



**ADVENTURE TRAVEL**  
VOLUNTEER-LED EXCURSIONS WORLDWIDE

# The Trekker's Trek— The Via Alpina across Switzerland: Part I

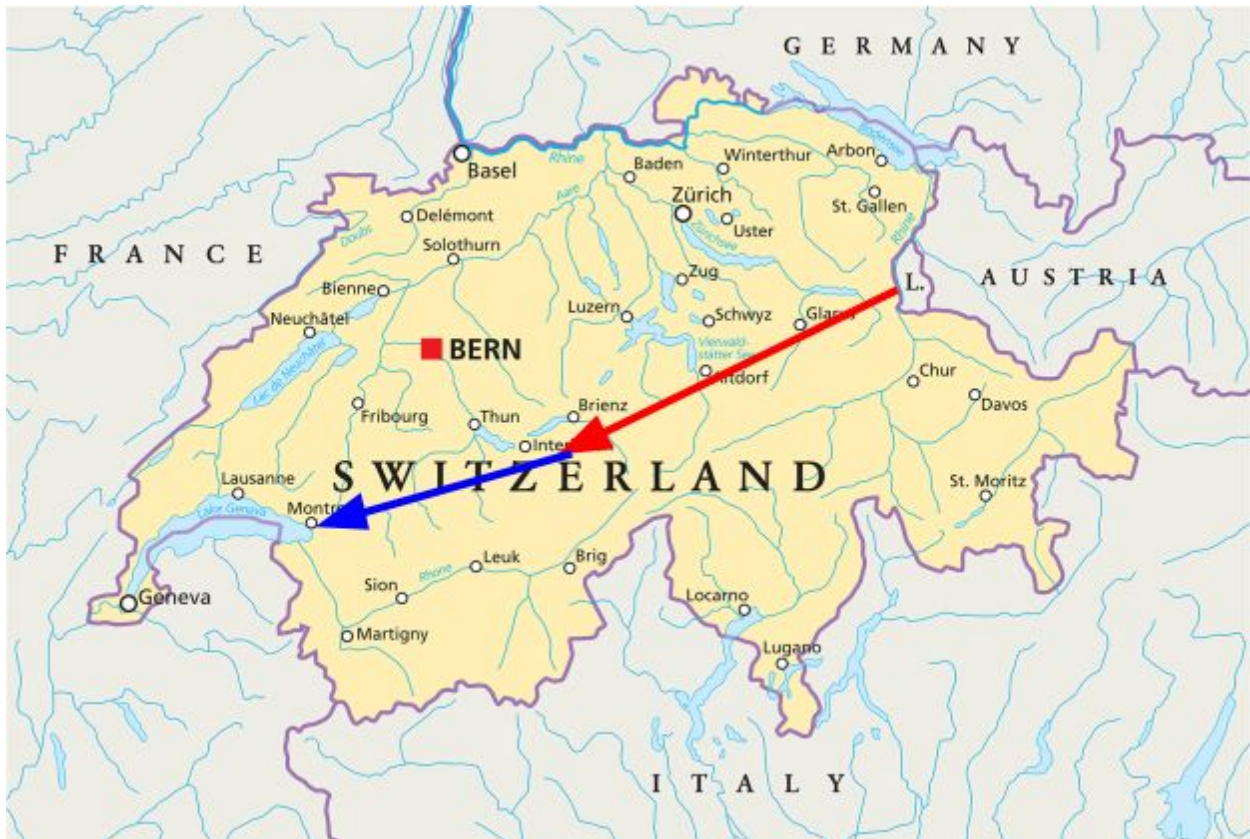
Trip# 1828 18 August–2 September 2018



*Approach to Grindelwald, Switzerland at sunset*

Backpacker magazine selected Switzerland's Via Alpina as "[The World's Best Hike](#)" for 370 km of scenery, cheese, and chocolate. *"Your first view of the Eiger massif will spoil you for the rest of your hiking days. The Via Alpina could offer nothing else and still be world-class. The chocolate, historic villages, on-time trains, and luxe hut system are pure gravy."*

The Via Alpina consists of a network of five long-distance hiking trails across the alpine regions of Slovenia, Austria, Germany, Liechtenstein, Switzerland, Italy, France, and Monaco. Our trip focuses on the Swiss portion. It follows the [Via Alpina trail](#) which starts in Sargans in eastern Switzerland and then connects in the middle of the blue arrowed segment below with the [Swiss National Route #1](#) to finish in Montreux on Lake Geneva. Henceforth when the term Via Alpina (VA) is used, it refers strictly to our chosen Swiss route as indicated by the red and blue arrows below.



