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TOUR AND ASCENT OF ELBRUS (5642 M.) ON FOOT OR BY SKI THE TRUE 'HIGHEST SUMMIT IN EUROPE'

The highest mountain in the Caucasus has two summits : the west, 5642m. and the east, 5621m. It is an extinct volcano, 15km north of the General Caucasus range and its volcanic shape makes it an easy mountain to climb. **However, there is more to skiing here than just Elbrus**, this is a fabulous region for **ski touring**, with dozens of skiable summits of between 3000m and 4500m. Ski touring season on Elbrus is from February to May, and it can be climbed on foot from June to October. At the end of March and in April, downhill skiing from the summit of Elbrus to the first Azau cable car station (2450m) is possible. **The ascent of Elbrus is not technically difficult, but demands a good level of physical fitness and good acclimatisation.** The programme allows for an acclimatisation period, alternating ascents, walks and rest days.

Programme

- Day 1 : Arrival in St Petersburg.
Transfer to the hotel or apartment and time to visit the town, briefly.
- Day 2 : St Petersburg. Choice between sightseeing day, or departure for the Caucasus.
The whole day to visit the town. Hotel or apartment in the evening, OR departure for Mineralny Vody in order to have a spare day, just in case....
- Day 3 : In the mountains :
Internal flight to Mineralny Vody. From here, transfer by bus (4 hours) to the Baksan valley (1800m), at the foot of Elbrus. Night in the hotel/guest house at Elbrus or Adyl-Sou : you will find that Russian and Kabardino-Balkare food is just as good as the best in France.
- Day 4 : Excursion (4 hours walk) in the Shilda valley, to the glacier (300m height gain). Return to the hotel. "Shilda" means 'bear's grape' : a berry growing here which the bears like to eat.
OR : The Adyr Su – Djailyk valley : 4 hours. After a short transfer, our first day walking, through a beautiful forest to the Djailyk hut, (2100 m.)
- Day 5 : The Koiavganaush Col (3250 m.) : 8 hours.
Crossing this col, between the Adyr Sou and Adyl Sou valleys, gives us beautiful views over them both. Night in small hut with no warden (Hôtel Vert'). Adyl Sou is the 'red river'; the Adyr Sou valley (Russian) runs parallel and is home to small black bears, as are the surrounding Georgian valleys. Descent by ski, in the spring, as far as Pri-Elbrouzia.
- OR days 4, 5 and 6 : By ski. Night in the 'Hôtel Vert' hut to ski Tchot-Tchat (3600m.) et Jantugan (4050m.) or other neighbouring summits.
- Day 5: Goumatchi Peak (3650m.) : 8 hours. By ski. This secondary summit, situated in the General Range is good for acclimatisation ; no particular technical difficulties. Throughout the whole day, there is a beautiful view over Elbrus. Return to the hotel.
- Day 6 : Baksan . By ski. Rest day to discover the upper Baksan valley ; local market selling woollen clothes. Night in the hotel.
- OR Days 7 and 8 : By ski. Around Azau : ascent of two of the multitude of magnificent skiable summits close to Elbrus (starting from the villages of Elbrus and Azau.) : this is a vast, fantastic ski touring area which remains relatively unexplored .
- Day 7 : Priute mountain hut (Onze hut) (4150 m.). By ski.
We begin the ascent by cable car, then on foot (2hours) to the Onze hut. This will be our base camp for the 1 day ascent.

The rest of the programme can be either on foot or by ski (according to the time of year) : by SKI in March, April, May and possibly June;

- Day 8 : Pastoukhov rock (4750 m.)
Acclimatisation ascent of Pastoukhov rock (2 hours). Descent to the hut.

Day 9 : Mount Elbrus (5642 m.) : 8 to 10 hours. Leave very early, via easy snowfields. The route then steepens and a choice has to be made between the east (5621m) and the main (5642m) summits. The latter is longer and more technically difficult (45° slope). Return to the hut.

Day 10 : Descent to the valley, either via the eastern slopes and the Kiltirk valley, in 2 days, OR on foot as far as the cable car station, down to the valley in the cable car and by bus to the hotel. The descent from Elbrus (5462m.) to 2400m or 2000m on skis takes 3 hours or less .

Day 11 : Spare day for a second attempt on Elbrus (or another summit by ski)

Or, visit to the Kurmyrtchi valley (wild bears, protected. Fortunately they hibernate until the end of March/April.

Day12 : In St Petersburg. Morning transfer to Mineralny Vody, then flight to St Petersburg. Transfer to the hotel or the apartment.

Day 13: Take off for Paris.

Price (summer or winter) per participant : 2200 euros for a minimum of 4 participants. By SKI : 3050 euros

The price includes:

- All land transfers connected with the normal running of the trip; the logistics.
- 3 nights in the apartment in St Petersburg;
- Nights spent in the hotel in Baksan;
- Nights spent in mountain huts;
- Full board during the whole trip;
- Supervision and training by a mountain guide.
- The flight from St Petersburg to Mineralny Vody (Caucasus) : Return = +2000 frs / person;

The price does not include:

- Night spent in hotel in St Petersburg;
- Multirisk travel insurance - mandatory;
- Unforeseen premature return (in case of illness, accident or death);
- Visa expenses;
- Drinks and all other personal expenses.
- Porters;
- Air travel excess baggage charges

To obtain a visa, send us your passport details :

- Full name;
- Date and place of birth;
- Passport number, place and date of issue ; photocopies of the first pages of your passport.
- Details of nationality.

Using these details, we will send you the official Russian invitation, and confirmation by the Consular department of the Russian Embassy (Geneva, Paris, Marseille or Strasbourg – please specify).

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

For skiing on Elbrus, bring just one pair of high mountain boots : ski touring boots, with all the corresponding ski equipment (but bring, in addition, crampons, ice axe, harness).

Don't forget to bring : ARVA, avalanche probe, shovel (we can hire these out on request).

Beware ! Your baggage allowance is only 20kg, so keep it to a minimum (each kilo of excess baggage will cost you about 15 euros).

Many of the smaller (heavier) articles can be bought in Russia : towel, toothpaste, shaving foam, etc....Even books, LR6 batteries for the ARVA.....

We also advise you to bring two small pieces of hand luggage, (including a 25 – 32 litre rucksac) containing heavier smaller items, such as : harness, headtorch and batteries, skins, ski touring boots, fleece jackets, ARVA, avalanche probe, camera, etc.....