

Tour de Mont Blanc Packing Guide

From **Heatheronhertravels.com**



Introduction

When I started the first leg of the Tour de Mont Blanc with my friend Julia, we were the kind of walkers who enjoy a couple of hours walking along a coastal path in Cornwall. We had walking boots but not much else in the way of equipment, yet over four years we completed this arduous Alpine trek in stages, carrying everything we needed with us.

The Tour de Mont Blanc is a 170 km circuit that encircles the Mont Blanc Massif passing through France, Switzerland and Italy. The whole trail takes around 12 days to walk, although you can also divide it into sections to walk at different time, as we did. Whatever approach you choose, we found it was important to travel light and only carry what we really needed.

This packing list is based on articles that I wrote on my blog at **Heatheronhertravels.com** and in places I have provided links to specific articles that may be helpful. You may already own or be able to borrow some of the things in this packing guide, while others may need to be purchased, in which case it's worth knowing what is worth the investment.

In the sections that follow you'll find my thoughts on what you need and why, while at the end there is a checklist that you can print off and take shopping or use when you pack.

On your feet

Let's start with your feet, as you'll need to look after these, if they are to carry you and your 10kg+ rucksack over 170km during 10-12 days, sometimes walking 8 hours a day or more.

Walking boots – I'd recommend that you choose walking boots with good ankle support, to cope with slippery and uneven paths. You might get away with trail shoes (a cross between trainers and boots) but I would only suggest these if you are walking shorter sections of the trail or doing more running than walking. You'll need boots that are solid but lightweight and have a waterproof, breathable membrane such as Gore-Tex to keep your feet dry. If you are buying new boots, try on many different pairs in different shops before you make a decision and then wear them in as much as you can before you go, to avoid blisters.

Read my article: **How to choose the perfect hiking boots for the Tour de Mont Blanc**

Lightweight trainers (optional) – I took a spare pair of light trainers to give my feet some relief in the refuge, if stopping in a town and just in case my boots gave up.

Socks – 3 pairs of thick hiking socks, so that you can wash them in the refuge when required and always have a spare dry pair. 2 pairs of light cotton socks, to change into after your shower in the refuge, to wear with your slippers or spare trainers.

Outdoor Protection

Waterproof Jacket - Mine was a Gore Tex jacket, which packed up quite small but was substantial enough to keep off the morning and evening chill when you get up to altitude. My jacket had plenty of zip pockets, zips under the arms for ventilation and a hood with visor that tucked away into the neck when not in use. This is a key item and worth spending a bit extra to get the right jacket, especially if you can use it for everyday wear as I do.

Waterproof Trousers - These were the least used item in my backpack, but then we were walking in summer and enjoyed sunshine for most of the time. However, I did hear tales of walkers who had bad weather for several days in a row and in this case your waterproof trousers will keep you comfortable and dry. Unless you walk a lot, I wouldn't invest a lot of money in waterproof trousers, but would buy something inexpensive that will pack up small, but still do the job of keeping you dry.

Hat and gloves – A sunhat is essential as the sun can be quite hot and you burn more easily at high altitude. You do not want to be suffering from sunstroke on the mountain. A warmer hat and lightweight gloves are optional, as there may be times when you are walking through snow or sleet at higher altitudes. You may like to have a square cotton bandana to keep hair off your face, protect your neck from sunburn or use to wipe sweat away.

To wear while walking

Walking trousers - I took one pair of walking trousers that were made of a quick-drying, lightweight fabric with a comfortable waist and zips on the legs to convert them into shorts. You may want to take a second pair of lightweight trousers, cut-offs or shorts to allow you to alternate when they need washing. You should avoid heavy cotton trousers or jeans that will become soggy if there's any rain and take ages to dry. Like my jacket, the trousers had lots of useful pockets for lip salve, maps and cameras.

Walking t-shirts - I walked in a running t-shirt that I already owned, but if you're buying anything specially, look for a lightweight, quick-drying fabric or specially treated Merino wool that is ideal for walking as it wicks away sweat and keeps you cool. I did alternate with a running vest but it's probably preferable to wear t-shirts that cover your shoulders, for protection against the sun and rucksack straps.