*Via Alpina Trek Year I: red arrow Year II: blue arrow*

The VA crosses fourteen of the most beautiful Alpine passes. Hikers experience a fascinating variety of culture, geology and topography on a journey across six Swiss cantons. There is no better way to get to know the many facets of Swiss Alpine culture. The route is lined with one of the world's most diverse variety of flora and fauna. Shifts, thrusts, depressions and rockfalls are evidence of an interesting geological structure. The scene changes from a pleasant family holiday resort to stylish villages. Peaceful oases of stillness and solitude alternate with flourishing tourist centres. Wide roads end in dizzying, breezy ridge trails. Breathtaking panoramas interchange with tiny wayside gems. There are many gastronomic treats in store as well. It generally takes 3–4 weeks to complete this trek.

To manage the itinerary within the typically available vacation time of two weeks, we plan to section hike the trail over two years, two weeks per year: in 2018 trek from Sargans to Interlaken (above map, red arrow), and in 2019 from Interlaken to Montreux (blue arrow). Participants in Part I will have priority for participation in Part II. Here is a [detailed map for Part I of the VA](#)



*Klausen Pass*

An excellent reference guide book for the VA is Kev Reynold's [Alpine Pass Route](#). You can learn more about hiking the Via Alpina in these [Backpacker](#) & [New Yorker](#) magazine articles. If you are really daring, you can watch a 2 ½ minute video resulting from the trip co-leader's traverse of the VA in 2010: [The VA from Altdorf to Adelboden](#) CAUTION - Watching this video may result in an uncontrollable desire to immediately apply for trip membership :)

## Trip Itinerary

We will meet in Sargans, accessible on a direct train line from Zürich central station, follow the Green trail, stop along the way for day-hiking opportunities in Unterschächen and Engelberg, and finish fourteen days later in Interlaken via Grindelwald.

To ease our adjustment to Swiss time we will spend the first evening in Sargans. Aside from the travel days of arrival and departure, we will hike every day with a typical altitude gain of 850m and a distance covered of 16km. We will be outdoors eight hours per day of which six hours are hiking and the balance for lunch, taking pictures, & smelling the fresh air.



*Surenen Pass*



## Lodging

We will spend every night in either hotels or mountain huts. Blankets and pillows will be provided. Participants must bring a sleeping bag liner (sleep sack) to use instead of sheets. Accommodations are typically in a bunk room with 4–12 people of mixed gender. Mattresses are either side-by-side or in two-level bunk beds. Alternatively, we may sometimes have two persons (same sex) per room sharing two adjacent mattresses in a single bed frame.



*Descent from the Grosse Scheidegg*

## Daily Itinerary

All distance & elevation information are approximate based on representative maps. The leaders reserve the right to change the itinerary for reasons such as weather, trail conditions, availability of accommodations, group preference, etc.

A typical day will have us waking up at 6:30 and on the trail by 8:00. We may pass other huts along the way and indulge in a slice of apple strudel as a lunchtime snack. We aim to arrive at our destination by 16:30 each afternoon. Almost all huts & hotels have showers. The meals are hearty Swiss country cuisine. Vegetarian options are limited. All lodges serve beer or wine. Dinner is at 18:30 or 19:00. Most people are in bed by 21:00–22:00.

