

Walking Italy's Alps - Bassa Via Val D'Aosta

Pont St. Martin, Gressoney, Great St. Bernard Pass, and Aosta

June 9-17, 2026



Features

- Seven nights in the field at small hotels, one night in a Rifugio
- Nine hiking days
- Eating and sleeping in rifugi and rural inns and luggage service keep backpacks weight down
- Approx. ~40-mile, moderate, trailed route
- Stunning scenery in the Italian Alps
- Hiking at elevations of 2,000-3,000 feet
- Optional pre-trip day activities in historic Turin
- Visit a variety of Castles and Savoia Palaces, including the Savoia Summer residence in Gressoney St. Jean
- Grand St Bernard Pass, visit the St Bernard dogs, overnight in the monastery
- Vineyards tour and wine-tasting
- Traveling through one of Italy's unique mountain valleys on sections of the Via Gallia

Cost: \$4,295 - includes pre and post-trip Turin lodging

Max Trip size: 12 participants
2 NOLS Instructors

Minimum Age: 18

Trip Description

Join a small group of NOLS grads and instructors for an 8-day adventure of spectacular hiking in the western Italian Alps as we trek between “rifugi” (small, hostel-style lodgings) and rural hotels. This adventure is geared toward individuals interested in walking in the mountains with light day packs (luggage service included).

This trip's hiking days average 4 to 7 miles in undulating terrain with some elevation gain. Most participants are excited to relax with a glass of wine or a beer at the end of those long days, but for those that want more, there will be options to do additional day hiking with an instructor who is familiar with the area.

Meals include set dinners, buffet breakfasts at hotels or Rifugio, and picnic lunches along the trail. The group will divide lunch supplies and share the load to ensure plenty of food.

This trip is a great way to get reacquainted with NOLS backpacking techniques in a convivial, relaxing, and visually stunning part of the world. Instruction is geared to your interests, with time for journal writing, photography, and more. Of course, non-alumni friends and family are invited—this is a great way to introduce NOLS to your sidekicks.

A fantastic part of alumni trips is the group itself. NOLS alumni and their guests are an interesting crew with diverse professional and personal backgrounds. On this trip, expect plenty of camaraderie, laughter, learning, and shared responsibility.

Trip Environment

The Aosta Valley is a classic large U-shaped valley. The valley floor offers a variety of mountain terrain: grassy meadows, stands of conifers, large boulders, and terraced vineyards. The walk follows established trails, which are in good condition and are commonly walked by other hikers. Most walking will be in the 2,000-5,000' elevation range, with surrounding peaks reaching over 14,000'.

Summer weather in the Alps can vary widely. Some days might experience hot temperatures reaching into the 80s, while others might have rain. On average, we can expect temperatures to be 60-75 during the day and near 50 at night.

NOLS Staff

Our staff are NOLS professionals who are trained and certified accordingly. This means they maintain certifications in wilderness medicine and are trained to meet NOLS's high standards in risk management. They are senior NOLS staff who have spent years working and teaching in backcountry environments worldwide. Additionally, our staff specializes in bringing together groups of strangers and building the group culture and camaraderie that makes NOLS trips great.

On this trip, our staff brings regional language skills that create a smooth and relaxing schedule when paired with a flair for logistics. Our instructors have been running trips in Italy for well over a decade and are true specialists in the region's food and culture. They will ensure you pick up some basic Italian language, history, and connections.

A Day in the Life

In the mornings, generally about 7 a.m., the group gathers for breakfast in a common area or dining room. Options include eggs, meats, bread, cereals, and hot drinks.

The group then returns to their rooms to change into hiking clothes (shorts or hiking pants and a T-shirt) and finish packing their gear for the gear shuttle. Once packed, everyone will gather outside with packs to review the day and maps. The team hikes as a loose group along the trail, stopping for water and snack breaks as needed. Walks vary and are generally ~5 hours on the trail.

Once we arrive at our lodging, the instructors will assist with checking in to the hotel. People regroup for additional, optional hikes or change from hiking clothes into comfortable travel wear for lounging around the hotel. Dress is casual, so warmish casual clothes like hiking pants, polo shirts, and light sweaters or shawls are appropriate around the common areas.

Our group dinners usually happen at a set time from a multi-course menu. Meats and pasta are standard options, with vegetables, breads, and a dessert selection. Meals (which are excellent) are included in the trip tuition, but alcohol is not. Participants often pair up to buy a bottle of wine, or folks order beer or spirits from the bar.

After dinner, groups often come together for parlor games and socializing. Most participants head to bed by around 10 p.m.