Fleece for warmth – it can be quite cold at altitude once you stop walking or in the evening. I used a zip front mid-weight fleece that I also wore when walking if I was cold, and a second long sleeve fleece t-shirt that could be layered over a short sleeve t-shirt to stay warm.

To wear in the refuge

When you arrive at the mountain refuge you'll be lent a pair of slippers or plastic clogs to wear inside, as you'll be asked to take off your walking boots at the door. If you're particular you may want to bring some light slippers of your own (such as the towelling ones they give away in hotels) or wear your clean socks. Next you'll find your room or dorm, leave your rucksack by the bed or in a designated place and go for a shower. You'll want to shower as early as possible as hot water may be limited and this is also the opportunity to do any laundry. After showering you'll change into your refuge clothes;

Comfortable joggers or cut-offs – I used a pair of stretchy jogger that could be used for walking if I had nothing else, but also doubled as PJs. In most mountain refuges the sleeping arrangements were communal, with men and women sleeping in mixed dorms, and the rooms are unheated, so I slept in my refuge clothes.

Lightweight cotton t-shirt - I had one that I kept just for the refuge and only put on after I had showered, so it didn't get too sweaty.

Equipment

Rucksack - I used a 35 litre rucksack which I found was the ideal size and encouraged me to pack light. It was designed for mountain walking and had plenty of zip compartments and outside pouches to keep water, map and snacks. My friend, Julia had a slightly larger 45 litre rucksack but while mine fitted into the cabin size baggage requirements for the plane, the 45 litre rucksack was a little bit over. Everything inside was packed into plastic bags to keep it dry in case of downpours and I also had a few spare plastic bags.

Links to useful packing articles with video;

The Mountain Clothing you'll need for trekking the Tour de Mont Blanc (video)

What I packed for my mini Tour de Mont Blanc (video)

Walking Poles – A pair of walking poles are essential to take the strain off knees and legs and support you on uneven, slippery or steep paths. On the first years of our walk I bought the cheapest telescopic walking poles available in the UK, but for my final year I used some more expensive lightweight poles which collapsed into sections, anticipating that I would use them on future walks. Another possibility was to hire poles from a local sports shop for €5 per pair per day or buy locally although the prices tended to be a bit higher than in the UK.

If you are doing the whole circular walk in one go, I recommend that you book into the same hotel for the start and finish, so that you can leave any extra luggage there.

Read my article: **How my walking poles saved my legs on the Tour de Mont Blanc**

Other things we took

Walking Guide – the guide that most walkers including us seem to use is the Tour de Mont guide by Kev Reynolds from Cicerone Press. **You can read my review of the guide here.** We found this to be an excellent guide and it gives directions for the walk in both the popular anti-clockwise direction and also the clockwise direction that we took. My only caveat is that I believe the walking times given in the book are somewhat under-estimated and we found we had to allow 30% extra to allow for rests, snacks and photos. We also bought a topographic map of the TMB locally, but only used this a couple of times for planning, so I'd say it is optional as the trail is very well marked. **You can buy the guide on Amazon here** (I will get a small commission)

Money belt – it's good to know that your money and passport are with you, even when you take your rucksack off. I used small plastic bags inside the money belt to ensure everything stayed dry. You need to take enough cash with you for all the mountain refuges as there are only a few places such as Chamonix, Champex Lac and Courmayeur where you can get cash from ATMs, and the refuges only take cash. Remember you'll need Euros and Swiss Francs.

Water bottle – Of course you need to carry sufficient water for each day. We normally found 2 litres was enough and that we could refill at each refuge. Julia had a large plastic water pouch with a drinking tube that she kept in the rucksack side pocket while I just bought 4 small plastic water bottles at the supermarket that I filled up each day and threw away at the end of the trip.

Sheet sleeping bag – In the mountain refuges you will normally be provided a quilt or blankets, but no sheets, so you need to have your own sheet sleeping bag. Mine was made of silk and packed up very small into its own pouch.

Quick-drying towel – You need a quick drying camping towel that is made of a fleece like fabric and packs up small, as towels are not provided in the mountain refuges.

