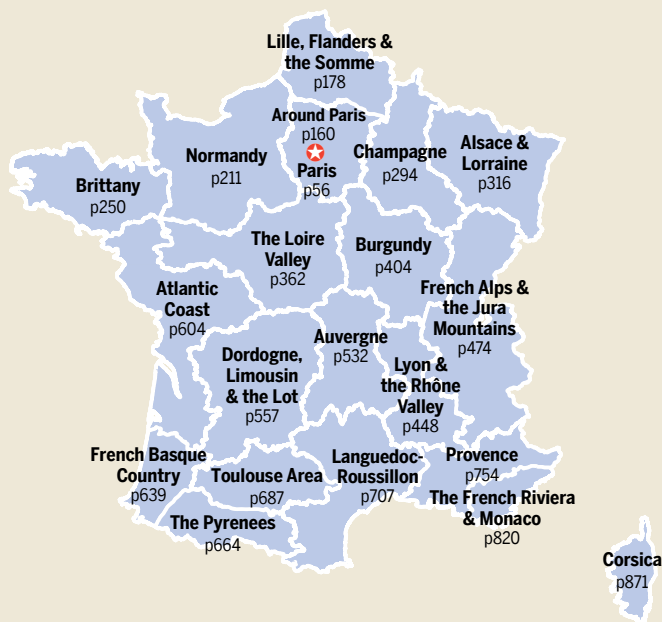




# France



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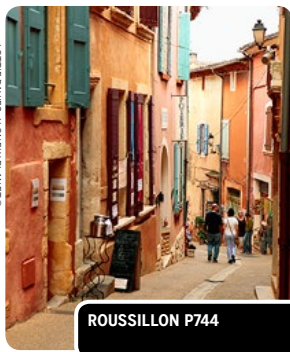
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# Itineraries



**10**  
DAYS

## Essential France

No place screams 'France!' more than **Paris**. Spend two days in the capital, allowing time for cafe lounging, bistro lunches and waterside strolls along the Seine and Canal St-Martin. On day three, enjoy Renaissance royalty at **Château de Chambord** and **Château de Chenonceau** in the Loire Valley. Or spend two days in Normandy, marvelling at **Rouen's** Notre Dame cathedral, the **Bayeux** tapestry, sea-splashed **Mont St-Michel** and – should modern history be your passion – the **D-Day landing beaches**.

Day five, zoom south to view world-class cave art in the **Vézère Valley**. Key sites are around the towns of Les Eyzies-de-Tayac-Sireuil and Montignac. Or base yourself in Sarlat-la-Canéda, showcasing some of France's best medieval architecture with a fabulous food market to boot. Day seven, experience 12 hours in **Bordeaux**, not missing wine tasting in the stunning La Cité du Vin. Next day, drive three hours to the walled city of **Carcassonne**, Roman **Nîmes** and the **Pont du Gard**. Finish on the French Riviera with a casino flutter in Grace Kelly's **Monaco**, a portside aperitif in Brigitte Bardot's **St-Tropez** and a stroll through Matisse's **Nice**.



**2**  
WEEKS

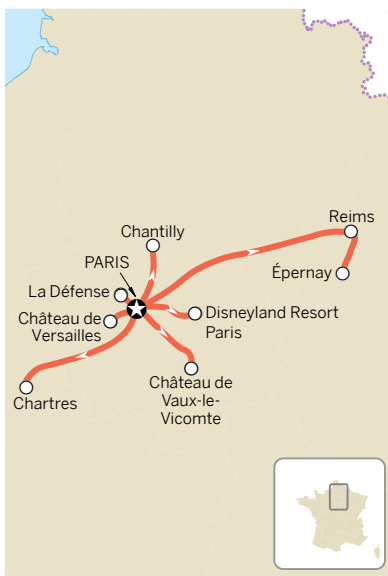
## The Channel to the Med

Step off the boat in **Calais** and be seduced by 40km of cliffs, sand dunes and windy beaches on the spectacular **Côte d'Opale**. Speed southwest, taking in a fish lunch in **Dieppe**, a sensational cathedral visit in **Rouen**, or a picturesque cliffside picnic in **Étretat** en route to your overnight stop: your choice of the pretty Normandy seaside resorts of **Honfleur**, **Deauville** or **Trouville**. Spend two days here: a boat trip beneath the breathtaking Pont de Normandie, shopping for fresh fish and seafood at Trouville's waterfront Poissonnerie, and hobnobbing with Parisians on Deauville's chic star-studded boardwalk are essentials.

Devote day three to Normandy's D-Day landing beaches. Start with the Mémorial – Un Musée pour la Paix in **Caen**, the best single museum devoted to the Battle of Normandy, then follow a westward arc along the beach-laced coast, taking in the caisson-strewn sands at **Arromanches-les-Bains**, gun installations at **Longues-sur-Mer**, and the now-serene 7km-long stretch of 'bloody **Omaha**'. Come dusk, rejuvenate spent emotions over fresh scallops and *calvados* (apple-flavoured brandy). Or, if art is more your cup of tea, skip the beaches and go for the stunning representation of 11th-century warfare embroidered across 70m of tapestry in **Bayeux**.

Day four and iconic **Mont St-Michel** beckons – hiking barefoot across the sands here is exhilarating. End the week in Brittany with a flop in an old-fashioned beach tent in **Dinard** and a bracing stroll on spectacular headlands around **Camaret-sur-Mer**.

Week two begins with a long drive south to chic **La Rochelle** for a lavish seafood feast. Spend a night here, continuing the gourmet theme as you wend your way south through Médoc wine country to **Bordeaux**. Next morning, stop in 'ville rose' **Toulouse** through which the undisputed queen of canals, Canal du Midi, runs, and/or **Carcassonne** before hitting the Med. The Camargue – a wetland of flamingos, horses and incredible bird life – is a unique patch of coast to explore and Van Gogh thought so too. Follow in his footsteps around **Arles**, before continuing onto the ancient, enigmatic and totally fascinating port city of **Marseille**.

