At Your Own Risk & Duty of Care

As you will know, we offer a weekly programme of organised walks which you can join at no extra cost. Our walk organisers are not qualified guides and you join them at your own risk. Similarly, if you choose to walk independently, we cannot take responsibility for information gleaned from our Ideas & Information Files, Route Laminates and the first-hand knowledge/opinions of our own people. To this extent, it is essential that you ultimately decide independently whether any itinerary you choose to do – be it self-guided or ‘organised’ – is suitable for you and your party.

In short, everything you do during your stay in the mountains is done at your own risk. In the event of personal injury or death, we are not liable for efforts made by us to enhance your stay, amongst which are our organised walks and various printed and verbal suggestions. It is a fact that activities undertaken in the mountains are associated with personal injury and death. By coming to such an area with Collett’s Mountain Holidays – or indeed independently – you are exposing yourself and your party to the (thankfully small) possibility of personal injury or death. In such an event, Collett’s Mountain Holidays will not be held responsible for your interest in mountainous areas and your involvement in mountain pursuits, which can occasionally have tragic consequences.

We put safety first but you are as responsible as we are!

You join our organised walks as part of an autonomous group, in which each member has a duty of care to each other. Not being professionally responsible for you does not mean we turn a blind eye to safety, nor does it make us exempt from owing a duty of care to you. Your safety is essential to us and we therefore take our own safety measures, endeavouring to minimise the possibility of personal injury and death. We do this in line with legal requirements pertaining to duty of care. We assess, communicate and manage risk as part of a formal company Health & Safety Policy, which is regularly reviewed and includes the training our own walkers. We try to make people aware of the importance of mountain safety and their responsibilities as part of a group. As with any person or organisation involved with activities where there is a possibility of personal injury or death, the issue of duty of care is ever-present and, in the absence of a qualified guide in ‘non-professional’ activities anywhere in the world, such as walking (whether organised by a company, club, university or even a friend) every member of the group has a legal commitment to all involved. This commitment to your fellow walkers should form the basis of your behaviour and actions during an organised walk, especially in the event of accident or injury. Our focus on safety should not influence whether you decide to join an organised walk or not, for at the heart of our procedures are basic mountain safety measures, which should be undertaken by any walker when preparing for a day out in the mountains, especially when walking/climbing in a group, where your actions (or inaction) could compromise your safety as well as that of other people in the group.

Some notes about our Organised Walks

Our programme of organised walks is put together on a goodwill basis by our own walk organisers and we ask you to accept their discretion where the selection of walks is concerned. You won’t be disappointed. Each week the programme changes and is duly published to our guests. Everyday except on our local day-off, Wednesday – and with a reduced programme on Saturdays – we offer two different walks, one more demanding than the other. Prior to joining up to an organised walk, please remember somebody else’s opinion of a walk is their opinion, not your knowledge. Try to acquaint yourself independently with the proposed route using the relevant map to help you decide if it is suitable for your level of fitness and experience. Also, ask about precipitous features if prone to vertigo. Some walks feature ledge paths with significant drops and switchback tracks on steep slopes. Wednesday is our staff day off and there are no organised walks on this day. Our organised walks take place in a sociable and informal atmosphere and, whilst you are encouraged not to join one unless you are certain it is within your physical capabilities, we walk at the pace of the slowest person and pause regularly. You do not pay to join our organised walks and in the event of a walk organiser being ill, we cannot guarantee the excursion will take place. Children can join our organised walks but only if accompanied by a guardian, who takes full responsibility for their safety and behaviour.

Guest Car Sharing & Taxis

With various people choosing to join various walks in various locations, you might be asked to give (or take) a lift with someone. Please do not do either unless you are happy that, in the event of an accident, Collett’s will not accept any liability. If ever taxis are used, the cost is shared across the party.

