

Where eagles don't dare...

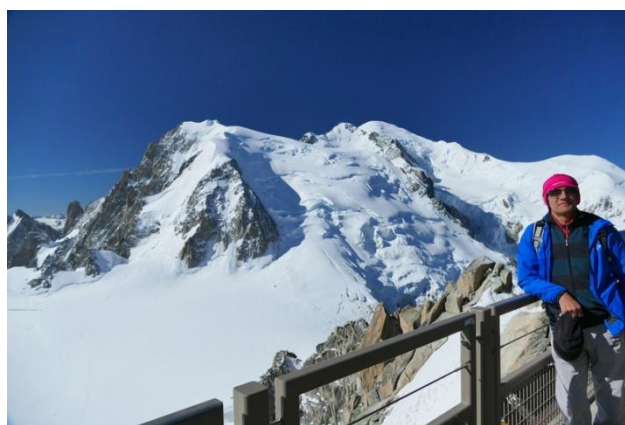
by Regina

During our 2017 European trip, my husband and I spent the first week of July in the picturesque town of Chamonix in the Haute-Savoie department in south-eastern France. The town is located in a beautiful valley at the base of Mont Blanc and is popular among snow sports enthusiasts in winter and hikers in summer.



Taking advantage of the perfect weather, we explored many areas of this beautiful part of the world. One bright, sunny morning we caught the first cable car (*le téléphérique*) to the summit of l'Aiguille du Midi (3842m). At 2317m (*Plan de l'Aiguille*) there is a change of cars, from there the car goes to the upper station at 3777m without being supported by any additional pillars, the final section of the ascent is almost vertical!

From there a lift took us to the summit terrace at 3842m. The temperature there was -1°C and we felt the effects of less oxygen in the air - going up several stairs to the upper terrace required an extra effort, but it was worth every bit of it – the view was just incredible. The snow covered rounded peak of Mont Blanc (4807m) didn't seem to be almost 1000m higher.



We walked the length of the tubular walkway that encircles the summit allowing a view of the surrounding mountains in all directions. In the brilliant morning sunshine the French and Italian Alps looked mesmerising.

We spent three hours soaking up the spectacular views; admired the human ingenuity that went into constructing this extraordinary station in a place where even eagles don't dare; and we wished good luck to mountaineers getting ready to conquer Mont Blanc.



Our plan for the way back was to use the cable car to get to *Plan de l'Aiguille* (the cable car's mid-station at 2317m) and from there to hike to Chamonix (1035m) via Montenvers - Mer de Glace (1913m), and that's what we did. The hike wasn't very difficult, just a few uphill sections took our breath away, but the views were always breathtaking: from the green valley below us, alpine meadows and streams at our feet, to the sharp peaks above us.



After hiking for over three hours we reached Montanvers - Mer de Glace site which is a tourist attraction on its own, with the largest glacier in France, the Ice Cave and an exhibition dedicated to glaciology. We decided to explore the area another day (it is accessible from Chamonix by a funicular railway). After a short break we continued our hike to Chamonix. The scenery changed, the path was winding through a forest now. After walking some distance, we came across one of the region's famous *buvettes* (alpine restaurant/ snack bar). We couldn't resist the raspberry tart and a rest with another wonderful view. This particular *buvette* (*Buvette des Mottets*) also offers overnight stays in a transparent tent suspended from a tree – very original idea...maybe another time...

We reached Chamonix around 7pm, enjoyed a tasty dinner with an evening view of l'Aiguille du Midi and Mont Blanc – just a perfect finish to an incredible day.



If you'd like more information about the l'Aiguille du Midi, follow the links below:

Aiguille du Midi cable car: <https://www.chamonet.com/sights/aiguille-du-midi-chamonix-main-town-668504>

Les Buvettes : <https://chamonixallyear.com/mountain-restaurants-summer-huts-in-chamonix/>

Montanvers - Mer de Glace: <https://www.chamonix.net/english/leisure/sightseeing/mer-de-glace>