Toiletries

You'll want to make sure that any toiletries you bring are in the small sizes that you often get in hotels and you may want to consider multi-purpose items such as soap/shampoo or creams. I found that sun-cream was essential as we were lucky with the weather and the sun was quite strong. I had a couple of lip salves, as my lips got surprisingly dry when walking. Wet wipes served multiple uses, as in some of the refuges there were no shower, so they enabled a body wash, at other times we were able to clean our hands before eating or after a call of nature on the path.

Electronics

As a blogger, I carried more than the average person would in the way of electronic hardware in order to record the experience in photos, video and audio. I think the average person would at least need to take a camera to capture the wonderful landscapes of the Mont Blanc range.

Your smartphone may also serve as a camera but you can't always be sure where you will be able to recharge your phone, so I would take a separate camera and keep my mobile well charged in order to make emergency phone calls. The mobile service was patchy, but there were times when the reception was surprisingly good even in remote places and other times when I was out of signal range for over 24 hours, even in the valley.

Be sure to pack your chargers and travel adapters, being aware that the plugs in Switzerland are a different shape to the normal European style, so you either need a universal adapter or different adapters for each country.

Also I would pack a head torch or small hand torch with spare batteries, which is useful if you are sleeping in a dorm and need to look for something in the night.

Medical kit

I won't be too prescriptive about what you should have in your personal medical kit as everyone has a different perspective on health and risk. Mine was designed to be very small and fitted in a clear plastic pencil case.

My view was that the Tour de Mont Blanc is a popular trail, and while you can get to some wild places, you are never more than a few hours walk down to the valley where you can get medical attention. With this in mind, the things in our medical kit were designed to alleviate minor ailments and discomfort, the sort of things that could spoil your holiday.

Having said that, my friend Julia did suffer unexpectedly on the second year from altitude sickness and on subsequent walks she took medication for this. Read my article: **Avoiding altitude sickness and staying healthy on the Tour de Mont Blanc**

If you've found this packing advice useful, please do check out the many articles from our TMB at **Heatheronhertravels.com**

Tour de Mont Blanc Packing checklist

On your feet

- Walking Boots
- Walking socks (min 3 pairs)
- Thin cotton socks for the refuge (min 2 pairs)
- Lightweight trainers (optional if travelling ultra-light)

Outdoor protection

- Waterproof jacket
- Waterproof trousers
- Sunhat & Sunglasses
- Cotton bandana (optional)
- Warm hat & gloves (Optional but useful if early in the season)

To wear while walking

- Walking trousers (ideally zip off legs)
- 2nd pair Walking trousers/shorts
- Lightweight quick-drying t-shirts (min 3)
- Underwear (quick drying and comfortable)
- Long sleeve t-shirt/fleece (2)

To wear in the refuge

- Comfortable joggers/shorts (double as PJs)
- Comfy T-shirt (double as PJs)
- Lightweight slippers (optional)

Equipment

- Rucksack (35-45 Litre is ideal unless you are camping)
- Walking poles

Electronics

- Camera + batteries/charger
- Mobile phone + charger
- Travel adapter (the Swiss plugs are different from French/Italian)
- Head torch + spare batteries

Toiletries (you may have other personal items)

- Miniature size shampoo, creams etc
- Lip salve
- Sun cream
- Wet wipes & tissues
- Small soap in a box/tin
- Toothpaste/toothbrush
- Comb/hairbrush plus hairband/hair ties for long hair

Other

- TMB Walking guide (we recommend the Cicerone guide)
- TMB Map (optional)
- Compass
- Quick dry camping towel
- Lightweight sheet sleeping bag
- Money belt
- Water bottle
- Plastic bags in various sizes

Medical Kit

Note: This is the lightweight medical kit I took but you may need to take medical advice and allow for your own medical conditions.

- Plenty of Plasters for blisters (essential)
- A few larger dressings
- Safety pins
- Cold & flu capsules
- Painkillers (e.g. Paracetamol, Ibuprofen)
- Diarrhea treatment
- Antiseptic cream and wipes
- Nasal spray for blocked noses
- Lip sore cream for cold sores
- Antibiotic eye ointment
- Athletes foot cream
- Knee or ankle support (optional)
- Medication for Altitude sickness (on medical advice)
- Other medication for your individual conditions