

VF4 Alta Via 1 with Via Ferratas

Safety Briefing

In order to maximize any adventure in the mountains, it is important to keep safety as a top priority. Even the simplest mishaps, like an innocent stumble that causes a sprained ankle, can happen to anybody and will severely disrupt the experience. As this is a self-guided tour, there won't be anybody along the way mitigating all the possible risks for you. **It will be your responsibility before the tour, and throughout the duration of the tour, to make decisions that keep you safe.**



The purpose of this Safety Briefing is to inform you of the known risks for your tour and the actions you can take to mitigate that risk. This information is largely reliant on the statistics of various Search and Rescue organizations around the Alps, as well as based on our own analysis of your route. As travel and outdoor adventure are both known to be full of surprises, this list is far from comprehensive. There are a multitude of things that can go wrong during your tour. Many of these may cause disruptions to your itinerary. But hey, it wouldn't be an adventure if everything was guaranteed to go exactly as planned.

By booking a tour with Alpenventures GmbH, you acknowledge and accept all risks, both listed and not listed, and agree to release Alpenventures GmbH from any liability.

Here is a list of the known risks for via ferratas and mountain hiking in the Alps, and we'll include any specific dangers related to your tour at the end of this document. Most accidents in mountain hiking tend to happen on descents and in moderate terrain, or in areas where we least expect it. Via ferrata rescues tend to be most frequent on C- and D-rated via ferratas.

General Risks for Via Ferratas in the Alps	
Risk	Mitigation
Mental/Physical Blockage	<p>It may be surprising to hear that 50% of search and rescue operations involving via ferratas have absolutely nothing to do with accidents or injury. In fact, 50% of climbers rescued from via ferratas are simply unable to continue and unable to go back where they came from. Some have lost their way, some run out of strength and/or are suffering from exhaustion and no longer have the physical ability to continue, and some are simply mentally blocked and cannot go further. The key here is that a via ferrata is not a place where you should be pushing your limits. Be conservative when selecting a via ferrata difficulty level. Preserve arm strength by using your feet as much as possible, and when necessary, hang on straight arms instead of on bent arms. If you have somebody with you who is less experienced or less fit, consider bringing a short rope with belay gear along. Feeling the tug of a snug rope on a via ferrata can give some the added boost of confidence that is needed to continue.</p>
Fall in unsecured terrain	<p>The second most common rescue on a via ferrata is a fall in unsecured terrain. While via ferratas offer a lot of security, you sometimes have unsecured sections in class 3 terrain, and also sometimes have loose scree or other challenging terrain on the approach or on the return. If you are uncomfortable in this type of terrain, read the via ferrata descriptions and reviews in detail and avoid via ferratas that have difficult unsecured sections. And use care throughout the route. The terrain can still be dangerous even if there isn't a via ferrata cable in place.</p>
Fall on a via ferrata	<p>Only 8% of via ferrata rescues involve a fall into the via ferrata set while on the via ferrata. Unlike in free climbing, falling is not a part of doing via ferratas. The via ferrata set is there as a last resort to save a climber's life in case of a fall. The nature of falls on a vertical via ferrata and the force on the body in such a fall does mean that injuries are likely and there is a high chance a rescue will be required. The best way to avoid a fall is to judge your capabilities correctly, both from a technical perspective and from a strength and endurance perspective. It is also critical to use a proper via ferrata set</p>