1  
WEEK

## Brittany to Bordeaux

It starts fresh off the boat in **St-Malo**, a walled city with sturdy Vauban ramparts that beg exploration at sunset. Linger at least a day in this attractive port. Walk across at low tide to Île du Grand Bé and lap up great views atop a 14th-century tower in pretty St-Servan. Motor along the Côte d'Émeraude the next day, stopping in **Dinard** en route to **Roscoff** 200km west. Devote day four to discovering Brittany's famous cider and megaliths around **Carnac**, the enchanting medieval town of **Vannes** overlooking the glittering island-studded Golfe du Morbihan, and the turreted medieval castle in **Josselin**. Push south along the Atlantic coast, stopping in **Nantes** if you like big cities (and riding mechanical elephants), or continuing to the peaceful waterways of Green Venice, aka the **Marais Poitevin**. **Bordeaux** is your final destination for day six, from where a bevy of Bordeaux wine-tasting trips tempt. End the journey on a high atop Europe's highest sand dune, **Dune du Pilat**, near oyster-famed Arcachon.

1  
WEEK

## A Week Around Paris

Day one has to be France's grandest castle, **Château de Versailles**, and its vast gardens. Second day, feast on France's best-preserved medieval basilica and the dazzling blue stained glass in **Chartres**, an easy train ride away. Small-town **Chantilly** is a good spot to combine a laid-back lunch with a Renaissance château, formal French gardens and – if you snagged tickets in advance – an enchanting equestrian performance.

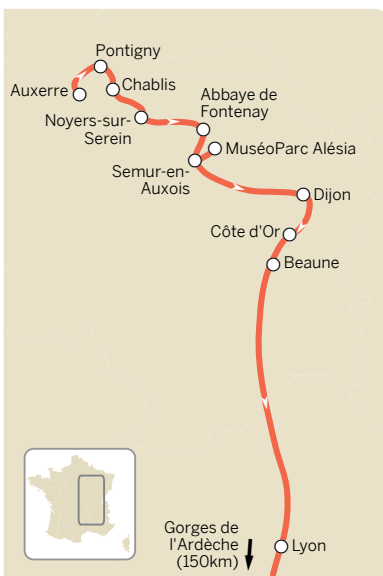
On the fourth day, catch the train to elegant **Reims** in the heart of the Champagne region. Scale its cathedral for dazzling views before tucking into the serious business of Champagne tasting. Dedicated bubbly aficionados can hop the next day to **Épernay**, France's other great Champagne city.

On day six, enjoy a lazy start then catch an afternoon fountain show at **Château de Vaux-le-Vicomte**, followed by a candlelit tour of the château. End the week with a look at futuristic **La Défense** or, for those with kids, **Disneyland Resort Paris**.

5  
DAYS

## Along the Loire Valley

For five days of aristocratic pomp and architectural splendour, there is no finer destination than the château-studded Loire Valley. Make your first base the regal city of **Blois**, from where you can maximize the limited amount of time you have by hooking up with an organised château tour: queen of all castles **Château de Chambord** and the charmingly classical **Château de Cheverny**, with its extraordinary furnishings and dramatic hound-packed kennels, make a great combo. Day three, follow France's longest river southwest to **Amboise**, final home of Leonardo da Vinci. If wine is a love, build some *dégustation* (tasting) of local **Vouvray** wines in vineyards into your itinerary on the way to solidly bourgeois **Tours**, an easy hop from Amboise. From here **Château de Chenonceau** is beautifully strung across the River Cher 34km east. End your trip with France's elite riding school in **Saumur** and the movingly simple abbey church **Abbaye Royale de Fontevraud** – or push on northwest to **Angers** with its black château and Apocalypse tapestry. Château de Verrières in Saumur is a befitting overnight address in this château-rich neck of the woods.

6  
DAYS

## Burgundy & Beyond

Red-wine lovers can enjoy the fruits of Burgundy with this itinerary. Begin in the Roman river port of **Auxerre**, 170km southeast of Paris. Explore its ancient abbey and Gothic cathedral, and cycle along towpaths. On day two consider an easy bike ride to a wonderful piece of Cistercian architecture in pretty **Pontigny**, 25km north. Stay overnight or push on to **Chablis**, where more bike rides and gentle hikes between Burgundy vineyards await – allow ample time to taste the seven *grands crus* of this well-known wine-making town. Day four, meander south to the picture-postcard village of **Noyers-sur-Serein**, then head east to the breathtaking, Unesco-listed **Abbaye de Fontenay**, before winding up for the night in **Semur-en-Auxois**, 25km south. **MuséoParc Alésia**, where Julius Caesar defeated Gaulish chief Veringétorix in 52 BC, is not far from here and makes for a fascinating day out. On the last day, discover **Dijon** and its beautiful medieval and Renaissance buildings. From here, should you have more time, take a road trip through the wine-making area of **Côte d'Or** to **Beaune**, or south to **Lyon** in the Rhône Valley and beyond to the rugged **Gorges de l'Ardèche**.

10  
DAYS

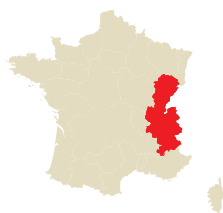
## The South of France

For sun, sea and celebrity action, hit France's hot south. Start in **Nice**, star of the coastline that unfurls in a pageant of belle-époque palaces and iconic sands. Drive along the Riviera's trio of legendary **corniches** – coastal views are mind-blowing – and on day three take the train to glitzy **Monaco**. Then move to fishing port **St-Tropez** where million-dollar yachts jostle for space with street artists. Rise early the next morning for the place des Lices market and frolic away the afternoon on the sand at Plage de Pampelonne. Day six is a toss-up between a dramatic drive along the **Corniche des Maures** to **Bormes-les-Mimosas** and the staggering **Route des Crêtes** mountain pass, or a boat trip to the *très belle* **Îles d'Hyères**. Head inland next to **Aix-en-Provence**, a canvas of graceful 19th-century architecture, stylish cafes and hidden squares. From Aix, it's a hop and a skip to **Ventabren** where lunch or dinner al fresco at La Table de Ventabren is what eating in Provence is all about. Devote your last two days to the wild **Gorges du Verdon**, Europe's largest canyon, two hours' drive northeast, or the gentler **Luberon** with its bounty of photogenic hilltop villages.

