



## HOW TO HIKE IN THE ALPS

This document has been created by KISC staff to give you an idea about what it is like to hike in the Alps. It is a spectacular and awe inspiring experience that is very different to hiking in other parts of the world.

### What to Pack

Hiking in the Alps does require that you have some equipment with you. Our Staff, over many years, have created a kit list which outlines what to take with you when hiking in the Alps. It is available on our website at <http://www.kisc.ch/?uid=214>

However, there are some major differences hiking in the Alps compared to other parts of the world.

- Hikes tend to be single days, or hut-to-hut if they are overnight expeditions; tents and bivouacs are not required. In fact, in Switzerland it is illegal to camp out overnight outside of a designated camping ground or place of accommodation.
- Swiss mountain huts are usually very comfortable. Full bedding is provided, people simply bring a silk or cotton sleeping bag liner - there is no need to bring a sleeping bag. In most huts dinner and breakfast are provided, so stoves and cooking equipment is not necessary. Many people prefer to use a much smaller backpack than they do hiking in their home countries. Don't forget plenty of water – hiking at altitude requires much more water to remain hydrated. Also, water is difficult to find along the track as is it dangerous to drink glacier water!

### Stay Safe When Hiking

Here are some important points you should follow to ensure you and your group remain safe while hiking around Kandersteg.

- Before you arrive it is a good idea to begin preparing for hiking in the alps! The best way to prepare is by doing some day hikes in your own country to ensure you are fit and prepared to hike in the mountain environment around Kandersteg.
- We recommend hiking in groups with a maximum of 12 Scouts of which at least one person is a responsible adult over 18 with suitable hiking experience.
- Try some shorter, lower level day hikes before heading out in the higher areas or longer overnight hikes to ensure you are fully prepared, and acclimatised.
- The weather in the Alps changes very quickly – on a sunny day, thunderstorms can often appear with little warning. Be sure to prepare for all weather conditions and check the daily forecast before heading out.
- Above all remember to be flexible in your plans. Adapting the route according to the needs of the group and the weather are vitally important when hiking in the mountains around Kandersteg.

### When and Where to Walk

Hiking in Kandersteg starts towards the end of May and continues depending on snow until early-mid November. However, for hikes which travel above 2,500 metres, the hiking season is generally June - Sept due to the amount of snow. Outside of these times, there can be a high risk of avalanche. For updated weather, snow and track conditions, you can contact the [Programme Staff](#).

In the section of the Alps surrounding Kandersteg, there are 3 different types of hiking paths;



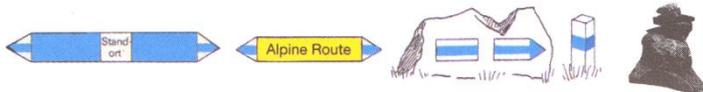
**Wanderweg** – A regular, wide walking path. No special knowledge is required to hike on this path. Wanderwegs are marked with yellow signs such as:



**Bergweg** – Mountain Walking. Most of these paths are narrow and steep and may be exposed. Basic equipment includes solid, above ankle hiking boots, with soles that grip, as well as clothing which provides protection against the cold, sun, wind and rain. Bergwegs are marked white-red-white such as:



**Alpinweg** – Alpine Walking. Alpine routes lead into the mountains, partly across trackless terrain, across snowfields and glaciers or up rocks with short climbing pitches. Alpine routes require a very high level of physical condition, mountain experience and complete sure-footedness. You must be free from vertigo, be able to climb pitches using your hands and sometimes be familiar with using a rope and an ice-axe. You should only take these paths if you are accompanied by persons with mountain experience, or, if necessary, by a mountain guide. Alpinwegs are marked white-blue-white such as:



The footpath network in Switzerland is extensive, well connected, clearly signposted and the tracks are well maintained. This makes it difficult to get lost. What we do recommend, for trip planning and navigation is the '1:25 000 Kandersteg Wanderkarte' Map. This is available from Reception or the Chalet and Campsite Shops. If you would like one in advance, we can post it to you for SFr 22.50 (including postage), just contact the [Programme Staff](#) for more information.

In the mountains surrounding Kandersteg, there are hundreds of hiking opportunities available. Information about the hikes that are guided by our staff as well as information about hikes that we recommend to be done 'unguided' can be found on our website. There are also Google Earth files and elevation profiles available so you can really see where you are going!

## Access

Access to hike areas can be by various means. There are many hiking routes which leave directly from the valley floor, however, often you can significantly reduce your journey uphill by using a cable car. There are three cable cars which leave from Kandersteg: Oeschinen Gondola, Sunnbüel Cable Car and Allmenalp Cable Car. Prices and schedules are available in KanderActive and on the KISC website. To access hikes outside of Kandersteg, or in adjoining valleys there is a well connected network of trains and buses which can deliver you to any corner of Switzerland. [www.sbb.ch](http://www.sbb.ch) is a good starting point for researching transport connections, and is available in English. There is also a bus which operates in the Gastern Valley. More information and bookings can be made through the Programme Staff.

## Mountain Huts

Kandersteg is surrounded by a series of world class mountain huts in spectacular locations. For more information on booking, hut etiquette and much more, please see the mountain huts section of our website - <http://www.kisc.ch/programme/summer/mountain-huts/>



## How to Minimise Ecological Impact

Here at KISC we are very aware of the environment around us, we do everything we can to preserve and improve it. The mountains are a particularly unique place and it is important to minimise our impact on them. You can help us by following a few important points to minimise your ecological footprint when hiking.

