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Safety on Alpine Tours

10 recommendations from Club Arc Alpin

Mountaineering in the high mountains is a great way to experience nature, companionship and adventure. The aim of the following recommendations is to effectively respond to the many risks of mountaineering in the Alps. You can gain fundamental practical knowledge by attending courses on climbing crags and mountaineering in ice and snow, gathering the required experience step by step.

1. Healthy and fit for the mountains

Mountaineering takes place at great altitude and demands a lot of stamina! It makes your heart and circulation as well as your muscles and joints work hard, so a high fitness level and a realistic assessment of your abilities are required. Avoid having to rush and adopt a speed that everybody can keep up with.

2. Make sure you acclimatise to the altitude

Once you are above 2500 metres, your body needs time to acclimatise. To do so, it is crucial that you ascend slowly and increase the altitude at which you sleep gradually. The best way of alleviating symptoms of altitude sickness such as a headache, dizziness or nausea is to descend the mountain.

3. Careful tour planning

Maps, guidebooks, the internet and experts are good sources of information on distances, differences in altitude, difficulty and the current conditions. Pay particular attention to the weather forecasts because storms, snow, wind and cold conditions increase the risk of accidents significantly. Also plan alternative routes! Check the mountain rescue-emergency numbers (Euro emergency hotline 112).

4. Mountaineer in small groups

Use the ability, experience, motives and size of your group as a basis for choosing which tour to take. The ideal group size is 2 to 6 people, as larger groups are a risk factor! It is generally not advisable to go mountaineering on your own. Always let someone you trust know about your destination, route and estimated return time.

5. Appropriate equipment

Make sure you have the right equipment for your destination and that your rucksack is not too heavy! Ropes and helmets provide protection from falls and falling rocks, whilst crampons and pickaxes secure your footing. Use sun protection. Take a first-aid kit, bivouac sack, mobile phone and head torch for use in emergencies with you.

6. Be aware of the conditions

Climate change may result in glacial retreat, the disappearance of snow cover and the rise of the zero-degree line. These conditions increase the risk of rock falls and falling into a crevasse. A timely start is important and it is also vital to keep monitoring the weather and terrain and adapt your route if necessary.

7. Constant orienteering

Orienteering can be particularly difficult on off-trail terrain and glaciers and if visibility is severely restricted. It is therefore important to be skilled in using a map, altimeter, compass and GPS. Turn around in good time in the event of any doubt!

8. Rope up for glaciers, belay when the consequences of a fall are serious

Using safety devices and rescue techniques on rocky ridges, glaciers, firn and ice flanks requires a high level of skill. In the event of falls into crevasses, a roped party can prevent the victim from falling even deeper. Watch out for the risk of being pulled along if everyone in the roped party is moving at the same time on a steep slope!

9. A steady footing is essential

Falls resulting from slips and trips are the most common cause of accidents! It is important to be aware of the fact that walking too quickly and fatigue have a severely negative impact on your footing and concentration. Intensive training is required to be able to use crampons and pickaxes safely.

10. Respect for nature and the environment

High mountains provide valuable free space in which to roam in a unique wilderness. Enjoy this freedom and respect the sensitive natural surroundings found on high mountains! Be respectful of others and support the Alpine associations by protecting and caring for this natural habitat and the environment.

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