5  
DAYS

## Spring in the Alps

A trip to the French Alps often translates as one week of skiing in one place. Yet take time to explore the region after the snow has melted – spring or early summer is best – and you'll be pleasantly surprised. Warm up with old-town ambling, lakeside strolling and warm-weather swimming in fairy-tale **Anney**, a beautiful medieval town just 45km from Geneva, Switzerland. Day two, shift to **Chamonix** at the foot of Mont Blanc, Europe's highest peak: ride a cable car up to the **Aiguille du Midi** or, if the sky is not crystal-clear, ride a cog railway up to the **Mer de Glace** glacier. Yet more unforgettable views of Mont Blanc seduce along hiking trails in the chic, picturesque Alpine villages of **St-Gervais** and **Megève**. Let the adrenalin rip, or push on via the ancient Savoyard stronghold of **Chambéry** to the **Parc National de la Vanoise**, where spectacular mountain biking in **Les Trois Vallées** will please the most jaded outdoor junkie. A fitting finale to your Alpine foray is the stunning drive through the **Parc National des Écrins** to **Briançon**, perhaps the loveliest of all the medieval villages in the French Alps, famous for its Vauban fortifications.



# French Alps & the Jura Mountains

POP 4.8 MILLION

## Includes ➔

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- ➔ Les Louvières (p530)
- ➔ Le Cap Horn (p484)
- ➔ Crèmerie du Glacier (p485)
- ➔ La Fruitière (p505)

## Best Places to Sleep

- ➔ Petit Hôtel Confidentiel (p497)
- ➔ Hôtel de la Vallée Heureuse (p527)
- ➔ Hôtel Aiguille du Midi (p484)
- ➔ The Farmhouse (p489)

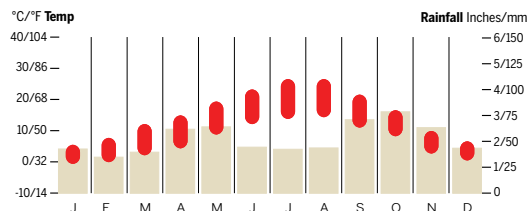
## Why Go?

It took something as monumental as the collision of Africa and Europe to produce the Alps. Inconceivable forces buckled the land, driving it high into the sky, creating a place of enchantment and danger. And further north, where those forces finally reached their limit, the lower, lushly wooded ridges of the Jura mountains grew. What the geological millennia produced is a place where superlatives fail: colossal peaks thrusting upward into cobalt-blue skies, crevasse-fissured glaciers, tumbling crystal-clear rivers, sapphire lakes, and mountain passes blocked by snow for nine months a year.

In summer, all this can be explored on foot, or by bicycle, kayak or car. Then the return of the snow each year brings some of Europe's finest skiing: impossibly fast black runs and world-class off-piste routes, of course, but also plenty of fun for those just finding their feet. And, in the lush lowlands and stately medieval cities, you'll discover the rich culture, food and history of the folk who made these mountains home.

## When to Go

### Grenoble



**Feb-Apr** Venetian carnival in Anney, world music in Grenoble and cracking out the *vin jaune* in Jura.

**Jul & Aug** The Tour de France whizzes by, and fireworks illuminate Anney at the Fête du Lac.

**Dec** Christmas markets, freestyle events and fun on the pistes as the first big snows fall.

## Skiing & Snowboarding

The 200-plus resorts in the French Alps have earned a reputation for offering some of the best – perhaps *the* best – downhill skiing and snowboarding in Europe. In larger resorts, snowboarders are brilliantly catered for in snow parks kitted out with halfpipes, kickers and ramps.

At most stations, the ski season begins in early or mid-December and ends in mid- or late April, though the highest-altitude stations, such as Val Thorens (in Les Trois Vallées) and Val d'Isère (Espace Killy), open in mid- or late November and don't close until early or mid-May. Lots of people line up a chalet and go skiing for a week, staying from Saturday to Saturday.

Summer skiing on glaciers is possible from about 21 June to the end of August, and again for a week around 1 November, at two French ski stations: Les Deux Alpes and Val d'Isère/Tignes (Espace Killy).

The Jura is renowned for its selection of *ski de fond* (cross-country) trails, with Les Rousses at the centre. European downhill runs are colour-coded to indicate how kid-easy or killer-hard they are:

- ➔ **Green** Beginner
- ➔ **Blue** Intermediate
- ➔ **Red** Advanced
- ➔ **Black** Expert

## Ski Rental & Lessons

Skis (alpine, cross-country, telemark), snowboards, snowshoes, boots, poles and helmets can be hired at sport shops in every resort. All-inclusive rental costs around €35 per day for good-quality alpine equipment or snowboarding gear (about two-thirds of that for kids) and €18 for cross-country. Reserving ahead online can get you a 15% discount.

Every resort has a variety of ski schools with certified instructors; tourist offices have details. France's leading ski school, the **École du Ski Français** ([www.esf.net](http://www.esf.net)) – its instructors distinctive in red jumpsuits – has a branch in every resort. Group lessons typically cost €60/200 for one/six half-days. Private instruction is also available (€182 per half-day). Kids can start learning from the age of four; from three years old they can play in the *jardin de neige* (snow garden).

## Lift Passes

You will need a *forfait* (lift pass) to ride the various *remontées mécaniques* (lifts):

## **i** AVALANCHES

Avalanches are a serious danger whenever deep snow meets steep slopes. You know the golden rule: never ski, hike or climb alone. Off-piste skiers should never head out without an avalanche pole, transeceiver, shovel – and, most importantly, a professional guide. Ski resorts announce the daily risk level using signs and coloured flags: yellow (low risk), black and yellow (heightened risk) and black (severe risk). Henry's Avalanche Talk ([www.henrysavalanchetalk.com](http://www.henrysavalanchetalk.com)) translates the daily avalanche forecast issued by Météo France into English during the ski season.

*téléskis* (tow lines), *télesieges* (chairlifts), *télécabines* (gondolas), *téléphériques* (cable cars) and *funiculaires* (funicular railways). At the big resorts, passes cost €45 to €55 per day or €260 to €330 per week (reckoned as either six or seven days), about 40% less than at major US resorts. Everywhere in the Alps, lift tickets can be bought and recharged online.

At most stations, children aged three or four and under ski for free but still need a pass; bring along a passport as proof of age. Some places also offer free lift passes to skiers aged over 75. A few resorts (eg Val d'Isère and Les Deux Alpes) have several free lifts for beginners. Weeklong passes usually include limited access to a swimming pool, an ice-skating rink and indoor sports facilities.

You have to pay a *forfait* or *redevance* (fee), usually around €9 a day, to use *ski de fond* (cross-country) trails.

