB Circuit Trek there is one day where luggage transfers are not possible. You will need to carry your overnight necessities on these days. There is limited space available in the vehicle for luggage storage so please only bring essential items on the trip.

BUYING SUPPLIES
Tour du Mont Blanc
For self-guided walkers, the opportunity to purchase supplies along the route is limited, so we recommend that you purchase snacks and any other supplies you require on the walk in the major towns with supermarkets (Chamonix, Les Contamines, Courmayeur, Le Fauly and Argentière). Most accommodation places can provide a sandwich or ‘picnic’ for about €12 – enquire about this option when you check in.

Alternatively, you can purchase a ‘sandwich’, usually a baguette, at most towns and villages and sometimes cooked lunches in the bigger refuges en route. There are refreshment stops on route; however, it is recommended that you purchase lunch at the beginning of the day, as these stops may not be reached at a convenient time for lunch; or you might find they are closed when you get there. Some are known to close when a helicopter re-supply is scheduled, and sometimes for no apparent reason!

Walkers on guided treks are provided with lunches and snacks.

Italian Dolomites
We only offer guided treks on the Dolomites. Walkers are provided with lunches and snacks.

Swiss Alps
As per the itinerary, what is provided each day does vary.

LANGUAGE
Despite the fact that the Tour du Mont Blanc involves walking in three different countries, French is generally spoken along the route, irrespective of national boundaries. Italian is more often used on the south side in Mont Blanc between Col de la Seigne and the Grand Col Ferret.

Do not expect English to be readily understood by those whom you meet in hotels, huts or shops. Brush up on basic French before your trip. An effort to communicate in the host country’s language will be appreciated.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>French</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bonjour</td>
<td>Hello</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merci</td>
<td>Thank you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S’il vous plait</td>
<td>Please</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pardon</td>
<td>Sorry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oui</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chalet-refuge</td>
<td>Mountain inn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chambre</td>
<td>Bedroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Batons</td>
<td>Trekking poles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carte</td>
<td>Map</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eau</td>
<td>Water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lac</td>
<td>Lake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Col</td>
<td>Pass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Croute au fromage</td>
<td>Hot cheese and garlic bread</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frites</td>
<td>French fries/chips</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fromage</td>
<td>Cheese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rösti</td>
<td>Fried grated potato with onion and bacon</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While the Dolomites are part of Italy, there are actually three languages spoken there. Town, road, and trail signs will vary between one, two, and three languages: Italian, German and Ladin – an ancient language spoken by the first inhabitants of the Dolomites and later influenced by the Latin-speaking Romans. When you travel to the mountains of Northern Italy, you may encounter any of these languages.

Here are a few words and phrases that will help you navigate your hiking adventure. Our International Mountain Leader who leads our Dolomites treks speaks fluent Italian but it’s still helpful to learn a few phrases before you travel.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Italian</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hi</td>
<td>Ciao</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Si</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per favore</td>
<td>Please</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grazie</td>
<td>Thank you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prego</td>
<td>You’re welcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buon gionro</td>
<td>Good morning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quanto costa?</td>
<td>How much is that?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La dolce vita</td>
<td>Beautiful life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rifugio</td>
<td>Mountain hut</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Switzerland has four official languages; German, Italian, French and Romansh. Towards the south and across the Alps, Italian is spoken; to the west, French; while German is spoken in the central and eastern parts of Switzerland. Romansh is predominantly spoken in the southwest.

### ELECTRICITY

Generally 230V two-pin round plugs are used in France and Italy. Switzerland uses a unique three-pin round plug. You are not guaranteed access to power points in every refuge as power points are shared so you should take adequate batteries for your camera.

### MONEY

#### Currency

France and Italy use the Euro. Switzerland uses the Swiss Franc but the Euro is widely accepted especially at most shops serving tourists. The exchange rate at the time of writing is: $1 = €0.65

If you are arriving into Geneva International Airport, you are in Switzerland, which is not part of the Eurozone – wait until you get to Chamonix to change money.

#### ATMs

There are a large number of ATM cash points that accept Visa and Mastercard in Chamonix and Italy.

#### Credit cards

Credit cards are accepted in major restaurants and shops.