Collett’s Vehicles & Taxis

If our vehicles are free to help with transport, they will be used and guests are asked to pay a small taxi fare. If our vehicles are not available and there are enough guests interested in the itinerary we might book a taxi. This is not the cheapest option and each guest in the taxi would need to be happy to share the cost.
Procedures on meeting up at the start of the Organised Walk

All organised walks will depart from the Hotel Sonnenspitze at a time established at Office Hour the night before. Prior to leaving, the walk organiser will run through an equipment checklist and at the start of the actual walk, he/she will state the following:

- They are not qualified guides and everyone joins the Organised Walk at their own risk;
- The party is walking as a group of non-qualified individuals and the walk organiser, as someone who knows the route, is the nominal leader only;
- Everyone should follow the course and progress of the route on their map checking the correct route is being adhered to;
- They will generally walk at the pace of the slowest person in the party and it is the responsibility of each member of the party to keep the rest of the group in sight;
- If anyone wants to rest at any time, they should not hesitate to ask;
- If anyone wants to leave the party at any time could they please let someone in the group know, otherwise we might have to assume you are lost and alert mountain rescue;
- Everyone owes a ‘duty of care’ to each other. In the event of an accident, the organiser will act in a way they deem safest to offer assistance, but would of course appreciate the assistance of the rest of the party;
- If it is the first time the organiser has done a route, the party understand this and it is an ‘adventure’ for all involved.

Self-Guiding

If you prefer to walk independently then you may wish to make use of our Ideas and Information (I&I) files, which detail numerous different routes to suit different levels of fitness and mountain experience.

We reproduce these route proposals, which we call Route Laminates, and you can borrow these from us to use in conjunction with your map at your own risk. They have proved enormously popular with our guests.

At Office Hour we will be happy to talk to you about any of the walks detailed within the I&I files, but ultimately you should decide independently whether the walk is suitable for you and your party, as we do not accept responsibility for any ideas, suggestions or opinions we give to you during your stay.

Mountain Safety & Emergency Procedures

Here are some notes that might help you refresh or improve your awareness of safety in the mountains. When in the mountains and when planning itineraries, apply your mind to safety at all times. Poor preparation is often the cause of many accidents and dramas. As a general guide to safety we have used information published by the Italian Alpine Rescue Corps and the British Mountaineering Council to produce the following notes:

Prevention Of Accidents – Basic Rules For Increased Safety In The Mountains

- Never underestimate the dangers and the risks attached to a day out in the mountains – hostile environments, rapid changes in weather conditions, etc.
- Select itineraries within your level of fitness and technical/physical ability and within those of your party members.
- Do not go alone – if possible, go with others or, for more safety, go in the company of an alpine guide or a qualified organisation. (Collett’s is not a qualified organisation but we will endeavour to arrange local guides if requested to do so).
- Prior to departing, research and familiarise yourself adequately with the characteristics and difficulties of the itinerary. Study carefully the relevant topographical map.
- Let someone know where you are going and leave details of your itinerary. (Do not change your itinerary without informing somebody).
- Have a contingency plan in the event of the unexpected. An inaccurate or out of date map, route deterioration or a landslide, could all cause a change in your itinerary.
- Mountain Weather conditions should always be taken into account. A forecast is available from local tourist offices every day and whilst variations in mountain forecasts are not uncommon, they are worth consulting.
- Have the right clothing. You should have a robust pair of walking boots/shoes, which support the ankle. Take a waterproof/wind-proof jacket and some spare clothes in your rucksack.
- Be responsible. Always carry the relevant map at all times. Carry safety equipment such as a compass, torch, whistle, spare food and an understanding of how to use them in case of emergency. If you have a health condition, please ensure that you carry any necessary medication at all times, and inform another member of your party so that somebody is aware of your circumstances.
- Have adequate insurance cover. Don’t leave home without it, you can’t take out insurance after you departure!

Some Points Specific To Mountainous Areas

- Avalanches – residual snow and early snow falls, coupled with high summer temperatures can lead to the risk of avalanche. Avoid walking on steep sided, snow covered slopes.
• Lightning – thunderstorms are a feature of mountain weather. If lightning is close, avoid any cables, summits, ridges, trees and caves. There are various opinions as to the best course of action in this event, but it is probably safest to sit the storm out on a rucksack in open ground.

• Residual Snow – in early-mid summer be aware of residual snow on some trails. Late lying snow can be treacherous underfoot, and if you slip it may be difficult to stop. There may also be hidden hazards underneath (ditches, streams etc). If you are concerned, talk to members of your party and if appropriate, consider walking around these areas. If you are thinking about crossing any snow, always ascertain, as far as possible, what risks are involved and only cross if you think it is safe to do so.

• Rock Falls – due to the easily fractured nature of limestone, loose rocks and rock fall are a significant feature of the mountains. Take care when walking near the base of cliffs, and consider taking a climbing helmet if planning a long walk in such areas. Be careful not to dislodge loose rocks yourself, as there may be other people below you. Warn other if you dislodge a rock. In English the usual shouted warning is ‘Below!’, but in Austria you should shout ‘Achtung!’.