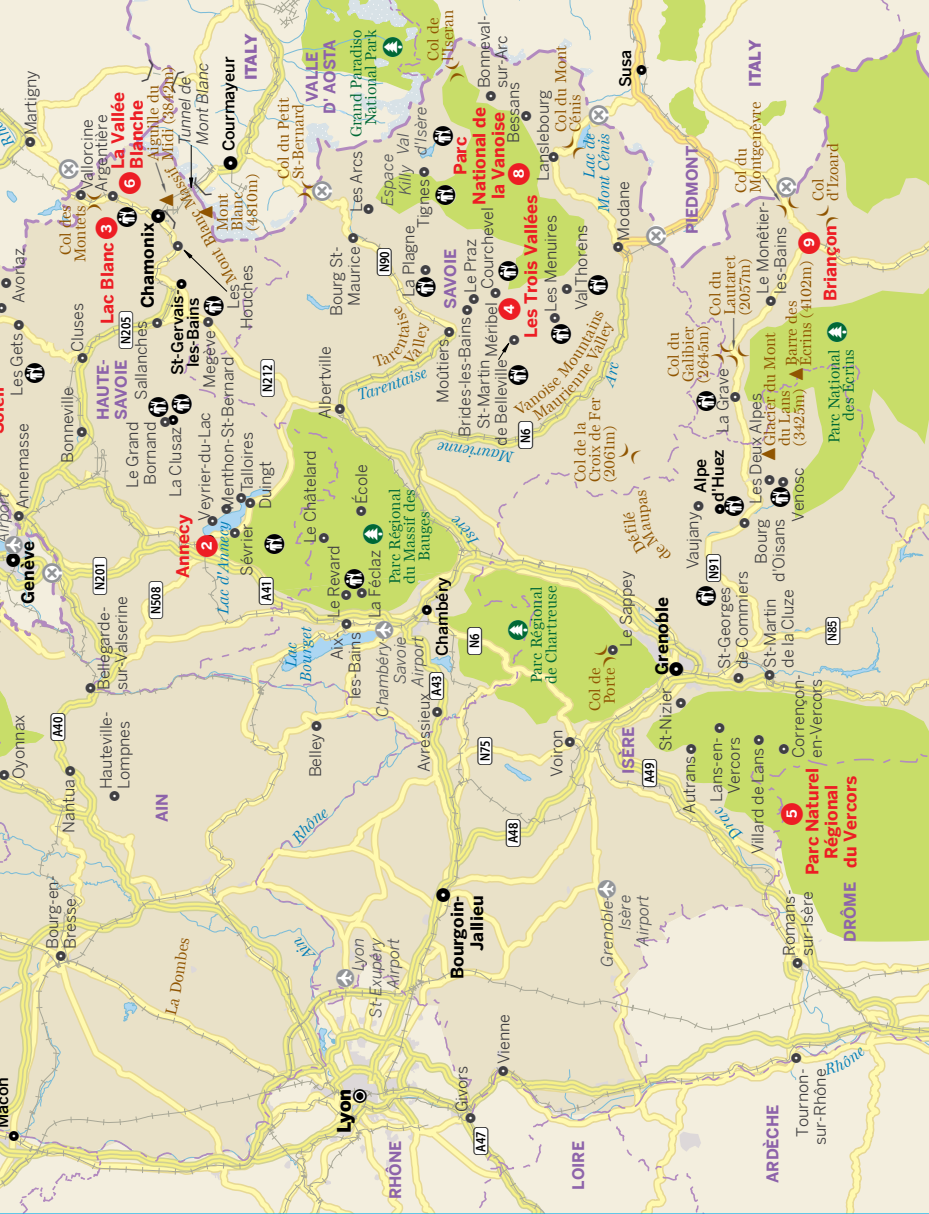
## Insurance

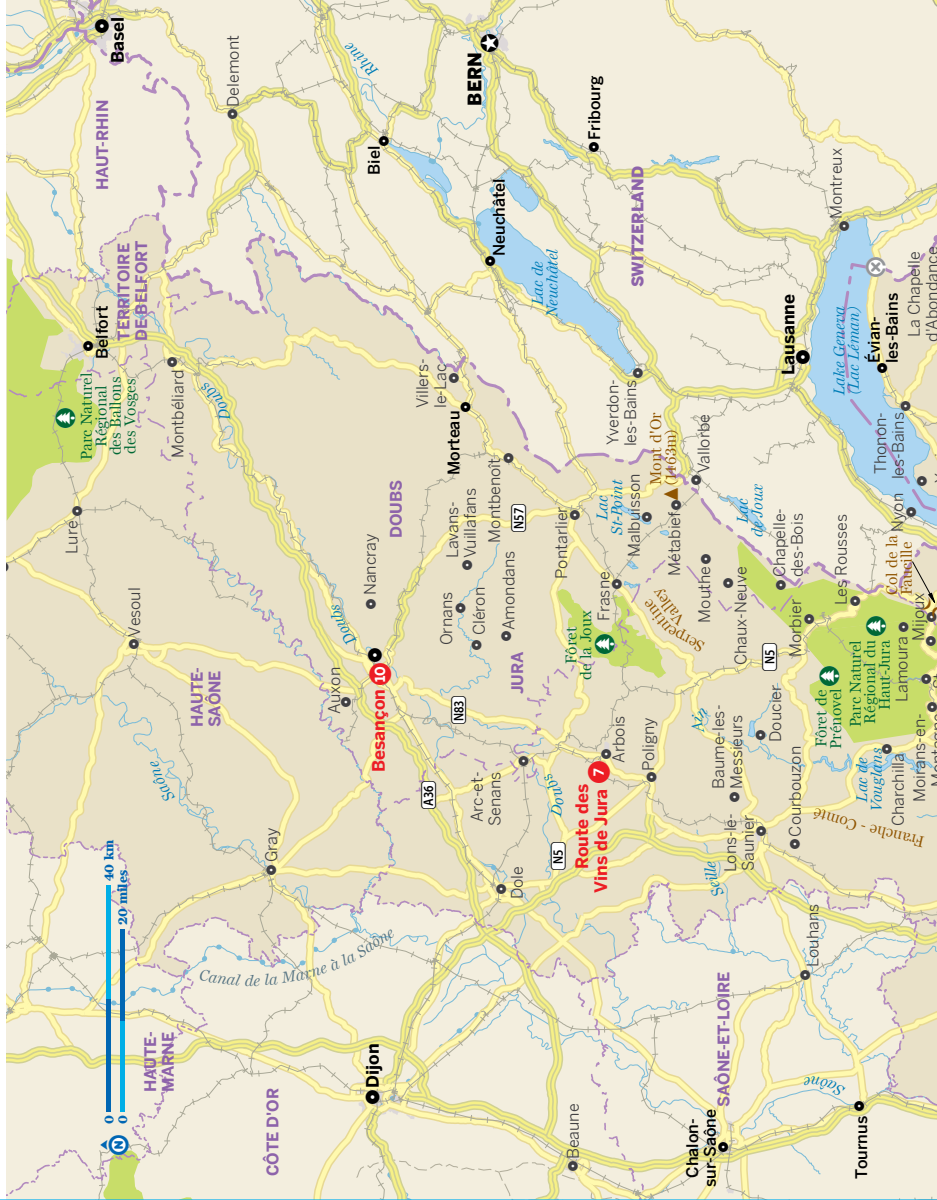
Before you launch yourself like a rocket down that near-vertical black piste, make sure you're properly insured. Accidents happen, and expensive mountain-rescue costs (we're talking five figures here for a helicopter), medical treatment and repatriation add insult to injury.