	(static slings WILL LIKELY FAIL on a via ferrata fall) and to use all equipment properly.
Rockfall	Rockfall is always a risk in the mountains, but it is an even greater risk on a via ferrata. 3% of all rescues on via ferratas are a result of rockfall. Of course, the steep nature of the terrain plays a major factor, but there may be a few via ferratas where you have climbers above you who can knock down rocks (modern via ferratas are typically built to avoid this risk). Rock fall is most likely during rain and heavy storms. When passing under glaciers or snowfields, rockfall is also common on very hot and sunny days. Wearing helmets is a requirement on via ferratas, as that is the first defense against rockfall. We also recommend avoiding via ferratas in heavy rain or directly after an extended period of rain. Always ask for local guidance, either from the staff at the mountain huts, professional guides, or at the tourist information office.
Damaged security cables	There is never a guarantee that the via ferrata equipment is going to be in perfect condition. Rockfall, freeze & thaw cycles, and normal wear and tear can reduce the security level of a via ferrata. It is important to always check the quality of the security at each bolt, and not to assume that both ends of the cable are secured until you are visually able to confirm.
Lack of technical knowledge or carelessness	Via ferratas lead climbers through dangerous terrain and having the right knowledge and following proper techniques are truly a matter of life and death. At a minimum, each via ferrata climber needs to have a climbing harness, UIAA-approved via ferrata set¹, and climbing helmet. Climbers should do a buddy check, or if they are alone, a double check, to ensure all safety gear is set up properly before starting and following any bathroom breaks or gear adjustments. While on the via ferrata, climbers should be clipped to the steel cable whenever it is available and should only unclip one carabiner at a time to move past a bolt or security point. Carabiners should be clipped in opposing directions. On vertical sections, there should always be at least two points of security between climbers.
Tripping or stumbling	It may not surprise you to know that the most common accident in mountain hiking in the Alps is tripping or stumbling² . It may; however, surprise you to know that 70% of those accidents happen to hikers who report having

	<p>defective vision. This tells us, that having your vision checked, and ensuring you have a solution for glasses and/or contacts in place that is suitable for hiking in various weather conditions and at various levels of exertion, may greatly reduce your chances of evacuation. Along with this, it is important to start early enough in the day, so you don't find yourself hiking without daylight. It has also been determined that of those who trip or stumble, those who are already very active, are less likely to sustain an injury.</p>
Cardiovascular failure or other existing major medical conditions	<p>The second most common cause for Search and Rescue operations for mountain hiking is cardiovascular failure or other major existing health problems that the hiker already has (and may not be aware of). This also accounts for 10% of all via ferrata rescues. For this reason, we strongly recommend all tour participants, who are 40 and older, visit their General Practitioner for a health check-up prior to their tour. We also want to emphasize that travel may not be the most appropriate time for pushing your own limits. We urge all our customers to make conservative decisions when choosing their tour, as well as when they are out on the trail.</p>
Delayed access to rescue and medical assistance	<p>By nature, via ferrata tours travel through remote areas, and help may not be immediately available should there be a medical emergency. Search and Rescue operations are often run by volunteers and can take hours to reach you, sometimes longer if there is a storm, if it is dark, or if there are other conditions that are unsafe for the teams. It may be up to 24 hours or more before reaching medical assistance should an accident occur. It is important to have basic first aid skills (we recommend taking a Wilderness First Aid Course), to have first aid equipment with you, and to have the equipment with you that would be needed to survive a night outside if necessary (emergency shelter, insulation, food, water). On technically difficult via ferratas (D and above), have the knowledge and gear to carry out a self-rescue using a pulley system. Alpenventures UNGUIDED does not provide rescue assistance as part of our tour packages. Customers use the local search and rescue infrastructure and should have insurance to cover both</p>