Switzerland has four official languages; German, Italian, French and Romansh. Towards the south and across the Alps, Italian is spoken; to the west, French; while German is spoken in the central and eastern parts of Switzerland. Romansh is predominantly spoken in the southwest.
Tipping
'Service compris' on your bill at French restaurants means that a service charge has been included, although it is polite to tip 5% to 10% if the service has been very good. Bar staff and café waiters expect a small tip or loose change. At your discretion you might also consider tipping your Trek Leader in appreciation of the efficiency and service you receive.

Spending money
Every traveller is different and therefore spending money requirements will vary. Some travellers may drink more than others while other travellers like to purchase more souvenirs than most. Please consider your own spending habits when it comes to budgeting for drinks, shopping, souvenirs and other personal expenses.

Emergency funds
Ensure you have access to additional funds to be used if unforeseen incidents or circumstances outside our control (e.g. a natural disaster) necessitate a change to your planned route. This is a rare occurrence but we recommend being prepared. Some comprehensive travel insurance companies will make payments on your behalf in an emergency. Some more basic covers require you to pre-pay yourself then make a claims. Do your research before you travel.

SAFETY IN THE MOUNTAINS

Health
We recommend that you carry a basic first aid kit along with any medications or epi-pens if you have specific allergies. Also make sure you have emergency contact numbers in your phone or in an easy to reach place when you go out walking each day. In the event of any medical emergency, please ensure you make immediate contact with your travel insurance provider on their 24-hour assistance number.

Knee strain
Although you can't eliminate strain on the knee joints when dropping steeply, you can reduce it by taking shorter steps, which leave your legs slightly bent and ensure that your heel hits the ground before the rest of your foot. Some walkers find that tubular bandages or high-tech supports help. Walking poles are very effective at taking some of the weight off the knees.

Altitude sickness
It's very unlikely that you will experience any altitude sickness, as this generally occurs at heights over 3500 metres and all the passes on our European Alps treks are below this. In addition, walkers normally descend from these altitudes within an hour or so, and sleep at a much lower elevation. You may, however, become slightly short of breath while walking.

Sunburn
In the rarefied air and deceptive coolness of the mountains, sunburn occurs rapidly. Always use sunscreen and a barrier cream for your lips. Wear a broad-brimmed hat and protect your eyes with good quality lenses, particularly when walking near water, glaciers or snow.

Landslides and rockfall
Landslides and rockfalls are becoming more frequent in the Alps because of climate change. These natural phenomena are accelerating because of more extreme conditions such as long droughts followed by torrential rain.

Thunderstorms
Roughly speaking, the highest frequency of thunderstorms in Western Europe occurs in three regions near the Alps because of climate change. These natural phenomena are accelerating because of more extreme conditions such as long droughts followed by torrential rain.

HOW MUCH WATER TO CARRY
Dehydration is the biggest risk when undertaking a physical activity. It is vital to be aware of your fluid intake and to constantly drink water throughout the day, even when you do not feel thirsty.

You will need to carry at least 2 litres of drinking water with you most days, more if the weather is warm and if you are above average body weight. Drinking water is available at all accommodations and most refuges, and even public drinking fountains in many towns.

WASHING FACILITIES
There are launderettes in Chamonix and other major towns but limited washing facilities on the trails, so it’s best to bring clothes that you can wear for several days.
<table>
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<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
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<td>Our people</td>
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<td>Our commitment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Expert, friendly service</td>
<td>55</td>
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<td>Giving back and treading lightly</td>
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<td>Free resources to help you plan your trip</td>
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<td>Destination websites with unrivalled</td>
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<td>information</td>
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<td>RAW Adventures News</td>
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<td>Follow us on Facebook</td>
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<td>Free travel information nights</td>
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<tr>
<td>Walk and talk days</td>
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<tr>
<td>Book your flights with us</td>
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<td>Travel insurance</td>
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<tr>
<td>City breaks</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact us</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
ABOUT RAW TRAVEL

RAW Travel specialises in iconic walks worldwide. We are a small family owned operator on Victoria’s Mornington Peninsula that is highly regarded for great value, outstanding customer service and reviews, experienced tour guides, and excellent accommodation and food.