Most ski packages include *assurance* (insurance), at least for evacuation and emergency first aid. If further treatment is required (eg you are evacuated to a hospital), your coverage may depend on your national or private health insurance. Note that some private insurance policies do not cover winter sports, especially off-piste, so check before you leave home.

## French Alps & the Jura Mountains Highlights

- 1 Portes du Soleil** (p488) Trying, just trying, to ski all the terrain at this vast, international ski area.
- 2 Annecy** (p490) Exploring the stately city's medieval lanes, strongholds and crystal-clear waters.
- 3 Lac Blanc** (p482) Hiking up to the turquoise lake for a breathtaking view of the Mont Blanc massif.
- 4 Les Trois Vallées** (p503) Slaloming down legendary slopes, then partying away in après-ski bars.
- 5 Parc Naturel Régional du Vercors** (p513) Communing with nature on a middle-of-nowhere farm.





- 6 La Vallée Blanche** (p482)  
Conquering the ultimate in Alpine off-piste skiing.
- 7 Route des Vins du Jura** (p523)  
Sipping golden *vin jaune* amid bucolic vines.
- 8 Parc National de la Vanoise** (p506)  
Hiking through glaciated grandeur.
- 9 Parc National des Écrins** (p517)  
Getting buzzed on the dramatic winding drive to Briançon.
- 10 Besançon** (p519)  
Walking the hilltop ramparts of the hilltop Vauban citadel.

**FAST FACTS****Area** 51,890 sq km**Local industry** Sheep, cattle, cheese production, viticulture, high-tech industry**Signature drink** Green Chartreuse

The Fédération Française de Ski offers members of its local clubs, holders of the **License Carte Neige** ([www.ffs.fr/federation/licence-carte-neige](http://www.ffs.fr/federation/licence-carte-neige)), an optional annual insurance policy (€31 to €50 per year for downhill, including membership) that covers emergency evacuation whether you're on or off-piste. It's instantly recognised by French rescue services so you won't have to pay out-of-pocket and then file for reimbursement. At ski stations, it is available from the local École du Ski Français (ESF) branch.

A simpler option is to buy **Carré Neige** (☎01 41 85 85 96; [www.carreneuve.com](http://www.carreneuve.com); downhill/cross-country per day €2.80/1.30) insurance, the benefits of which are similar, along with your lift pass.

Rental shops offer equipment insurance for a small extra charge (often €2 a day).

**i Getting There & Away****AIR**

The French Alps are served by four airports with low-cost flights (at least in winter), and seasonal bus services to various ski resorts:

**Chambéry Savoie Airport** (p498) 11km north of Chambéry.

**Geneva Airport** (Aéroport International de Genève; [www.gva.ch](http://www.gva.ch)) In neighbouring Switzerland; has lots of cheap flights.

**Grenoble Isère Airport** (p512) 45km north-west of Grenoble.

**Lyon-St-Exupéry Airport** (p962) 28km east of Lyon.

**BUS**

During the ski season, buses link airports and railheads with numerous ski resorts. Some services require that you make reservations 24 to 72 hours ahead.

**CAR & MOTORCYCLE**

The roads up to many popular ski stations are narrow, steep and serpentine so in season (especially during French school holidays) traffic can be hellish, especially at weekends.

After a snowfall, local authorities may require that all cars have either:

- snow chains (*chaînes neige*), available from car rental companies for a small charge; you can put them on at an *aire de chaînage*
- winter tyres (*pneus neige*), available on rental cars for an extra fee.

You certainly don't want to find yourself blocked by the police from driving to your prepaid chalet so arrive in the Alps equipped – in the mountains (reasonably priced) chains can be hard or impossible to find, especially in the evening and on weekends.

The Fréjus and Mont Blanc road tunnels connect the French Alps with Italy, as do several routes over the mountains. Passes such as Col de l'Iseran and Col du Petit-St-Bernard are blocked by snow for all but the summer months. Road signs indicate when they're open, or check official online maps (listed north-to-south by *département*):

**Haute Savoie** ([www.inforoute74.fr](http://www.inforoute74.fr))

**Hautes-Alpes** ([www.inforoute05.fr](http://www.inforoute05.fr))

**Isère** ([www.itiniserre.fr](http://www.itiniserre.fr))

**Savoie** (<http://savoie-route.fr>)

These sites also have details on road delays or blockages that have nothing to do with the weather. You can also call local tourist offices for updates on road and weather conditions.

**TRAIN**

On weekends from mid-December to early April, **Eurostar** ([www.eurostar.com](http://www.eurostar.com)) ski trains (one way/return from €156/279, seven hours) are a quick and environmentally friendly way to travel between London and Moutiers, gateway to Les Trois Vallées (Méribel, Courchevel and Val Thorens), and Bourg St-Maurice, linked by bus with Val d'Isère.

Within France, train services to the Alps are excellent. In addition to Moutiers and Bourg St-Maurice, important railheads include Sallanches, linked to Megève by bus, and Modane, gateway to Parc National de la Vanoise. To get to Chamonix you have to change to the narrow-gauge Mont Blanc Express at St-Gervais-Le-Fayet.