- **Stay on the Track** – staying on the track is very important. Every time someone steps off the track they increase erosion and destroy the habitat of many plants and animals.
- **Leave the Alps better than you found them** – by picking up all the rubbish on the ground, as well as carrying out all of your rubbish. It is also important to remember not to dump your rubbish at mountain huts, as it is very expensive to fly this out by helicopter.
- **Respect plants and animals** - the Alps are home to many species of plants and animals and it is our duty to respect them. Approach all animals quietly and slowly. Make sure that you don't pick flowers as many of these are endangered alpine species as well.  
“Take only photographs and leave only footprints”

## Walking Techniques

There are many different walking techniques that people use to make hiking easier. Some handy hints to make hiking in the Alps easier include:

- Try the 'Kander-Plod' also known as the 'Alpine Plod.' A walking speed which is distinctly slower than regular walking speed designed to be used at altitude. The idea being to walk slower and take less breaks. Try setting a speed so that you only need to break once every 30 – 40 minutes of walking.
- Ensure that with each step your body weight is centred over your feet at all times and that you maximise the boot to ground contact to avoid slipping over.
- If you find yourself out of breath when climbing adjust your breathing to slow, deliberate, and very deep breaths. Deeper breaths will make up for the lack of oxygen. Try to keep your breathing in rhythm with your walking.

## Trail Courtesy

When hiking on the trails remember to give way to people walking up-hill, make sure you move off the track to let people pass or overtake. Never overtake someone by walking off the path (see the section on environmental impact). Also make sure that you are polite and say hello! Use the phonetic pronunciation guide below to improve your Swiss German.

English	Phonetic Swiss German
Hello	Grüezi/ Salut
How long does it take to...	Wie lang gahts bis ...
straight ahead	gerad uus
left/right	links/ rächts
Enjoy your meal	En guete
I'm lost	I bi velore

## Emergencies, Rescue and Obligations

In Switzerland, by law, if you find someone who is injured or in need of assistance, you must stop and help them. If you ever get injured, you will find that many Swiss people will stop and offer to help you.

Helicopters form a major part of mountain rescue operations in Switzerland, especially in the Alps. If you see a helicopter flying close towards you, it is important to indicate your current situation with the following hand signals:



Hand signals to the  
rescue helicopter:



We need  
help!



We do not  
need help!

If you require a helicopter for rescue in the event of an emergency, please call 1414. For more complete details about rescue helicopters in Switzerland, please see [www.rega.ch](http://www.rega.ch).

## Further References

The following is a list of publications, websites and maps which can help you plan your adventure.

### Books

- Lindenmayer C et al. *Walking In Switzerland*. Melbourne: Lonely Planet Publications. 2001.
- Various. *Walking in the Alps*. Melbourne: Lonely Planet Publications. 2004
- Anker D. *Bernese Oberland East*. Ottobrunn: Rother. 2004
- Reynolds K. *The Bernese Alps*. Cumbria: Cicerone. 2005

### Websites

- Kandersteg Tourist Office. <http://www.kandersteg.ch/kandersteg.html>
- Hiking in Switzerland. <http://www.wanderland.ch/en/hiking-in-switzerland.html>
- Activity Workshop. <http://activityworkshop.net/hiking/alpinepassroute/kandersteg-adelboden.html>
- Kandersteg – Lauterbrunnen [http://www.igougo.com/journal-i13745-Kandersteg-Kandersteg\\_to\\_Lauterbrunnen\\_-\\_via\\_mountain\\_huts.html](http://www.igougo.com/journal-i13745-Kandersteg-Kandersteg_to_Lauterbrunnen_-_via_mountain_huts.html)

### Maps

- 1:25 000 Kandersteg Wanderkarte
- 1:50 000 Berner Oberland Zusammensetzung

## What other's Have to Say!

We have asked Scouts from all around the world, who have taken their group's hiking in the Alps, to say a few words about what they thought of the experience and how it was different to hiking in their home country.

### Alice (United Kingdom)

*"Hiking in the Alps in a truly amazing and EASY experience! The paths are well interconnected, well signed and it is difficult to get lost. On top of that, the scenery is like nothing I've ever seen before, walking through such dramatic and spectacular mountains has you in awe..."*

### Rick (The Netherlands)

*"..don't forget to fill in your route card properly, call in if you're late and bring a first aid kit.*

*If you forget to bring enough food or water there isn't a shop nearby that you can get to with a small detour!."*

### Phil (Canada)

*"Looking back on my first Kandersteg experience, I was blown away at how many different kinds of paths there were... The staff at KISC were more than helpful in educating and preparing us for the contrasting mountaineering experience."*

### Filipe (Portugal)

*"Hiking in the Alps is like walking an entire year in one day. They have a mind of their own and you may see all 4 seasons in that single day.*

*That alone makes it very exciting, that unexpected is a perfect challenge for a Scout"*

If you require any more information or have any questions, please visit or [email](mailto:) the Programme Staff in Reception at KISC. We hope that you enjoy your time at KISC and the spectacular Swiss Alps!