<i>Day</i>	<i>Activities</i>	<i>Trail</i>
Saturday 18 August 2018	Depart US to Zürich (ZRH)	
Sunday: Sargans	Take train from airport. Transfer in Zürich main station for a direct train to Sargans. Estimated cost CHF 18.50, travel time 1h:14m.	
Monday: Alp Vorsiez	Ease gently into our long walk, climb out of the valley to meadows & trees of Weisstannental. Prepare for climbing our first pass next day.	Book time 5h:00 Distance 17km Ascent 653m Descent 16m
Tuesday: Elm	Alpine pastures are followed by a narrow ridge of black slate. Day mostly gentle climb that gets steep at times, including the final section to the top of Foopass (2,223m). The terraced alp huts on the other side of the Foopass are an architectural rarity.	5:50 17km 1,048m 1,261m
Wednesday: Linthal	Big views & lots of variety. Take bus part way to avoid road walk. Trail surrounded by rock bastions. Climb to unnamed saddle before Richetlipass (2,261m).	6:00 14km 670m 1,732m
Thursday: Urnerboden	Steep forest path to Braunwald, a sunny depression in the landscape. Long wooded bands of rock. Open, flat, rugged terrain along the Fätschbach river to Urnerboden.	5:50 15km 857m 300m
Friday: Unterschächen (stay here for two nights)	Loud clanging of cowbells on the way to Klausenpass (1,948m). Mobile bee boxes. Zigzag path down the edge of crags to pass below the 90m Stäubifall that bursts from the mountainside above the romantic little hamlet of Äsch.	6:00 17km 700m 1,275m
Saturday: Unterschächen (second night in town)	Climb through one of the prettiest valleys in central Switzerland to the Brunnialp and Sittlisalp.	5:00 14km 667m

		667m
Sunday: Brüsti	Morning bus to Altdorf to walk around birthplace of Switzerland, home of Wilhelm Tell, lunch, steep climb to Brüsti.	4:00 8.2km 1,110m 100m
Monday 27 August 2018: Engelberg (stay here for two nights)	Approach to Surenenpass (2,289m, the highest on this trip) with views down to a stem of the Vierwaldstättersee (Lake of Lucerne), or south into the secretive Waldnacht Valley, while from the pass itself the ice-crowned Titlis is seen to the south-west. For much of the descent to Engelberg you will have that mountain in your sights.	6:30 20km 766m 1,300m
Tuesday: Engelberg (second night in town)	Several options for the day: local hike loop to Rughubelhütte for lunch, cultural tour of Lucerne, or visit Titlis glacier via cable car	
Wednesday: Engstlenalp	Trail leads over two rises to scenic Trübsee at the foot of Titlis. Climb to Jochpass (2,208m) into the Bernese Oberland. Finish by lake & thousands of Alpine roses. Stay at the historic Victorian hotel Engstlenalp	5:30 11km 1,207m 373m
Thursday: Meiringen	Through Alpine flora to Tannalp with dairy, inn and lake. Ridge hike over Balmeregghorn, with wonderful views of the Eiger, Mönch & Jungfrau.	6:00 21km 450m 1,630m
Friday: Grosse Scheidegg (1,962m)	Reichenbach Falls. Valley floor under the spell of the Wetterhorn, past the nostalgic Rosenloui Hotel and glacier gorge.	5:00 14km 1,367m 0m
Saturday: Interlaken	Walk in meadows between wall of glaciated mountains that seem to grow as we descend into Grindelwald. Take train from town to Interlaken.	2:50 7km 0m 928m
Sunday 2 September 2018: depart to US	Flight departs no earlier than 13:00. Recommended airport is ZRH, 2:30 hours away from Interlaken by train.	

# Participants

## Profile



*Rami, Steve, and group on France's GR5 trail*

You should enjoy traveling and be comfortable traveling in areas which are unfamiliar to you. You should recognize that you may find yourself in closer quarters or be less comfortable than you are used to at home. You should make it a priority to help others on the trip and contribute to their having a great time. If you do that, we guarantee that you will have a great time.

This is a strenuous hike geared towards the outdoors adventurer. Since breakfast, dinner and lodging are provided we will be traveling light, with backpacks in the range of twenty-five pounds fully loaded.

