



# Great Walks

OF THE WORLD

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## The Matterhorn Circuit

The Matterhorn's distinctive shape makes it one of the World's most famous mountains, with its classic peak of sharp, isolated rock pyramid and steep narrow ridges jutting from surrounding glaciers. Although it stands at 4478 metres, it is not the highest mountain in Switzerland. However because of its elegance and notorious history, it has become one of the most popular mountains for climbers to attempt.

The Matterhorn Circuit lies half in Switzerland and half in Italy and therefore it is a diverse trek concerning both the terrain and the contrasting cultures that will be encountered. The Trek will be challenging and demanding as it follows a route around one of the great iconic peaks of the Alps, and includes remote terrain and glacier passes. It may be necessary at times to use ice axes and crampons to cross some of the glaciers and therefore this trek bridges the gap between walking and climbing, and is thus one of our most demanding Alpine treks. However, at all times you will be escorted by fully qualified alpine guides.

The circuit begins in the Swiss village of Arolla, giving the opportunity to acclimatise, before ascending up and across the Otemma glacier leading to the Italian border. The route then follows a descent down into the Valpeline valley and takes us past Monte Dragone and on into Valtournanche. Our route will then lead us onto Cervinia before entering back into Switzerland to cross the Theodul glacier. We will enter the lively resort of Zermatt, which will prove to be a rest stop before we continue our trek across the last challenging glacier and snow peak and back into Arolla.

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## **Itinerary**

### **Day 1**

We will meet in quaint Swiss village of Arolla for dinner and an orientation. This will also offer us a chance to meet the group, which we will be spending the twelve days with.

### **Day 2**

Today we will partake in an acclimatisation hike. There are numerous treks around Arolla that provide a glimpse of some of the beautiful scenery that we have lying ahead of us. Today will also give us a feel for walking before tomorrow's slightly more challenging trek.

### **Day 3**

This morning we will start our trek with a hill hike to the Vignettes hut, one of the many alpine huts that we will encounter along this circuit. As we approach the hut, we will be leaving behind the enclosed valley, for more open ground that therefore the scenery in turn will also become more dramatic the higher we trek. The final section of the ascent will be on snow and ice, giving everyone the early chance to learn about the use of crampons and ropes for safe glacier travel.

### **Day 4**

The length of today's trek will not be great, although most of the day will be spent on a glacier. Therefore we will have plenty of use for the crampons and ropes, which we learnt about yesterday. Our route will take us across the Otemma glacier and the Col de l'Evêque before descending via the Col Collon, where we will cross the Italian border. It may be possible to extend the day by ascending the Pointes d'Oren (3525m) at the end of the trek, if the group wish to do so.

### **Day 5**

Today we will descend down a steep climber's track into Valpeline, which will have fixed chains in the more difficult sections of the track. Once we have completed this arduous portion the trek will get steadily easier for the rest of the day, as we descend further down into the valley. We will begin to leave the rough terrain of the path and move into the alpine meadow, where it may be possible to see Ibex, higher up on the mountain. We will spend the night in Prayerer, a tiny village, where we should have some time to relax before tomorrow's hike.

### **Day 6**

Upon leaving Prayerer the path will be steep and rugged, although we will be passing through spectacular flower filled alpine meadows before reaching the bleaker landscapes of rock and ice. Throughout the day we will also gain a fantastic view of the south side of the Dent d'Hérens, which towers above Valpeline. We will spend the night at the Dragone Hut, which is situated summit of Monte Dragone, and on the shore of a beautiful high alpine lake.

### **Day 7**

This morning we will take a trek around the lakeside before scrambling up a steep ridge, where we will be rewarded with a spectacular view of the huge south face of the Matterhorn and the Valtournanche. Once we have descended back to the hut, we will take a short break before descending further, through meadows and forest to the Italian ski resort of Cervinia.



### **Day 8**

Our route today will take us over the Theodul glacier, where we will gain more fantastic views of the Matterhorn, although this time they will be of the east face, and with the Hörnli ridge in profile. Once over the glacier we will be following a well-marked track into the lively ski resort of Zermatt.

### **Day 9**

Today we will be taking a well-earned rest day in the exciting town of Zermatt, before continuing our challenging trek tomorrow. For those who are still feeling active, there are a number of shorter treks that can be walked from the resort.

### **Day 10**

Now all rested up we will leave Zermatt on the steep track that leads out of the valley and through the beautiful village of Zmutt. We will continue along side the Zmutt glacier to the meadow at Schönbiel, where we will be trekking beneath the north face of the Matterhorn. Once at the hut, we will have plenty of time to enjoy the magnificent surroundings of the north face of the Matterhorn and Zmutt ridge above, as well as the cascading icefalls of the north face of the Dent d'Hérens.

### **Day 11**

This morning we will start early so that we can undertake maybe the toughest day of the circuit. We will start with a steep descent to cross the awkward Schönbiel glacier, and then follow a tiny climbers path to reach the top of Stockji where we will be rewarded with a view of plentiful glacial ice. Our route then moves over the Stockji glacier to gain the Col de Valpeline and shoulder the Tête Blanche, which we will be able to ascent, if there is time and everyone has enough energy. We will end the day by descending down the Mont Miné glacier to the extraordinarily perched Bertol hut.

### **Day 12**

Today we will return to our starting point to Arolla, via the Bertol glacier. Once across the glacier we will follow a walking track, which leads steeply into the Arolla valley.

### **Day 13**

After a leisurely breakfast, we will take our private transfer to the airport, so that we can board our return flight to the UK.