We provide a friendly, personal and trusted service. We pride ourselves on the intimate knowledge we have of our chosen walking destinations, which allows us to create exciting journeys for our clients while taking meticulous care of all the details.

We offer walks for complete beginners through to demanding treks that will satisfy and thrill even veteran adventurers.

Over the years, we have organised countless trips to far flung corners of the globe and introduced many thousands of happy travellers to their first long distance walk or ride. The spirit of RAW Travel remains the same – creating inspiring active journeys that offer genuine interaction with the people and cultures we visit, backed by a personal but expert service.

Come and visit us at our beachside location in the coastal town of Mornington. Make an appointment with one of our Destination Experts and afterwards browse the many shops, cafes, beaches or nearby vineyards of the Mornington Peninsula.

OUR PEOPLE

We have an experienced, dedicated passionate team in our Mornington Head Office, as well as expert guides and support staff on the ground in Europe and Australia. We have many things in common, including a passion for walking, a love of adventure travel in beautiful and historic locations, and the ability to go above and beyond to make our client’s travel dreams become a reality.

www.montblanctreks.com.au

EUROPEAN ALPS

Why book your trip with RAW Travel?

Our trips are flexible and tailored to you:

• We listen to our walkers; we’ll plan an itinerary to suit your needs and ability.

• We operate our own trips, self-guided.

• We have staff dedicated to each destination: you get first-hand advice from people who know the walks.

• We have our own staff in-country, so help is never far away should you need it.

• We offer authentic travel with 17 years’ experience.

OUR COMMITMENT

We won’t cut corners or ever intentionally compromise the quality of your trip. We don’t want to run thousands of trips every year – because the quality of your experience is much more important than quantity to us. We’re still small enough to care about our travellers as individuals and we want to stay that way!

We know that people desire a certain level of comfort along with their adventure, so great accommodation and discovering delicious local food is a hallmark of our trips. RAW owns and operates its own adventures, with our own staff on the ground in many destinations so we are able to keep control over the quality of our trips at the same time as we offer you reassurance and support. We take notice of the feedback you give us and your opinions do matter.

As a primarily ‘direct to customer’ company we avoid the commissions and overheads associated with the traditional travel distribution network. We charge fair prices but still provide great advice before you go, experienced leaders who love their groups, good quality accommodation and solid value for your money.

EXPERT, FRIENDLY SERVICE

We’re a specialist company and we enjoy providing a friendly, personal service where you’re treated as an individual – no call centres here!

At RAW Travel we don’t just plan your travel, we take our clients on a journey. From your research and ideas we work with you to plan your dream travel experience. We consider your fitness levels, your achievements, your motivations and then together we map out every step of the journey.
Our Destination Experts deliver a level of advice and experience that comes from being 100% focused on our chosen walks, rather than hundreds of different trips, as is often the case with bigger companies. We pride ourselves on our intimate knowledge of our chosen walking destinations and we really do “know because we go”.

Our staff take these walks each year and share their insider insights with you to help create exciting journeys where you can experience the best of your chosen destination, while being reassured that all the details are taken care of. Help is never far away should you need it from our locally based staff and suppliers.

GIVING BACK AND TREADING LIGHTLY
Our trips have helped raise over $A18 million in funds for 40+ charities in Australia and overseas through our charity challenges. We are proud to have been part of so many great fundraising initiatives that have substantially impacted and improved people’s lives.

In today’s world travelling lightly is no longer just an admirable sentiment but a necessity. We always look for ways to improve our impact on the ground by monitoring our group’s environmental and cultural impacts. At RAW, we have achieved advanced eco-certification on our Great Ocean Walk and have always been committed to ‘grass roots’ tourism.

In particular we favour small local suppliers to ensure the benefits of travel are distributed equally and to the people who need it the most. We also donate to KIVA micro-lending throughout the world and encourage you to also look at this commendable scheme.

So, rest assured, your travel with us will leave a positive, lasting impact on you and the places you visit.

FREE RESOURCES TO HELP YOU PLAN YOUR TRIP
We’ve got inspirational brochures, essential preparation guides, comprehensive destination guides, weekly blog posts and more!