Difficulty Scale

This trip is rated 1 out of 5 on our difficulty scale.



We use a difficulty scale to help participants evaluate if a trip is right for them. It considers probable weather conditions, physicality of activities, and food and accommodations. You don't need to be a honed athlete, but pre-trip work to improve your strength, flexibility, and endurance is highly encouraged to enhance your enjoyment of the place. Please contact the Alumni Trips Department for specific questions regarding physical preparation and readiness.

Curriculum

This trip focuses on many traditional NOLS skills, competencies, and concepts, including map reading, hiking, and group travel. The instructors will provide information necessary for the group to travel and optional topics as desired by participants comfortably. These could include natural history, local history, leadership, decision-making, and team function, among other things. Formal “classes” are few and mostly optional, but informal discussions are plentiful. Anticipate a required base level of group management and cohesion—this is a mountain expedition.

About Valley D'Aosta

In northwestern Italy, the Valle d'Aosta is a marvelous region of magical mountains and rugged valleys verging on pristine wilderness. The great peaks of Gran Paradiso, Mont Blanc, Monte Rosa, Grand Combin, and Matterhorn can be seen from many points along our route.

The Via delle Gallie Consular Road

The narrow passageway between the river Dora Baltea and the sheer rock cliffs at the village of Bard was historically the mandatory route into the Valle d'Aosta. Dating back to the Roman period, the Gallic Consular Road or Via delle Gallie Consular Road, which has sections that were cut into the surrounding rock face, connected the ancient Roman city of Eporedia (Ivrea) to the mountain passes of Alpis Graia (the Little Saint Bernard Pass) and the Alpis Poenina (the Great Saint Bernard Pass).

You can see the Roman road from the top of the Fortress of Bard. The Via delle Gallie Consular Road was built in 25 BCE after the Romans defeated the Salassi population. It was in use until the nineteenth century. Today, the Via Francigena follows this route, mainly known for its archaeological ruins, which are still visible in sections between Bard and Donnas.

The Via Francigena

This is an ancient road and pilgrimage route running from the cathedral city of Canterbury in England, through France and Switzerland, to Rome, and then to Apulia, Italy, where there were ports of

embarkation for the Holy Land. It was known in Italy as the "Via Francigena" or the "Via Romea Francigena"

Aosta

The Cryptoporticus, the Roman Theater, Porta Pretoria and the city walls

Expectations of Participants

The alumni trip atmosphere is more relaxed than a typical NOLS expedition. However, it's not a full-service vacation or guided experience. You'll have to participate, carry your load, and help as needed. These expeditions are fun but still require self-reliance, self-awareness, risk management, and sound decision-making as we trek through remote areas where evacuation to modern medical facilities can take several days. Like all NOLS courses, these expeditions emphasize hands-on learning and applying new skills in various situations.

All participants must complete and submit application materials, including a medical history form. These forms highlight the intersection of your trip's anticipated physical rigor and your current health and fitness status. Your forthright and timely completion and submission of the forms sets you and your trip up for success in the outdoors.

Alumni trips allow electronics and alcohol (for those of legal age in the country of the trip). Many participants find these luxuries can add to the trip experience and local flavor. Excessive alcohol consumption is not a part of the culture of Alumni trips.

Trip Itinerary

June 7	Many participants will depart the U.S. on this day, depending on connections and possible pre-trip plans.	
June 8	We urge you to arrive in Turin on this day, allowing for jet lag recovery, baggage snafus, and some optional activities the next day. For those in town, we'll host an optional "wine rally." Meet in the Star Hotel Majestic lobby at 6 p.m., where we'll introduce local wines and cheeses. It's a chance to meet the group and taste the region's fantastic foods. Please RSVP.	Lodging: on your own, but we suggest the Star Hotel Majestic.
June 9	For those in Turin, we'll loosely organize some optional sightseeing activities from our hotel. Our pre-trip group orientation and official start of the trip, occurs at 6 p.m. in the Star Hotel Majestic lobby or nearby.	Lodging provided by NOLS at the Star Hotel Majestic Dinner on your own.
June 10	Pack up. Store in-town luggage. Train to Pont St Martin, next shuttle to Gressoney to visit the Savoia Summer Residence. Travel to Teche, our evening residence. Hike ~2 miles ↑ ft ↓ ft.	Lodging: Hotel Lo Scoiattolo, Teche
June 11	Take a morning walk, take the cable car up to Passo dei Salati, and hike on the NW side of Mt. Rosa.	Lodging: Hotel Lo Scoiattolo, Teche