**SAVOY**

Flanked to the east by the Swiss and Italian Alps, Savoie (Savoy) – divided between the *départements* of Haute-Savoie (to the north) and Savoie – rises from the southern shores of Lake Geneva, Europe's largest alpine lake, and culminates at the roof of Europe, mighty 4810m Mont Blanc. At higher elevations you'll find legendary ski resorts including Chamonix and Val d'Isère, with historical château towns such as Chambéry and lakeside Annecy to the west.

Rural life, unchanged for centuries, continues in the region's more remote corners, such as the Bauges massif and the wild Parc National de la Vanoise.

## Chamonix


POP 9050 / ELEV 1037M

With the sheer white heights of the Mont Blanc massif as its sensational backdrop, the Chamonix Valley shows the Alps at their most dramatic. First 'discovered' as a tourist destination by Brits William Windham and Richard Pococke in 1741, it has become a wintertime playground of epic proportions, more than satisfying the most demanding skiers as well as the après-ski revellers who pack themselves into its boot-stompin' bars. In summer, lift-accessible highland trails offer thrilling panoramas to hikers, mountain bikers and other high-altitude thrill seekers.

### Sights

#### ★ Aiguille du Midi

VIEWPOINT

( information 04 50 53 22 75; [www.compagniedumontblanc.co.uk](http://www.compagniedumontblanc.co.uk)) A great broken tooth of rock rearing among the Alpine fastness of the Mont Blanc massif, the Aiguille du Midi (3842m) is one of Chamonix' most distinctive geographical features. If you can handle the altitude, the 360-degree views of the French, Swiss and Italian Alps from the summit are (quite literally) breathtaking. Year-round, you can float in a cable car from Chamonix to the Aiguille du Midi on the

vertiginous **Téléphérique de l'Aiguille du Midi** (place de l'Aiguille du Midi; adult/child return to Aiguille du Midi €58.50/49.70, to Plan de l'Aiguille summer €31/26.40, winter €17/14.50; ☼ 1st ascent btwn 7.10am & 8.30am, last btwn 3.30pm & 5pm).


Up top, you can take in the view in literally every direction, including straight down, thanks to the glass-floored **Step into the Void**. Halfway up, **Plan de l'Aiguille** (2317m) is a terrific place to start hikes or to paraglide.

Bring warm clothes, as even in summer the temperature at the top rarely rises above -10°C (in winter be prepared for -25°C).



From the Aiguille du Midi, between late May and September, you can continue for a further 50 minutes of mind-blowing scenery - think glaciers and spurs, seracs and shimmering ice fields - in the smaller bubbles of the **Télécabine Panoramique Mont Blanc** (adult/child return from Chamonix €80/68; ☼ last departure from Aiguille du Midi 2.30pm) to Pointe Helbronner (3466m) on the France-Italy border. A new **cable car** ([www.montebianco.com](http://www.montebianco.com); Pointe Helbronner; one way adult/child €36/25.20; ☼ 8.30am-4.30pm, earlier starts in summer) can then take you a further 4km to the Val d'Aosta ski resort of Courmayeur, on the Italian side of Monte Bianco.



#### Le Brévent

VIEWPOINT

( information 04 50 53 22 75; [www.compagniedumontblanc.co.uk](http://www.compagniedumontblanc.co.uk)) The highest peak on the western side of the Chamonix Valley, Le Brévent (2525m) has tremendous views of the Mont Blanc massif, myriad hiking trails through a nature reserve, ledges to para-

### KIDDING AROUND CHAMONIX

There's plenty to amuse *les petits* (the little ones) around Chamonix. In the warm season, kids will love getting close to free-roaming chamois, ibex and whistling marmots at the **Parc de Merlet** ([www.parcdermerlet.com](http://www.parcdermerlet.com); 2495 chemin de Merlet, Les Houches; adult/child €7/4; ☼ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun May, Jun & Sep, 9.30am-7.30pm Jul & Aug, by appointment 4 Jan-31 Mar), 13km by road (5km on foot) southwest of central Chamonix in Coupeau (across the River Arve from Les Houches). Or treat them to a fun-packed day on the trampolines and funfair rides at the **Parc de Loisirs de Chamonix** ( 04 50 53 08 97; [www.chamonixparc.com](http://www.chamonixparc.com); 351, chemin du Pied du Grépon; 1 day ski passes €21.90, 1/10 luge rides €5.50/45; ☼ 11.30am-6pm high season, reduced hours other times), near the chairlift in Les Planards, 500m east of Gare du Montenvers; the 1.3km luge winds through trees at mind-blowing speeds. **Cham' Aventure** ( 04 50 53 55 70; [www.cham-aventure.com](http://www.cham-aventure.com); 190 place de l'Église, Maison de la Montagne) has a wide variety of outdoor programs for children aged three to seven, eight to 12, and 13 to 17.

Back in Chamonix, the indoor **ice-skating rink** ( 04 50 53 12 36; 165 rte de la Patinoire; adult/child €6.20/4.60, skate hire €4.10) provides amusement when the weather packs up, as do sports activities at the adjacent **Centre sportif Richard Bozon** ( 04 50 53 23 70; 214 av de la Plage; ☼ noon-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 2-7.30pm Sat & Sun), with indoor and (in summer) outdoor swimming pools.