DESTINATION WEBSITES WITH UNRIVALLED INFORMATION
Visit our destination websites for unrivalled expert information and insights. You’ll find photo galleries, route information, resources, trail history and lots more!

rawtravel.com
caminodesantiago.com.au
kumanokodo.com.au
montblanctreks.com.au
greatoceanwalk.info

RAW ADVENTURES NEWS
It’s easy to stay up-to-date on all things RAW with our free monthly e-news. It’s bursting with traveller’s stories and information about new trips and insights. If you’re not already a subscriber, it’s easy to register.

Find out more: http://rawtravel.com

FOLLOW US ON FACEBOOK
We love connecting with like-minded travellers on social media and we’d like you to be part of our RAW community. We regularly share tips and resources, as well as photos and stories from other travellers and our staff. Like and follow us, and be sure to give us a shout out to say hello. We really enjoy reading comments from our community of travellers!

www.facebook.com/rawtravel/

FREE TRAVEL INFORMATION NIGHTS
We love meeting our clients face-to-face and getting to know them. Twice a year we travel around Australia and New Zealand to talk about a selection of our iconic walks. If you have ever wanted to experience an iconic walk with RAW Travel then you will want to attend one of these events. We guarantee you’ll be inspired by trip insights, videos and stunning images from our staff.

Find out more: http://rawtravel.com/talks/

GETTING WALKING FIT
Spain | Portugal | France
GETTING WALKING FIT
EUROPEAN ALPS
How to prepare for your multi-day trek
GETTING WALKING FIT
SECTION 4: RAW TRAVEL
www.montblanctreks.com.au

Tour du Mont Blanc | Italian Dolomites | Swiss Alps
GETTING WALKING FIT FOR THE COAST TO COAST PATH
GETTING WALKING FIT FOR NEPAL
GETTING WALKING FIT FOR THE GREAT OCEAN WALK
GETTING WALKING FIT FOR THE KUMANO KODO
www.montblanctreks.com.au
‘WALK AND TALK’ DAYS
We love to walk and we love to talk! During the year we regularly offer opportunities (in Victoria) to walk with our Destination Experts and ask questions about your chosen destination, pre-departure preparation and gear. We limit these walks to between 20 and 40 people (depending on the location). The pace in generally relaxed so there is plenty of time to chat.

Find out more: http://rawtravel.com/talks/

BOOK YOUR FLIGHTS WITH US
Our expert Flights Department is ready to assist you with any airfare query, big or small. From where to sit on the plane to the cheapest or fastest route, we have decades of expertise when it comes to taking to the skies. Combining years of industry experience with an innate passion for travel, our dedicated flight specialist will readily accommodate all your travel needs. (Please note: we do not book domestic flights.)

TRAVEL INSURANCE
If you are travelling on any trip with RAW Travel you will require comprehensive travel insurance. We sell Cover-More travel insurance and you can easily get a quote over the phone. No one plans for anything to go wrong, but if it does we want to make sure that you have adequate cover.

We highly recommend you purchase insurance as soon as you start booking your travel arrangements, and include cancellation cover. Your travel insurance must also include emergency evacuation and medical cover.

Any advice given here is a general guide only. Please research and purchase a policy best suited to your needs and circumstances.

CITY BREAKS
Double your holiday experience in an exciting new destination by including a stopover on your journey! A city break is a great way to explore another place, indulge in some extra shopping, dining or sightseeing and is a fabulous way to break up a long flight.

Our fabulous array of RAW Travel city breaks (minimum 2-night accommodation booking required; minimum 3 nights for any Japan booking) can be tailored to your needs and usually includes:
- arrival airport transfer (excluding Kyoto)
- 2 nights’ accommodation of your choice from our wide selection of hotels and apartments (3 nights for Japan)
- city sightseeing tour (excluding Japan)

Find out more: RAW Travel City Breaks

CONTACT US
All of our RAW Travel experts have one thing in common: bringing you the immediate, highly personal satisfaction of discovering a new world on your own terms.

RAW Travel Office (Victoria, Australia)
Our Melbourne HQ can be contacted Monday to Friday from 9am to 5.30pm on +61 3 5976 3763. If there is a genuine emergency outside of these hours, call +61 (0) 478 649 848.
We donate 10% of our profits to give back to the planet at no additional cost to you.

Our trips are 100% carbon neutral.