	Hike~5 miles ↑, 1050 ft. ↓, 200ft.	
June 12	Catch the bus to Pont St Martin. Walk part of Via dei Vigneti, Via Francigena, Via delle Gallie (the original Roman road to Lyon, FR.) to Castle Bard. Hike~6.5 miles ↑, 650 ft. ↓, 200ft.	Lodging: Hotel Cavour e des Officers. In Castle Bard.
June 13	Short bus ride to Roman Bridge, vineyard hike to St. Vincent. Hike ~6 miles ↑500 ft. ↓250 ft.	Lodging: Grand Hotel Billia
June 14	Shuttle to the road-head below the Grand St. Bernard Pass, hike to the pass, and overnight in the monastery. Hike ~3 miles ↑650 ft. ↓ 200 ft.	Lodging: Hospice du Grand St Bernard
June 15	Morning hike, shuttle back to Aosta. Afternoon visit to Roman Ruins in Aosta. Hike ~4 miles ↑650 ft. ↓350 ft.	Lodging: Duca D'Aosta Hotel
June 16	Morning bus to the Cogne Valley to see the Pont d'Aël, a Roman aqueduct. It was built in 3 BCE to supply water for the newly founded colony of Augusta Praetoria, now known as Aosta. Hike down the Cogne Valley to Castello Aymavilles and visit the castle. Continue to Les Cretes (one of the Aosta Valley's top vineyards) for wine tasting. Hike ~7 miles ↑450 ft. ↓250 ft.	Lodging: Duca D'Aosta Hotel
June 17	Explore Aosta in the morning and take the late morning train back to Turin.	NOLS provides lodging at the Star Hotel Majestic. Final dinner hosted by NOLS
June 18	Onward Travel	Breakfast at the hotel included

Trip Logistics

The trip starts and ends in the ancient city of Turin. Please plan on arriving in Turin a night early to allow for jet lag recovery, possible airline delays, optional wine tasting, and optional group day-touring before our official trip orientation meeting.

Travel

Recommended Option

Turin (code: TRN) is served by Lufthansa regional flights out of Munich and Frankfurt. Depending on where your first touchdown is in Europe, you may clear customs in that city or Turin. You don't need a visa, but customs will stamp your passport.

In Italian, Turin is “Torino,” which means there are two different words for the same city.

A bus service (ARRIVA SADEM) goes from the Turin airport to downtown and to the Porta Nuova station. Our group hotel is one block from this stop. The cost is € 6.00 for the local service (45-minute ride) or € 7.00 for the express service (30-minute ride).

Alternate Options

Milan is a workable alternative via Malpensa (MXP) or Linate (LIN) Airports. It's an easy train to Milan's Central Station to pick up a high-speed train to Turin (~1 hour).

When you arrive at Milan Malpensa Airport (MXP) you'll likely retrieve your luggage in Terminal #1. Follow the sign to the trains via a pedestrian tunnel. Purchase a ticket at the counter for a ride from Malpensa to Milano Centrale (~13.00 euros, one way). Trains leave hourly at 22 and 43 minutes after the hour. After your trip, purchasing a return train ticket in Turin directly to Malpensa Airport is easy.

Milan's Stazione Centrale has excellent, inexpensive sandwich shops outside the secured train platform area. If you purchase tickets at the central station, consider picking up a bottle of water and a sandwich for the train ride.

At Milan Central Station, tickets to Turin Central Station are not available from machines in the secured platform area behind the security checkpoint. You may buy tickets using the machines **outside** the security checkpoint (machines accept credit cards with chip technology), or at the ticket window for intercity trains in the Station Head House also located outside security. You can also purchase a ticket ahead of time using [Trenitalia's Website](#). Pre-booking and purchasing tickets online is less expensive, especially for high-speed (“freccie”) trains.

Purchase a ticket to station **Torino Porta Nuova**—“per favore un biglietto per Torino andata solamente.” Cost is about €38). Validate your ticket using the yellow trackside punch machine before boarding your train. The trip from Milan to Turin takes about 60 minutes, depending on the train.

Your car and seat assignment will be printed on your ticket. "Carrozza 005 posti 31 finestrino" means you are on car 005, window seat 31. The trains are smoke-free, and luggage is stored in the compartment or at either end of the carriage.

Lodging

NOLS has secured lodging for our group at Turin's Starhotels Majestic. Breakfast is included. We'll pair you in single-gender hotel rooms or couples—if you're traveling with a partner, please let us know. The hotel is a five-minute walk from the train station. If you want extra lodging in Turin before or after the trip, we suggest you try www.booking.com.

