

Backpacking Italy's Alps – *Haute Route Glacier/Alta Via dei Ghiacciai.* Gran Paradiso National Park

Valsaverenche, Valle de Rhemes Notre Dame, Valgrisenche

August 19-28, 2025



Features

- Seven nights in the field at “rifugios” or small hotels
- Eight hiking days
- Eating and sleeping indoors keeps backpack weight down
- Approx. ~50-mile, challenging, traile route
- Stunning scenery in the Italian Alps
- Hiking at elevations of 6,000-12,000 feet
- Optional pre-trip day activities in historic Turin
- Traveling through Italy's first national park (est. 1922)

Cost: \$3,795

*includes pre- and post-trip lodging in Turin

Minimum Age: 18

Max Trip size: 12 participants

2 NOLS Instructors

Trip Description

Join a small group of experienced mountain-hiking NOLS grads and instructors for an 8-day adventure of challenging and spectacular hiking in the western Alps as we trek between “rifugi” (small, hostel-style lodgings) and rural hotels in the Italian Alps.

This is a unique opportunity to travel in Grand Paradiso National Park's more remote and glaciated sections. Traveling along lateral moraines, we will see stunning views of high alpine glaciers. John Gans (past President of NOLS) said this is one of my top ten hiking experiences. Remote Rifugio settings, stunning hanging valleys, amazing glaciated bowls, pyramidal peaks, shimmering tarn lakes, and a unique blend of European hikers.

This adventure is for people who are comfortable and practiced with steep hikes, high peaks, and airy trails. We've found that the Italian Alps can be an addicting hiking experience and have crafted this hike to be among the more challenging of our routes for those that are looking for the true ups and downs of northern Italy's challenging backcountry travel.

This trip's hiking days each average about seven miles with some challenging changes in elevation and long climbs. 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.

Our first day starts out with a train north to Aosta, then a bus to our road head. Our hiking route truly begins below Gran Paradiso (13,323') in Italy's Valsavarenche and continues east, ascending the ridgeline that forms the western rib of Gran Paradiso. Over the next several days, we continue hiking west, crossing a series of south-to-north-oriented valleys as our legs absorb the fluted geography of the region. These days will entail elevation gain and loss as we make our way up, over, and down the ridges that define much of Northern Italy. As the trip continues west, we traverse the Valleys of Valsavarenche, Valle de Rhemes Notre Dame, and Valgrisenche.

Connecting a string of rifugios and small hotels gives us the chance to savor European cuisine and culture while mixing with other, mostly European travelers in a dorm-style setting. Sleeping and dining (dinner and breakfasts) in the rifugios or hotels allows us to considerably lighten our packs for our daily mountain hikes among the stunning spires, valleys, ridges and peaks of the western Alps. Unlike standard NOLS expeditions, we won't carry cooking gear or heavy rations—even pads and sleeping bags are not needed at the rifugi.

Meals are a combination of set dinners and buffet breakfasts at hotels or rifugio and picnic lunches along the trail. The group will divvy up lunch supplies and share the load to make sure there is plenty of food for all.

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 also 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. Expect plenty of camaraderie, laughter, learning, and shared responsibility on this trip.

Trip Environment

Gran Paradiso (Italian) or Grand Paradis (French) is a mountain in the Graian Alps in Italy, located between the Aosta Valley and Piedmont regions. Grand Paradiso was the private hunting ground of the Italian Royal family. Victor Emmanuel III donated the land to form Italy's first national park in 1922. This region offers a variety of mountain terrain—grassy meadows, stands of conifers, large boulders, and wide expanses of exposed bedrock. The majority of our trek follows established trails with limited signage and some steep, exposed sections. Trails are in generally good condition and are commonly trekked by other hikers. Most hiking will be in the 8,000-12,000' elevation range with nearby peaks reaching over 14,000'.

Summer weather in the high Alps can vary widely. Some days might experience hot temps reaching into the 80s while others might have rain mixed with even heavy snow at higher elevations and temps in the 50s. On average, we can expect temperatures to be 60-65 during the days and near 40 at night.