	medical evacuations and medical service in the destination country.
Getting lost	The trails in the Alps are very well signed out, and given their nature, via ferratas are often fairly easy to follow. With that said, people do get lost (11% of both hiker and via ferrata rescues). Bring a paper map and take care at all junctions to verify your position. Keep your electronics that are used for navigation functioning with enough battery life throughout your tour ³ . If you think you may have taken a wrong turn, stop immediately to assess the situation, and return to the last known position before continuing.
Blindly following navigation instructions	While we certainly emphasize using our navigation app or a GPS device, there is also a danger in getting too focused on these resources. Rockslides, snow fields, landslides and other conditions can deem a route impassable. It is important to be observant during your tour, to constantly assess conditions, and to use your paper map to find a safer route should any dangerous conditions be present.
Thunderstorms	Thunderstorms can be tricky in the Alps because they build much more slowly and are less imminent than they are in several other parts of the world. Via Ferratas, passes, summits, any sections of trail that are secured with a steel cable, and other exposed areas should be avoided in thunderstorms. Thunderstorms rarely last all day, so it is usually a matter of timing. It is best to not only regularly check the weather forecast, but to also ask the local hut staff, a local guide or the local tourist information office for their assessment of the severity of the weather forecast and the timing of any potential thunderstorms. The rain that comes with thunderstorms can last for hours, so it is important to carry raingear and a pack cover and use these when it first starts to rain to avoid getting wet. Via ferratas are often slippery in wet conditions.
Hypothermia	While hypothermia is a greater risk in winter, it can become a real risk in summer, especially under wet conditions. For this reason, it is very important to avoid wearing cotton clothing (this takes too long to dry), and to bring good quality rain gear, as well as a pack cover. As rain can last for hours in the Alps, it is best to use your rain gear as soon as it starts raining, to prevent yourself from getting wet. It is also

	important to always have a dry change of clothes available and to have adequate layers to stay safe in cold conditions.
Snowstorms	Snow can happen any time of year at high elevations in the Alps. The most common problem associated with a snowstorm is reduced visibility, which makes navigation extremely difficult and slow. Due to this, combined with the facts that you may not have the appropriate gear to manage a surprise snowstorm and that via ferratas can be slippery and dangerous under such conditions, we usually recommend that you stay at the hut or accommodation where you are until visibility and conditions improve. Very rarely, enough snow can fall in early September that it causes avalanche danger. If there are large quantities of snow, it is best to seek out local sources, such as hut staff, professional guides and tourist information offices for more direction.
Snowfields	Snowfields are common in the Alps in the early season, and they remain in some places throughout the season. Snowfields are especially problematic on via ferratas, as they may bury the security cable, making securing yourself impossible. In addition, this tends to be in very steep terrain where crossing the snowfield without security is extremely dangerous. We recommend planning high altitude via ferratas between mid-July to the end of August for the best conditions. Always checking with hut staff or the local tourist information office to check conditions for the following day and to plan a diversion if there is anything problematic. Do not continue on a via ferrata if a cable is buried under the snow.
Landslides	Every few years, a dramatic video of a landslide in the Alps circulates around the internet. Although rare, the steep topography of the Alps makes this a real risk. This is an especially high risk during severe storms that last several days. As always, we recommend you check with the local hut staff, professional guides and tourist information offices to identify if they see any risk for this. However, the potential for a landslide is not always identified in advance, and it is important to acknowledge that this is simply a risk of outdoor activity.
Dehydration and exhaustion	Both dehydration and exhaustion not only create a dangerous health situation for you, but they also cause impaired judgement and poor decision-making. It is critical that you take care to not only carry enough water with you to