Address: Starhotels Majestic, Corso Vittorio Emanuele II, 54, Turin, Italy.

Storage of Personal Belongings

You can leave valuables and luggage in a secure area at our first hotel for the trip. While the storage is safe, NOLS assumes no responsibility for the stored items. Although our partners have never had a problem, think twice before storing electronics or other expensive items in your in-town luggage.

Currency

You'll need cash in the form of Euros for miscellaneous purchases and transportation throughout the trip. You'll receive the best exchange at your local bank, but money change kiosks are handy in most airports. US credit cards will work in most locations, including train stations, but it's often a good idea to inform your credit card company that you're traveling internationally. About 100 Euros will be plenty of cash for the field portion of the trip for incidental purchases.

Tipping

Tipping in the service industry in Italy is common but lower than in the US. 5-10% is standard in restaurants that do not charge a *Servizio*, which is a service charge that takes the place of a tip. Tipping other service workers is common as well, but small amounts of 1-2 Euros are standard.

While tipping is common in the outdoor guiding culture, your NOLS Instructors are not driven to excellence by tips but rather by a love for taking people outdoors. You are welcome to tip the Instructors if you choose, but many instructors are honored by [a donation in their name to the NOLS Annual Fund](#), which supports scholarships for future NOLS students.

Travel Insurance

Travel insurance is worth exploring in case unforeseen events cause you to change your plans or if NOLS has to cancel a trip for any reason. Check with your insurance carrier and credit card to understand what you already might have, or check out cat70.com for a wide variety of options.

Carbon Footprint and Offset

Current estimates are that the Travel Industry accounts for ~8% of global emissions. This percentage includes everything from transportation to accommodation and shopping. NOLS recognizes that our business contributes to this problem, but we still need a comprehensive strategy.

If you would like to offset part or all of the carbon emissions related to your Alumni trip, we recommend the [South Pole. Their calculator](#) can help you easily calculate your footprint and choose a project to contribute to. [Here is a link to their calculator.](#)

Immunizations / Vaccinations / Travel medications

International travel poses special health considerations. NOLS strongly advises that all participants traveling to international locations carefully consider what vaccinations or inoculations are required, recommended, or suggested for their travel itinerary. Consulting with a physician, travel medicine specialist, or other healthcare professional is strongly advised.

Visa / Passport - Attention International European travelers - [Must read... Action Required](#)

If your travels have you **entering or transiting (passing through or laying over in) the UK**, you will need to apply for and have an approved Electronic Travel Authorization (ETA) to continue to your destination.

This [article](#) explains that starting Jan 8, 2025, US and Canadian citizens will need to apply for the ETA to enter the UK.

Here's [the link](#) for how to apply.

As well, for NOLS International Alumni trips, your **passport must be valid for a minimum of 6 months post trip**. For example, if your trip in Europe concludes on July 30, 2025, your passport must be valid through January 30, 2026.

At some point in the future (July 2025?) Europe (EU) will be requiring a travel authorization for most countries that are visa-exempt. This includes USA citizens. Once this system goes into effect, you will need to apply using this new system before traveling and pay a small fee for the authorization.

[You can read about this new program, check your requirements, and view the most up to date expected implementation date here.](#)

Electricity stuff

On this trip, you will have regular access to power plugs and be able to plug in and charge your devices. To do this, you will need a Type C adapter. Each rifugio will have at least some available charging capability and Wi-Fi.

Trip Registration

The best way to register is through the trip information page on the nols.edu website. A non-refundable deposit secures your spot on the trip. If any issues arise, please call the NOLS Alumni Department at (800) 332-4280. Your enrollment is complete with receipt of your full tuition and your completed application forms; these are **due 60 days before the start of your trip**.

All participants are required to submit registration materials, including a medical form. These forms highlight the intersection of your trip's anticipated physical rigor and current health and fitness status while providing NOLS information about your dietary needs.

NOLS is not responsible for additional costs incurred by late arrivals or evacuations. Trip participants are responsible for those expenses, and we recommend purchasing travel insurance to mitigate the impact of unforeseen circumstances.

We recommend NOT booking travel until 60 days before the trip. Only book travel before 60 days if you have confirmed with NOLS Alumni that the trip will run. On rare occasions, we do cancel trips due to low enrollment. You can check with us at alumni_trips@nols.edu.

Cancellation and Transfer Policy

Here is the [Alumni Trips Cancellation and Transfer Policy](#). When enrolling on a trip, you will need to agree to this policy.

