

La Vallée Blanche

Skiing La Vallée Blanche

The Vallée Blanche is one of the most famous ski runs in the world, and not without due cause: it offers 2,780 vertical metres of descent and is 22km long which makes it the longest run in the world however you're measuring! You'll start from the top of the Aiguille du Midi lift and ski down France's largest glacier, the Mer de Glace.

If the snow conditions are right, you can ski all the way down to Planards in Chamonix, or later in the season you'll finish at the Montanvers train station and take the train back down to Chamonix.

Aiguille du Midi cable car: The Vallée Blanche is accessed via approx. 30 minute ride in the Aiguille du Midi cable car, finally arriving at the top of the Aiguille du Midi peak, a 3,842m 'needle' on the shoulder of Mont Blanc.

The Arête: Possibly as well known as the run itself, the arête, or 'ridge', is the first hurdle you have to tackle before taking on the glacier. Once you have exited the Aiguille du Midi, you must descend about 150 metres along a ridge to reach the glacier. From early January the ridge is equipped with a safety rope and steel posts for people to use, as you will descend on foot, with crampons if it's icy and usually roped together with the members of your group and your guide. However before this time it is not roped up so extreme caution is advised. You certainly **need a good head for heights** due to the steep drops on either side of the ridge!

Montanvers train: If you can't ski right back down to Chamonix due to snow conditions, you'll take the Montanvers train back to Chamonix town centre. Be aware that from the glacier, you reach the Montanvers station via a cable car, but you'll still need to climb the 400+ steps to reach the cable car which can be tiring after your off-piste descent.

When to do the Vallée Blanche: It is obviously best to ski the Vallée Blanche when the weather is good as the scenery on the way down is stunning. Also it is more enjoyable if you can avoid the crowds; most people wait until the end of the week to go once they have 'warmed up' their legs, so we recommend booking for earlier in the week or even changeover days (Saturday and Sunday).

To ski or to snowboard? Both skiing and snowboarding are feasible, but you can come a cropper on a snowboard if conditions are not great. There is a long shuss at the end of the run which can be a pain on a board. Don't be put off as riding the powder on the Vallée Blanche is awesome, but it helps to take telescopic poles as you may need to push yourself along in places. These can be bought or hired easily in the town centre. Bear in mind too that you will not be allowed to unclip your board on the glacier.

Information & checklist

Skiing the Vallée Blanche is one of the best memories you can take away from your holiday in Chamonix. However, you are skiing off-piste on a glacier so it's important to read our safety guide below to ensure you are fully

prepared for your experience and you should only consider skiing the Vallée Blanche with a guide. It's also good to know that the route takes between 4-6 hours depending on conditions and group level.

You must be sure of your ski level and confident that you can ski in the conditions on the glacier. If you are not sure, call our Resort Team for advice (see phone numbers on the first page).

You will need:

- Ski or snowboard equipment
- Helmet - We strongly advise you wear a helmet, if you have one, bring it or hire one for the day.
- Warm clothing - This is essential as the weather can change dramatically within hours. You particularly need this when you start your journey on the arête as this is an exposed area. Fleece, layers and Gore Tex clothing that is breathable are good options.
- Food & drink – Always make sure you are fully hydrated so bring plenty of water with you. Bring a packed lunch as well as some snacks to keep your energy levels up throughout the day.
- Sun protection (goggles, sunglasses, sunscreen) – You need to be fully protected with adequate sun cream and lip protection, as well as sunglasses or light reflective goggles. Bring your goggles with you in your rucksack even if it's a clear day as the conditions may change.
- Retractable poles – if you are a snowboarder then we strongly advise you to bring retractable poles as it will be very hard work for you on the flats if you are without.
- Harness & avalanche transceiver - You must have these to ski the Vallée Blanche. These are provided by your guide but if you wish to bring your own please do so.
- Rucksack – You must bring a rucksack to carry your skis or snowboard.
- Mont Blanc Unlimited (MBU) ski pass - Required for the Aiguille du Midi cable car and the Montanvers train.
- Insurance – make sure you have adequate off-piste insurance.
- Camera - you won't want to miss those views!

Meeting arrangements & cancellations

- Meeting point - You must meet your guide promptly at the bottom of the cable car (usually by the Vertical Café, just inside the cable car building) so that you keep to your schedule.
- Cancellations – this activity may be cancelled if your guide feels the weather is not suitable. In this instance you will usually be contacted by your guide directly. Alternative plans can then be made depending on the forecast and refunds can be given if the activity cannot take place at all.
- No shows – if you change your mind, are severely late or decide the weather is not suitable you will still be charged. It is only the guide who decides if the weather is not suitable.