	<p>stay hydrated, but to also drink regularly. We recommend using a water bladder with a drinking hose, so you can drink regularly on the go. We also recommend eating enough food, particularly salty snacks, and taking enough breaks to keep your energy at a reasonable level. If you start to feel confusion or moodiness creep in, take a break and eat and drink something before moving on. We recommend carrying a bandana or buff with you that you can dip in streams and then wear on your head to keep cool on hot days.</p>
Sunburns	<p>Sunburns are common, yet so easy to avoid. Please make sure you use sun protection on both sunny and cloudy days. Apply sweat-proof sunblock regularly, and use hats, sunglasses and clothing to protect from the sun's rays.</p>
Blisters	<p>A blister may be one of the greatest threats you face on your tour. Although they rarely require a rescue, a blister can truly suck the fun right out of your adventure. Plan ahead for blisters. The most important step you can take is to ensure your footwear fits well and is worn in. But even with a well-worn pair of hiking boots, the change in the topography where you are hiking, can cause new friction points. We recommend either applying an anti-chafing cream or wearing sock liners to prevent friction as much as possible. ALWAYS stop as soon as you feel a hotspot and apply moleskin (available in the U.S.) or Compeed (available in Europe) to the hotspot. DO NOT APPLY DIRECTLY ONTO A FORMED BLISTER. If a blister does develop, have a plan and the proper supplies to treat that blister. Tip: duct tape can be very useful in keeping moleskin or bandages in place on your feet. Also, this is somewhat unrelated, but clip your toenails regularly during your tour to prevent pain.</p>
Tick borne illness	<p>Ticks call the wooded areas of the Alps home, and definitely do pose a threat. It is wise to carry tweezers in your first-aid kit and to do a tick check anytime you find yourself brushing against vegetation in wooded areas (which often happens during an impromptu bathroom break).</p>
Minor illness	<p>Minor illness can surprise us at any time. And while it may be minor, it can make physical activity extremely challenging. We recommend minimizing the risk of minor illness by eating foods and taking supplements that support your immune system, leading up to and during your tour. We also recommend avoiding foods that are known to cause issues for you and maintaining good hygiene throughout the duration of</p>

	your tour. If you do fall ill and it is not wise to continue, please speak with your accommodation and with us to find an alternative solution.
Dangerous wildlife	A dangerous wildlife encounter, with the exception of a tick bite, is extremely rare in the Alps. We recommend that you respect all wildlife that you encounter and keep a safe distance . If wildlife is on your trail, move safely around it if possible, or wait until it moves before continuing.
Livestock	You will encounter grazing livestock throughout your tour. Although rare, there have been deadly encounters with livestock, particular in circumstances where hikers have been accompanied by a dog and there are calves present. You will have more information in your eGuidebook about proper conduct with livestock, but in general, keep your distance and obey signs and fences .
Flooding	Flooding does occur in the Alps during and after heavy rainfall. This can be severe enough that it prevents the safe passage of the trail . During times of heavy rainfall, be sure to check with the hut staff, local guides, or tourist information offices for any advice on flooding risk. If you encounter a stream or river that you cannot safely cross, turn around and return to your last accommodation.
Hut/Hotel Fire	Although rare, fires can take place at your accommodation. It is important to always identify the location of fire extinguishers and evacuation routes upon first arriving at your accommodation .
Theft	Crime is rare throughout most of the Alps, but theft can certainly be a risk in areas of public transportation, such as major train stations, as well as in areas visited by a large volume of tourists. We recommend keeping your personal items securely with you, and to avoid wearing expensive jewelry or accessories. While crime is extremely unusual at the mountain huts, we recommend bringing a very lightweight bag with you that you can use to carry your valuables around with you while in the hut. One of the best ways to prevent theft is to simply pay attention to the people around you. Avoid being distracted by your phone or a book while in public areas, including public transportation .
Terrorist Attack	There is a looming threat of terrorist activity over most western European countries, and we see these happen from time to time. Terrorist attacks are most likely at high-profile public