## Chamonix

### 📍 Top Sights

- 1 Musée des Cristaux ..... A3

### 📍 Sights

- 2 Musée Alpin ..... B3

### 📍 Activities, Courses & Tours

- 3 Association Internationale des Guides du Mont Blanc ..... A5  
 4 Centre Sportif Richard Bozon ..... C1  
 5 Cham' Aventure ..... A3  
 6 Chamonix Experience ..... A6  
 7 Compagnie des Guides de Chamonix ..... A3  
 École de Ski Français ..... (see 5)  
 8 Ice-Skating Rink ..... C1  
 Maison de la Montagne ..... (see 7)  
 Office de Haute Montagne ..... (see 5)

### 📍 Sleeping

- 9 Auberge du Manoir ..... C3  
 10 Chalet-Hôtel Hermitage ..... D2  
 11 Club Alpin Français ..... B3

- 12 Grand Hôtel des Alpes ..... A4  
 13 Hotel L'Oustalet ..... B5  
 14 Hôtel Richemond ..... A4

### 📍 Eating

- 15 Extreme Café ..... B3  
 16 Hibou Deli ..... B1  
 17 Le Bistrot ..... A5  
 18 Le Cap Horn ..... B3  
 19 Le Chaudron ..... B3  
 20 Le GouThé ..... B3  
 21 Munchie ..... B3

### 📍 Drinking & Nightlife

- 22 Bar'd Up ..... B2  
 23 Bistrot des Sports ..... B2  
 24 Chambre Neuf ..... C4  
 25 Le Lapin Agile ..... B3  
 26 Les Caves ..... B3  
 27 MBC ..... D1

### 📍 Shopping

- 28 Cooperative Fruitière Val d'Arly ..... C3

## Mer de Glace

VIEWPOINT

(📞 information 04 50 53 22 75; [www.compagnie-dumontblanc.fr](http://www.compagnie-dumontblanc.fr)) France's largest glacier, the 200m-deep 'Sea of Ice', flows 7km down the northern side of Mont Blanc, moving up to 1cm an hour (about 90m a year). The **Train du Montenvers** (35 place de la Mer de Glace; adult/child return €31/26.40; 🕒 10am-4.30pm), a picturesque, 5km-long cog railway opened in 1909, links Gare du Montenvers with Montenvers (1913m), from where a cable car takes you down to the glacier and the **Grotte de Glace** (🕒 closed last half of May & late Sep-mid-Oct). Your ticket also gets you into the Glaciorium, which looks at the birth, life and future of glaciers.

On foot, the Mer de Glace can be reached from **Plan de l'Aiguille** on the **Grand Balcon Nord trail**. The two-hour uphill trail from Chamonix starts near the summer luge track. Traversing the crevassed glacier requires proper equipment and an experienced guide.

## ★ Musée des Cristaux

MUSEUM

(📞 04 50 55 53 93; [www.mineralogie-chamonix.org](http://www.mineralogie-chamonix.org); 615 allée Recteur Payot; adult/child €5.90/free; 🕒 2-6pm Sep-Jun, 10am-6pm Jul & Aug) Has a truly dazzling collection of crystals, rocks and minerals, many from around Mont Blanc. **L'Espace Alpinisme** focuses on the art and science of mountaineering with creative interactive displays and spectacular photos and videos of seemingly impossible ascents. Situated behind the church.

## Musée Alpin

MUSEUM

(📞 04 50 53 25 93; 89 av Michel Croz; adult/child €5.90/free; 🕒 2-6pm Wed-Mon Sep-Jun, 10am-noon & 2-7pm Wed-Mon Jul & Aug) Perhaps better titled the Musée Chamonix-Mont Blanc, this engaging little collection richly illustrates the area's long history of Alpine adventure, including the cliff-hanging feats of crystal-hunter Jacques Balmat and the first ascent of Mont Blanc by a woman (Marie Paradis, a local maidservant, in 1808). Ask at the ticket counter for printed information in English.

## 📍 Activities

### Maison de la Montagne

ADVENTURE SPORTS

(📞 04 50 53 27 74; 190 place de l'Église; 🕒 8.30am-noon & 3-7pm) Get the Mont Blanc low-down here, opposite the tourist office. Inside is the highly regarded **Compagnie des Guides de Chamonix** (📞 04 50 53 00 88; [www.chamonix-guides.com](http://www.chamonix-guides.com); 🕒 8.30am-noon & 2.30-7.30pm, closed Sun & Mon late Apr-mid-Jun & mid-Sep-mid-Dec); the **École de Ski Français** (ESF; 📞 04 50 53 22 57; [www.esfchamonix.com](http://www.esfchamonix.com); 🕒 8.15am-7pm ski season); and the **Office de Haute Montagne** (OHM; 📞 04 50 53 22 08; [www.ohm-chamonix.com](http://www.ohm-chamonix.com); 🕒 9am-noon & 3-6pm), which has information on trails, hiking conditions, weather forecasts and *refuges* (mountain huts), and topoguides and maps that are free to consult.

## Winter

Thrilling descents, glorious off-piste terrain and unbeatable Mont Blanc views – skiing in Chamonix is so darn fantastic that skiers don't even mind that accessing the slopes involves lots of land transport to and from the lifts. Of Chamonix' nine main areas, **Le Tour**, **Les Planards**, **Les Chosalets** and **La Vormaine** are best for beginners. For speed and challenge, it has to be **Brévent-Flégère**, above Chamonix, and **Les Grands Montets**, accessible from the attractive village of Argentière, 9km north of the town. Boarders seeking big air zip across to the kickers and rails at **Les Grands Montets snow park** and the natural halfpipe in **Le Tour**.

Chamonix' ski season runs from mid-December to mid-April.

## La Vallée Blanche

SKIING

(guided trips for 4 €310) This jaw-dropping 2800m descent is the off-piste ride of a lifetime. Beginning at the Aiguille du Midi, zip-ping over the crevasse-riddled Mer de Glace glacier and returning to Chamonix through the forest, it can only be tackled with a *guide de haute montagne* (specially trained mountain guide). Skiers should be red-piste level and in reasonable physical shape.

## Huskydalen

ADVENTURE SPORTS

(☎04 50 47 77 24; www.huskydalen.com; mushing per day adult/child €72/46; ☼Nov-Apr) One of two Chamonix outfits offering introductory mushing (dog sledding) courses.

## **i** LIFT PASSES

Details of the following passes can be viewed and purchases made online at [www.compagniedumontblanc.co.uk](http://www.compagniedumontblanc.co.uk).

**Chamonix Le Pass** (1/3/6 days €49/136/246) Gets you up to most Chamonix ski domains.

**Mont Blanc Multipass** (1/3/6 days €61/86/124) In summer, this pass affords access to all operating lifts.

**Mont Blanc Unlimited Pass** (1/3/6 days €60/176/293) A worthwhile investment for serious skiers, this pass grants access to 400km of runs, including all lifts in the Chamonix Valley, Courmayeur in Italy and Verbier in Switzerland, plus the Aiguille du Midi cable car and the Montanvers–Mer de Glace train.

## Summer

When enough snow melts (usually sometime in June), hikers can take their pick of 350km of spectacular high-altitude trails, many easy to get to by cable car (running mid-June to September). In June and July there's enough light to walk until at least 9pm.