You should have at least intermediate to advanced hiking skills. While no technical climbing is required, there are areas with narrow trails bordered by steep drop-offs: where appropriate there are steel cables for protection. We may use ladders bolted to the mountainside for short ascents of steep terrain.

*Wilhelm Tell Statue - Altdorf*



## Experience & Risks

Climbing high mountain passes is physically very demanding. Most of our travels will be between 1,500'–8,000'. Although these elevations should not be high enough for properly conditioned people to contract acute mountain sickness, the combination of physical exertion & slightly lower oxygen levels require that we pace ourselves and pay attention to proper nutrition and hydration.

People wishing to participate in this trip must have previous hiking and backpacking experience, at the intermediate level or higher. Several of the days are long and strenuous. You need to be prepared to commit yourself to keeping in shape between the time you sign up for the trip to the time you depart on it.

When you participate in this activity, you should be prepared both physically and mentally, and equipped with the appropriate gear. You should always be aware of the risks involved and conduct yourself accordingly. We are not responsible for your safety—you are.

Nonetheless, it may happen on any trip that a trip member is or becomes unable to participate in one or more of the planned activities. Leaders in their sole judgment have the right and obligation to refuse participation in any activity to any group member for reasons of group or individual safety. Illness, injury or lack of proper gear or fitness for a particular activity are examples of



*Truebsee*

some conditions that might result in a participant's being unable to perform one or more activity. Leaders may try to find a substitute activity for the trip member, but this may not always be possible.

Prior to your being accepted as a participant in this trip, you will be asked to discuss your capabilities and experience with us. Please do not be offended by our questions. Weather is likely to be temperate & sunny, although there is always a possibility of some precipitation. That said, mountain climate is unpredictable and can range from 30–80°F. Snow can fall in every month of the year.

## Trip Price

The final trip price will be adjusted in accordance with the best final arrangements we can make and currency fluctuations. Any savings we achieve, as well as any cost increases, will be passed back to you. Our cost estimates are conservative, and so a refund is considerably more likely than a price increase.





*Blümlisalphütte overlooking Hohtürli pass, the highest on Via Alpina at 2,778m (in Part II)*

Price is \$2,500 per person shared occupancy for AMC members. Non-members can join for \$50, and get the same price.

Deposit of \$1,000 is due with application. Balance of \$1,500 is due by 1 April 2018.

Includes:

- Fifteen nights of lodging.
- Breakfast and dinner for the entire trip, starting with dinner on 18 August through breakfast on 2 September 2018, excluding dinner on 28 August.
- Bus transport as a scheduled part of the itinerary.
- Emergency medical & evacuation insurance coverage.

Does not include:

- Airfare. The trip leaders will advise you as much as you need and will facilitate group travel. At this time, we estimate that the cost for a round trip ticket between the US East Coast and Europe will be in the range of \$1,000.
- Lunches, beverages, & incidental expenses. Dinner on 28 August.
- Local transport between arrival airport & beginning of trip.
- Local transport between end of trip & departure airport.
- Insurance for travel delay, interruption, cancellation, or for baggage loss. If the possibility of such problems concerns you, individual travel insurance is suggested. The AMC has a recommended vendor whose material will be sent to you if your application is accepted.

# Registration

We expect a group size of 12 people, including the 2 leaders. This trip is likely to fill quickly. If you are interested, you should apply as soon as possible. When registration is complete, we will send all participants the names, addresses, and phone numbers of all those going on the trip.

To apply, you must download, complete, and submit the [Application Documents](#) which consist of:

- Application
- Confidential medical form
- Acknowledgement and Assumption of Risk and Release form
- Supplemental Medical Questionnaire (optional)

You will not be accepted and your check will not be deposited until the leaders have determined by telephone conversation with you that you and the trip are a good match. Deposit checks from wait-listed applicants will not be cashed until a spot is available, the applicant is accepted onto the trip, & they confirmed their continued interest.

## Participant Cancellation Policy

Cancellation will not be allowed to raise the cost to the other participants or to the leaders.

The minimum cancellation fee is \$200 once the trip has been declared a go. If actual costs (expenses already incurred on your behalf, and any unavoidable future expenses that will be incurred as a result of your registration & cancellation) are higher, they will be assessed instead, unless they can be applied toward another acceptable participant.