Suggested Readings

- Italianissimo: The Quintessential Guide to What Italians Do Best. Apatoff, L. & Fili L.
- Sprezzatura: 50 Ways Italian Genius Shaped the World, D'Epiro, P. & Pinkowish, M.D.
- The Pursuit of Italy: A History of a Land, Its Regions, and Their Peoples, Gilmour, D
- A Soldier of the Great War, Helprin, Mark

Local Recommendations

- Museo Egizio- top Egyptian museum outside of Egypt.
- Royal Palace of Turin and Piazza Castello and the Shroud of Turin.

Fun facts about Turin

- Italy's capital of chocolate-gianduiotti and pasta gianduja, the precursor to Nutella
- Birthplace of the Aperitif
- The Turin area is the birthplace of the Slow Food Movement—visit its unique selection of slow-food restaurants.
- The birthplace of Eataly- two locations, one near our hotel
- Headquarters for Fiat Chrysler Automotive
- Home of the 2006 Winter Olympics
- Piedmont is a UNESCO World Heritage site.
- Turin's historic cafes birthed the unique coffee drink- Bicerin (espresso, chocolate, and whole milk served layered in a small rounded glass).

Packing System

Please utilize a 3-bag packing system.

1. Travel Bag—This might be a larger suitcase of some variety you traveled to Italy with. You will leave this bag at the first hotel along with anything you don't need for the trip. You will not have access to this bag throughout the trip.
2. Trip Luggage—This bag will be transported between lodgings during the trip, but you will also have to carry it on a few short walks (10-15 minutes). Please keep this bag size to an airline carry-on or something equivalent to a 40-liter duffel. A rolling bag could be nice, but make sure the wheels are robust for rough roads, cobblestones, and some stairs.

The luggage shuttle is included for 40 L /20kg/45 Lbs. These restrictions are based on the luggage service provider. If your suitcase is larger, there might be an additional charge.

3. Day Pack - Something small that can carry water, sunscreen, snacks, and layers.

Equipment List

Upper Body Clothing	
Equipment	Notes
Base layer (light or midweight)	Wool or synthetic
Long sleeve shirt	Necessary for sun protection, synthetic or wool
Wind shirt (optional)	A lightweight, breathable, durable nylon wind shell in either a pullover or parka style
Rain jacket	A sturdy, waterproof jacket with a hood. Both coated nylon and breathable fabrics such as Gore-Tex® are acceptable/ Umbrella
T-shirt (1-2)	A lightweight synthetic or merino wool t-shirt
Sports Bra or Tank (2-3)	A synthetic sports bra or a synthetic sports tank is recommended
Sun hat	Baseball cap or full-brim
Lower Body Clothing	
Equipment	Notes
Hiking shorts/ pants	Nylon, quick dry shorts or lightweight hiking pants
Underwear (2-3 pairs)	Wear what's comfortable; cotton, silk, or synthetics are fine
Footwear	
Equipment	Notes
Approach or Hiking Shoes	You will need a sturdy pair of shoes to hike in. Consider trail hiking shoes or approach shoes for something lighter than traditional boots
Gaiters (optional)	Short gaiters to keep rocks and debris out of their shoes
Sneakers or non-hiking shoe	Something to wear around the hotels and city walking
Socks (2-3 pairs)	½ crew to crew length wool socks. Cotton socks are not advised
Miscellaneous Personal Gear	
Equipment	Notes
Small backpack	Must be big enough to carry personal items (e.g., water, food, clothing layers) and lunch—15-25L
Small duffel	~ 40 Liters in size, this is your Trip Luggage bag.
Plastic Trash Bags (1-2)	One to two heavy-duty trash compactor bags (33 gallons) to help waterproof items in your pack
Water Bottles	Bottles with a total capacity of at least 2 Liters

Lip Balm (1-2)	SPF 15 or greater
Sunscreen	SPF 30 or greater
Sunglasses	Good-quality sunglasses with 100-percent UV protection; lenses should be dark
Toiletries	Toothbrush, toothpaste, comb, brush, skin lotion, tampons, etc. Ear plugs and eye covers can be nice
Beachwear	Swimsuit, goggles, beach sandals
Optional Items	
Trekking Poles	Most participants enjoy hiking with 2 poles
Hydration System	Very handy and popular
Book or e-reader	Bring something fun to read
Camera	We would love to see your photos post-trip!
Casual Clothes	Shirt/pants/skirt for dinner or hanging out around the hotels
Pack Cover	Heavyweight and attachable to your pack