While this region is well traveled by people, we can hope to see some fauna along our trek. Alpine Ibex and Chamois will likely be the largest of the animals we see while weasels, badgers, hares, and wolves are present as well. A variety of birds call northern Italy home— a careful observer will see many hovering around the peaks and ridges.

NOLS Staff

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

On this trip, our staff bring regional language skills that when paired with a flair for logistics, creates a smooth and relaxing schedule. Our instructors have been running trips in Italy for well over a decade and are true specialists when it comes to food and culture of the region. They will ensure that 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 in a common area or dining room for breakfast. Options include various eggs, meats, bread, cereals, and hot drinks.

The team then returns to their rooms to change into hiking clothes (shorts or hiking pants and t-shirt) and finish packing up (there is no gear shuttle). Once packed, everyone will gather outside with packs for a review of the day and maps. The team hikes as a loose group along the trail, stopping for water and snack breaks as needed. Hikes vary, but are generally ~5-hours on the trail.

Once we arrive at our lodging, the instructors sort out rooms for the group and get everyone settled in with a bunk. People regroup for additional, optional hikes, or change from hiking clothes into comfortable, travel wear for lounging around the rifugio. Dress is not formal, so warmish casual clothes like hiking pants, fishing shirts and light pile jackets are common and appropriate around the common areas.

Our group dinners usually happen at a set time from a multi-course menu. Various meats and pastas are common options, with vegetables, breads, and a desert selection. Meals (which are quite 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 before heading to bed.

Difficulty Scale

This trip is rated 4 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 improve your enjoyment of the place. If you have specific questions regarding physical preparation and your readiness please reach out to the Alumni Trips Department.

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 comfortably travel, as well as optional topics as desired by participants. 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 Gran Paradiso

In 1856 King Vittorio Emanuele II unified several hunting grounds and declared a Royal Game Reserve. Later, in 1922, his grandson renounced the royal hunting rights and declared the area Gran Paradiso National Park, the first in Italy. The first formal trails were put in during the mid-1800's as a way of connecting the King's hunting lodges and currently there are around 470 KM of signed and maintained paths in the area.

In the mid 1800s, the ibex and chamois population were dwindling due to over-hunting, so King Vittorio protected the area and saved these two animal populations. The ibex in particular were prized animals and were considered to be “walking pharmacies” because of all of the products derived from them.

The Gran Paradiso sits in the Valle d'Aosta, in northwestern Italy, a marvelous region of magical mountains and rugged valleys, verging on pristine wilderness. The Mont Blanc, Monte Rosa and Matterhorn mountains can be seen from many points along our trail. The curious and romantic name “Gran Paradiso” goes back much further than Italy's kings. While most experts say that the name Gran Paradiso refers to the 4,061 meter peak itself, others believe the name is a contortion of ‘granta parei’ or ‘great wall.’ Some locals say that it comes from the presence of so many saints at the head of Valnontey— the peaks of San Pietro, San Andrea and Sant'Orso— despite nearby Punta dell'Inferno (Hell Point) and Testa della Tribolazione (Tribulation Peak).

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 out as needed. These expeditions are fun, but they 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. And like all NOLS courses, these expeditions emphasize hands-on learning and the application of new skills in a variety of situations.

All participants need to 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 that these luxuries can add to the trip experience and local flavor. Excessive alcohol consumption is not a part of the culture of Alumni trips.