## Trip Cancellation Policy

In the unlikely event that the trip is cancelled, everything you have paid to AMC for this trip will be refunded in full.

Participants are responsible for their own airline tickets & other external expenses. Most airlines no longer give refunds for cancellations; instead, they issue coupons for a future trip with an administrative charge and an expiration date. Trip cancellation insurance is advised—policy information will be supplied to all participants.

## Disclosure

AMC Adventure Travel trips are run on a nonprofit basis. Leaders are not compensated except for their travel and administrative costs associated with the trip. A program fee is assessed toward AMC Adventure Travel program and administrative expenses.

## Leaders



**Steve Cohen** Since 2012 Steve has been an active AMC adventure travel leader. He has planned and led twelve hiking/ trekking-oriented Adventure Travel trips to such destinations the Haute Route (from Chamonix, France to Zermatt, Switzerland), the Alta Via II through the Italian Dolomites, the tour of the Jungfrau region (Switzerland), Patagonia, the high mountains huts of Austria, etc. He lived in Europe for four years and is fluent in both French and German. Steve is chair of Adventure Travel.

## Rami Haddad

Rami is an active AMC leader with Adventure Travel, Bicycle, Ski, & Family committees. He travelled throughout the Alps region on several trips for hiking, bicycle touring, sightseeing, & Ironman Switzerland. He has been on extended trekking & bicycle tours through the Pacific Northwest, Pacific Coast, Rocky Mountains, Japan, France, & Germany. Contact Rami at 857-288-8571 or [mcccxxv@me.com](mailto:mcccxxv@me.com).



# Packing List

## Backpack

We cannot emphasize enough the attention you need to give for choosing the correct pack and pack weight.

- Size & weight (without water or food) matter. Aim for 32 liters & 5kg (11lb) for comfortable light hike that allows you to run up the mountain. Cannot fit everything in? Try 35 liters & 6kg (13lb), trading some comfort with a third change of clothes. You cannot hike without those extra equipment “just in case”, no matter how much your shoulders ache & feet suffer? Go all out with 38 liters & 7kg (15lb). But remember, “we *you told so*”. Do not bother coming on the trip with anything larger & heavier.
- [Fit matters](#): get the right fit for your torso. Ever wondered what all these straps are for? Stop by your REI or local outdoor store for proper fitting.
- [Packing matters](#): keep heavy items in the middle to lower part of the pack, close to your back. Light items go on the outer & top layers. But none of this matters, because your whole pack is very light, right?

## Required

- Passport. Tourist visa not required for US citizens. For other citizens, check with the Swiss embassy. The passport must be valid for at least six months from the start date of the trip
- Broken-in waterproof hiking boots
- At least 2-3 set of hiking socks with liners
- Non-cotton shorts (or long pants) and shirt for hiking
- Sleeping bag liner (sleep sack)
- Waterproof wind and rain gear (tops and bottoms)
- Wool sweater, or synthetic pile/fleece jacket
- Long underwear top and bottom
- Hat for warmth, & gloves or mittens
- Polypropylene, Coolmax, Bergelene or other synthetic extra layer clothing
- Sunglasses
- Hat or bandanna for sun protection
- Sunscreen
- Sandals/crocs/etc to wear in huts, which do NOT permit the wearing of hiking boots outside of the public areas
- Headlamp or flashlight with fresh batteries
- Unbreakable bottles or hydration bladder (at least 3 liters total capacity)



- Waterproof pack liner and/or pack cover
- High-energy trail snacks
- Toiletry kit (many huts do not supply soap or shampoo)
- Camp towel (most huts do not supply towels)
- Ear plugs
- Personal first aid kit (leaders will have a group first aid kit)

## Optional

The following is a long list of optional items to bring. Use it as a reminder of additional items that can make your trip more comfortable.

- Casual clothing for use in a hut
- Gaiters (for rain)
- Hiking poles
- Whistle
- Knife
- Smartphone
- Camera
- Batteries/charger/adapter plug
- Pillowcase