	events, hotels that are frequented by tourists, places of worship, schools, parks, shopping malls and public transportation. We recommend you avoid these areas when possible and remain vigilant.
Public transportation accident	Public transportation in the Alps is considered to be extremely safe. An accident is very rare but is still possible. We recommend following all signs and instructions when taking public transportation to keep yourself as safe as possible should something occur.
Private transport accident	More common than with public transportation, are accidents that occur on the road with rental cars or with private transport vehicles. We advise our customers to wear seat belts at all times and to abide by speed limits and signage. If there are any concerns regarding a vehicle we have ordered for private transport, contact us immediately so we can find a replacement.
Gondola/chair lift incident	Gondolas and chairlifts are considered to be some of the safest forms of transportation, and incidents are extremely rare. When they do happen, they receive a lot of publicity. The gondolas and lifts in the Alps all adhere to strict safety regulations and are maintained regularly. We advise all our customers to always follow posted and verbal instructions when using gondolas and chair lifts.
COVID-19	The Alps have been heavily impacted by the presence and spread of the COVID-19 virus. We advise all of our customers to follow appropriate safety protocol as long as the threat remains. This includes wearing a face mask when indoors or interacting with others, keeping 1.5 meters of distance from others, and washing hands regularly. Huts and hotels may have additional measures in place to keep you safe, and we expect that all Alpenventures customers will follow these.
Other threats identified for your destination country as identified by the World Health Organization and by your home government	The safety situation in the Alps is dynamic and can change at any time. We expect all travelers to inform themselves of the safety and health risks their governments warn of for the country of destination, as well as any additional health risks identified by the World Health Organization. Here are some sources to check: Auswärtiges Amt (Germany), State Department (U.S.), Foreign Travel Advice (U.K.), Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Australia), and the World Health Organization (worldwide).

¹Via ferrata sets have evolved over the years, and the UIAA continuously revises the safety standards for them. There were major updates made by the UIAA in 2012, and any via ferrata sets that were designed by older standards should no longer be used. In particular, we advise strongly against the sets where the energy absorption system looks like a climbing rope instead of webbing. You can watch this [Via Ferrata Accident Video](#) to understand further why having a safety-rated via ferrata set is necessary.

²The most common injury that is evacuated from the trail is an ankle injury. You may be surprised to hear that there is no statistical difference based on the choice of shoe (trail runner vs. hiking boot with ankle support), but instead there has been a correlation shown between the Body Mass Index (BMI) of the hiker and the severity of the ankle injury. Based on this information, we strongly recommend adopting an ankle strengthening routine, as well as balance and stability training, into a regular fitness routine as you prepare for your tour.

³Alpenventures provides customers with free access to a navigation app that works offline on your smartphone. However, this is only helpful if the smartphone remains functioning and charged. There may be opportunities to recharge the smartphone at the mountain huts and other accommodations along the way, but this is not guaranteed. We recommend either carrying a solar charger and charging cable for your phone, or a GPS device with replaceable batteries (and enough batteries for the tour). Alpenventures can send you the GPS coordinates for your GPS device upon request.

Alta Via 1 with Via Ferratas	
Risk	Mitigation
Unsecured sections	There are a few sections of this route that lead through Class 3 terrain (requiring scrambling or using your hands) where there is not a cable. Extra care should be taken in these sections.
Challenging alpine terrain	This tour has a defined alpine character, and there are several sections that are not on via ferratas, that move through steep terrain, and sometimes with loose scree or talus. Experience and comfort in this type of terrain is absolutely necessary, as well as a good fitness level and stability.

Our Commitment

Your safety is extremely important to us at Alpenventures GmbH. We understand that along the way, you may need to make decisions that alter your itinerary. When presented with these situations, we will be here to help, and will assist with identifying solutions and making changes to your bookings. We will cover the financial costs within reason, but there may be some expensive solutions, such as taking a taxi for a long distance to route around a difficult section of trail, that we are unable to take on for you. All itinerary changes that are made for safety reasons will be handled on a case-by-case basis.

Alpenventures does not offer emergency services. Customers will be dependent on the infrastructure available in the Alps for evacuation and emergency response situations. We will provide all the appropriate information.

Summary

While there are certainly risks associated with outdoor adventure, there are a lot of things you can do to minimize those risks. Having a proper training routine leading up to your adventure, ensuring you have adequate vision and are in good health for the tour, having the right gear and technical knowledge, as well as planning ahead for navigation and packing the right items are a good start. From there, gathering information, both before and during your tour, and making safe decisions as you go will all help ensure that your big adventure is as safe and secure as possible.