• Steep, loose paths – many of the waymarked routes in the area include sections of steep, rocky track, often loose under foot. Walking poles are widely recognised as being helpful on such terrain. Check the gradient of any paths you are unsure of using a map and looking at the contour intervals (there is a contour interval of 20 metres on the 1:25,000 scale Mayr maps). If faced with exceptionally steep ground, the general rule to remember is not to go up if you don’t think you can come back down.

• Vertigo – many of the routes in the area include paths that traverse steep sided sections of mountainside. If you suffer from vertigo then sections like this can give you a sense of exposure. Plan your walks carefully.

Emergency Procedures
Based on information published by the Italian Alpine Rescue Corps and the British Mountaineering Council – for anyone wishing to take the following emergency notes with them on an itinerary, a printed copy is available:

• Stay calm and do not do anything on impulse.
• Evaluate the situation and identify the actual dangers;
• Take immediate and sensible precautions to prevent further risk;
• Give spare clothing to the injured person and do your best to provide shelter
• All reasonable efforts should be made to cope with the situation without resorting to the rescue services, providing that you do not make any injuries worse than they are already. If self-help is not possible, rescue services should be contacted. Call for 112. The rescue team will need to know where you are and have an idea about the condition of the victim;
• If you do not have a mobile, you would have to use a nearby refugio, or descend to find a landline. Choose a safe route – this might not be the quickest, but the possibility of a second accident must be avoided;
• Mark the casualties’ position on a map and take it along with you. Going for help is a relatively easy decision to make if there are four or more people in the party. At least two can leave to ring for help, leaving one to care for the casualty. If there are only two or three in the group then this becomes a more difficult judgement. In this situation, attracting help from others in the mountains will help;
• To attract attention use the International Distress Signal, using either a light, a whistle or by shouting: six long flashes of a torch/blasts of a whistle/shouts/waves in succession, repeated at one minute intervals. Repeat until replied to. A reply is given 3 times a minute (every 20 seconds) in either a visible or audible manner. If a helicopter is involved, the pilot’s questions can be answered as described on the right;
• If no local help is forthcoming a decision will have to be made to leave the casualty alone or potentially sending somebody on his or her own. To make this decision you would have to consider the injury, the conditions and the capabilities of the other members of the party; and
• As far as the injured are concerned, do for them only those things that you are certain you can do safely.
Emergency Contact – Call 118

If the operator manning the emergency line does not speak English and you are unable to communicate, please try calling one of our staff and we will relate the information as best we can.

- Call 118 – give your full name.
- Say where you are calling from and let them know your telephone number.
- If the location of the accident (and casualties) is far away, try to memorise some landmarks to help the search party find the group.
- Explain in brief what has happened.
- Give the time of the accident and the exact number of casualties and their relative conditions.
- Give the number of people in the rest of the group still at the accident, and try to remember the colour of their jackets etc. in order to aid finding them.
- Describe the weather conditions and the visibility.
- Do not leave the place from which you are making the call, in case the rescue services have to contact you again.

Things You Should Do For An Injured Person

- Resuscitate if necessary & you know how to do so
- Raise the chin being careful to support the back of the head
- Position the body on its side in the recovery position
- Cover the injured person - use spare clothing and provide as much shelter as possible and appropriate
- Immobilise any fractures and stem any bleeding
- Reassure them by talking calmly

Things You Should Not Do For An Injured Person

- Get them back on their feet
- Raise the head
- Move the body unnecessarily
- Remove their clothes
- Give them anything to drink
- Ask the injured unnecessary questions
- Display worry

Mountain Weather

We keep a firm eye on weather conditions and try to ensure it is safe to proceed with an excursion, but it is everybody’s responsibility to consider the possibility of cancelling an excursion (and voice any anxiety) if worried about the risk of adverse weather conditions.

- Winds increase and temperatures drop at altitude
- Snow and ice are not uncommon at high altitudes, especially in early and late season
- Take plenty of liquid (min. 2-3 litres)
- Protect yourself from the sun with high factor sun cream, sunglasses and a hat
- Plan your route according to the weather
- Plan for worse weather than forecast as the weather can change rapidly
- Always carry clothing for poor weather, even if the day starts fine