Aug 17	Depending on connections and possible pre-trip plans, many participants will depart the U.S. on this day.	
Aug 18	We urge you to arrive in Turin on this day, allowing for jet lag recovery, baggage snafus, and some optional activities on the next day. For those in town, we'll host an optional "wine rally." Meet in the Star Hotel Majestic lobby at 18:00, where we'll introduce local wines and cheeses. It's a chance to meet the group and get a taste of the region's fantastic foods. Please RSVP.	Lodging: on your own, we suggest the Star Hotel Majestic .
Aug 19	For those in Turin, we'll loosely organize some optional sightseeing activities. Our pre-trip group orientation occurs at 6 p.m. in the Star Hotel Majestic lobby or nearby. Dinner is on your own.	Lodging provided by NOLS at the Star Hotel Majestic
Aug 20	Pack up—store luggage in town. Take the train to Aosta, then the bus to Valsavarenche. Check into the hotel. Optional afternoon day hike to visit one of the Savoia satellite hunting lodges and a local cheese-making operation. Hike ~5.5 miles ↑2300 ft ↓2300 ft	Albergo Al Hostellerie du Paradis
Aug 21	Bus to road head, hike to first Rifugio. Travel a series of switchbacks and enter a heavily glaciated bowl on the north side of Grand Paradiso. The Rifugio is crowned by the glaciers off the north side of Grand Paradiso. Hike ~5 miles ↑3100 ft ↓250 ft	Lodging: Rifugio Chabod
Aug 22	Traverse the western ridgeline of Grand Paradiso, which comprises a series of glacial bowls and lateral and medial moraines. A series of glaciers crown the Rifugio. Hike~4 miles ↑1200 ft. ↓1100 ft	Rifugio Lodging: Rifugio Vittorio Emanuele II
Aug 23	Hike to the upper valley below Grand Paradiso. Hike ~3 miles ↑200 ft. ↓2600 ft	Lodging: Rifugio Tetra Lyre
Aug 24	Hike West into a hanging valley and a stunning alpine meadow. Climbing towards our next Rifugio. ~6 miles ↑2200 ft ↓350 ft	Lodging: Rifugio Savoia
Aug 25	Hike to Colle Basel 10,500 ft, then descend to Rifugio. Outstanding view of both valleys of Valsaverenche, Rhemes de Notre Dame, Grand Paradiso, and the glaciers of the Rhemes Valley. ~8.5 miles ↑2300 ft. ↓ 3100 ft	Lodging: Rifugio Benevolo

Aug 26	Hike to Col Bassac Dere 10,000 ft., then contour Ghiacciaio di Gliaretta along the lateral moraine; this is one of the more majestic glaciers on the route, and continue to the Rifugio. Hike ~9 miles ↑ 3600 ft. ↓ 3600 ft	Lodging: Rifugio Bezzi
Aug 27	Contouring along the upper valley of Valgrisenche. More glacial terrain and stunning view of the northern Alps on the Swiss border and to our south the French border. Hike ~7.5 miles ↑ 2700 ft. ↓ 2400 ft	Lodging: Rifugio Epee
Aug 28	Hike to the valley floor of Valgrisenche and meet the shuttle to Aosta, depending on the time, a couple of unstructured hours to visit the very unique Roman ruins before a train back to Turin. Hike ~5.5 miles ↑ 315 ft. ↓ 2600 ft	NOLS provides lodging. Final dinner hosted by NOLS
Aug 29	Depart Turin/fly home.	Breakfast included

Trip Itinerary

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 for optional group day-touring before our official trip orientation meeting.

Travel

Recommended Option

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

In Italian, Turin is "Torino;" two different words for the same city.

There is bus service ([ARRIVA SADEM](#)) from the Turin airport into downtown and the Porta Nuova station. Our group hotel is one block from this stop. 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, it's easy to purchase a return train ticket in Turin directly to Malpensa Airport.

Please note that Milan's Stazione Centrale has some very good and inexpensive sandwich shops outside the secured train platform area. Consider picking up a bottle of water and a sandwich for the train ride if you're purchasing tickets in the main station.

At Milan Central Station, tickets are available from machines in the secured platform area to Turin Central Station. To use the ticket machines, select your language and use a credit card with chip technology. Alternatively, you can exit security and proceed into the Station Head House and go to the ticket windows for intercity trains. Purchase a ticket to Torino (station 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 train tickets are printed with important information. Typical wording might say "Carrozza 005, posti 31 finestrino." This means that you are on car 005, your reserved window seat is number 31. The trains are smoke-free and luggage is stored in the compartment or at either end of the carriage.

Depending on the train, the trip from Milan to Turin takes about 60 minutes. Turin has several train stations: the one you want is Torino Porta Nuova. Pre-booking and purchasing a ticket online is less expensive, especially for the high speed ("freccie") trains. Web site: www.trenitalia.com/tcom-en

Lodging

NOLS has secured lodging for our group (we'll pair couples and single-gender rooms) at Turin's Starhotels Majestic on the first and last nights of the trip. We'll pair you in single gender hotel rooms—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 duration of the backcountry trip. While the storage is secure, 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. There is no luggage shuttle on this backcountry trip.

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 give your credit card company a heads up 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 not as high as it is in the US. 5-10% is standard in restaurants that do not charge a *servizio*, a service charge and takes the place of a tip. Tipping other service workers is common as well but small amounts of 1-2 Euros is standard.

While tipping is common in the outdoor guiding culture, your NOLS Instructors are not driven to excellence by tips but rather 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 personal 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 do not have a comprehensive strategy at this point.

If you would like to offset part or all of the carbon emissions related to your Alumni trip, we recommend [South Pole](#). [Their calculator](#) can help 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 specific 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

You will have regular access to power plugs on this trip 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 Wifi.

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 your current health and fitness status while also providing NOLS information about things like your dietary needs.

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

Do not book travel greater than 60 days before the start of the trip unless you have confirmed with NOLS that the trip will run. On rare occasions, we do cancel trips due to low enrollment.

Cancellation and Transfer Policy

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

Suggested Readings

Helprin, Mark. *A Soldier of the Great War*. Paperback: 880 pages.

Lussu, Emilio. *Sardinian Brigade*. Paperback: 286 pages.

Thompson, Mark. *The White War*. Paperback: 488 pages.

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— see 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).

Your Gear List

Upper Body Clothing	
Equipment	Notes
Base layer (light or midweight)	Wool or synthetic
Top layer (fleece jacket, or puffy)	Heavy weight fleece or a medium weight puffy layer
Long sleeve shirt	Men and women often like synthetic “fishing shirts” for their versatility and sun resistance.
Wind shirt (optional)	A lightweight, breathable, durable nylon wind shell, in either 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
T-shirt (1-2)	A lightweight synthetic or merino wool t-shirt
Sports Bra or Tank (2-3)	Synthetic sports bra or a synthetic sports tank are recommended
Warm Hat	Synthetic or wool
Sun hat	Baseball cap or full brim
Wool or Fleece gloves	Medium weight
Lower Body Clothing	
Equipment	Notes
Base layer (light or midweight)	Wool or synthetic
Wind/ Hiking pants	Breathable nylon wind pants or lightweight hiking pant
Hiking shorts	Nylon, quick-dry shorts
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	Short or tall gaiters to keep rocks and debris out of shoes
Sneakers or non-hiking shoe	Something to wear around the huts
Socks (2-3 pairs)	½ crew to crew length wool socks. Cotton socks are not advised
Miscellaneous Personal Gear	
Equipment	Notes
Medium sized Backpack	Must be big enough to carry personal items (e.g., water, food, clothing layers) and lunch—40-55L
Sleeping Bag Liner	Sleeping bag liner—we're using rifugio bunk beds with a basic sheet, pillow, and quilt. A liner is a required
Plastic Trash Bags (1-2)	One to two heavy-duty trash compactor bags (33 gallon) to help waterproof items in your pack
Water Bottles	Bottles with at 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
Headlamp	Bring spare batteries
Toiletries	Toothbrush, toothpaste, comb, brush, skin lotion, tampons, etc. Travel or trial sizes are enough. Ear plugs and eye covers can be nice
Swim Suit	Swimming in the lakes is quite a treat!
Optional Items	
Trekking Poles	Most participants enjoy hiking with two poles. Some variants collapse for handy travel.
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 rifugio
Pack Cover	Heavy weight and attachable to your pack
Rain Pants	Some folks like these for wet days
Pack Towel	If you want to shower in a rifugio
Ear plugs	Handy for sleeping in rooms with other people

Eye Mask	Great if you need the dark to sleep well
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