*Balcon* (literally 'balcony') trails, both *grand* and *petit*, run along both sides of the valley, the former up at around 2000m, the latter a bit above the valley's villages.

## Lac Blanc Hike

WALKING

(www.compagniedumontblanc.co.uk) Two gentle hours from **Télesiège de l'Index** (adult/child one way from Les Praz €23/19.60; ☼Dec-Apr & Jun-Sep) leads along the western valley to stunning **Lac Blanc** (2352m). There's also the steeper trail from the **Téléphérique de la Flégère** (☎04 50 53 22 75; 35 rte des Tines; adult/child from Les Praz €13/11.70; ☼8.45am-4pm Dec-Apr & Jun-Sep) or the even more challenging 1050 vertical-metre hike from Argentière (3½ hours one way). Reserve a place at the **Refuge du Lac Blanc** (☎04 50 53 49 14; [refugedulacblanc@gmail.com](mailto:refugedulacblanc@gmail.com); dm incl half-board €55; ☼mid-Jun-Sep), a wooden chalet famed for its top-of-Europe Mont Blanc views.

## Grand Balcon Sud Trail

WALKING

This easygoing trail, linking **Col des Montets** (12km northeast of Chamonix) with **Les Houches** (8km southwest of Chamonix), skirts the western side of the valley at an altitude of around 2000m, commanding terrific views across the valley to Mont Blanc. To avoid hoofing it 900m up the slope, take the Téléphérique de la Flégère from Les Praz or the Télécabine de Planpraz (p480) from Chamonix; walking between the two takes about two hours. A variety of other great trails begins at the top of both these lifts.

## Grand Balcon Nord Trail

HIKING

Trails you can pick up at **Plan de l'Aiguille** – halfway up the Téléphérique de l'Aiguille du Midi (p479) – include the challenging Grand Balcon Nord, which takes you to the dazzling Mer de Glace, from where you can walk or take the Train du Montanvers (p481) down to Chamonix.

## Cycling

Lower-altitude trails such as the Petit Balcon Sud from Argentière to Servoz are perfect for biking. Most outdoor-activity specialists arrange guided mountain-biking expeditions.

**Zero G**

CYCLING

(☎ 04 50 53 01 01; www.zerogchamonix.com; 90 ave Ravel-le-Rouge; ☀ 9am-12.30pm & 3.30-7pm) Rents out good-quality mountain bikes, as well as snowboards and gear.

**Paragliding**

Come summer, the sky above Chamonix is speckled with colourful paragliders wheeling down from the heights. Tandem flights from Planpraz (2000m) cost €100 per person; from the Aiguille du Midi, count on paying €220.

**Sleeping**

You need to book ahead in winter and in July and August. Many places close for a while in the spring and autumn.

The prices quoted below are for the winter high season. Rates are significantly lower in July and August, and even lower in spring and autumn.

**Club Alpin Français** ACCOMMODATION SERVICES €

(☎ 04 50 53 16 03; www.clubalpin-chamonix.com; 136 av Michel Croz; ☀ 4-6.45pm Tue-Sat) For details on staying in a *refuge* (mountain hut with bunk beds) high on the Mont Blanc massif, contact the Club Alpin Français. Expect to pay around €25 for a dorm bed and €40 to €50 for half-board. Meals are simple, hearty and prepared by the hut-keeper.

**Gîte Le Vagabond**

HOSTEL €

(☎ 04 50 53 15 43; www.gitevagabond.com; 365 av Ravel-le-Rouge; dm/sheets €21/5.50, d incl breakfast €101; ☀ reception 8-10am & 4.30-10.30pm; 📶) In the 150-year-old Le Brévent, once a stagecoach inn for travellers to Switzerland, Le Vagabond is Chamonix' hippest bunkhouse. It has rooms with four to six beds and a buzzing bar with a great log fire in winter. It's 850m southwest of the town centre.

**★ Hôtel Richemond**

HOTEL €€

(☎ 04 50 53 08 85; www.richemond.fr; 228 rue du Docteur Paccard; s/d/tr €66.60/103.20/136.40; ☀ mid-Dec-mid-Apr & mid-Jun-mid-Sep; 📶) In a grand old building constructed in 1914 (and run by the same family ever since), this hotel – as friendly as it is central – has 52 spacious rooms with views of either Mont Blanc or Le Brévent; some are pleasantly old-fashioned (retaining original furniture and cast-iron bath-tubs), others are recently renovated in white, black and beige. Outstanding value.

**ADVENTURE GUIDES**

It takes three years of rigorous training to become an *accompagnateur en moyenne montagne* (mountain leader) and a full five years to be certified as a *guide de haute montagne* (high-mountain guide); only the latter are authorised to lead groups on to glaciers or on mountaineering climbs requiring specialised equipment. Recommended companies include the following:

➔ **Compagnie des Guides de Chamonix** (p481)

➔ **Association Internationale des Guides du Mont Blanc** (☎ 04 50 53 27 05; www.guides-du-montblanc.com; 9 passage de la Varlope)

➔ **Chamonix Experience** (☎ 09 77 48 58 69; www.chamex.com; 49 place Edmond Desaillood; ☀ 8.30-11am & 3-7pm 1 Dec-5 May & 1 Jun-30 Sep)

**Auberge du Manoir**

HOTEL €€

(☎ 04 50 53 10 77; www.aubergedumanoir.com; 8 rte du Bouchet; s/d/q €133/154/225; ☀ closed 2 weeks late Apr & 2 months autumn; 📶) This beautifully converted farmhouse, ablaze with geraniums in summer, offers 18 pine-panelled rooms that are quaint but never cloying, pristine mountain views, an outdoor hot tub, a sauna and a bar whose open fire keeps things cosy. It's family-owned, and prices fall during the week and in low season.

**Le Vert Hôtel**

HOTEL €€€

(☎ 04 50 53 13 58; www.verthotel.com; 964 rte des Gaillands; s/d/tr/q with breakfast €90/125/155/195; 📶) This lively, British-owned hotel has 21 compact rooms – all with new bathrooms, some with fantastic Aiguille du Midi views. There's also a more-than-decent restaurant (dinner *menu* €22.50), a bar that regularly hosts international acts (Gilles Peterson and Krafty Kutz, to name two) and in-house equipment rental. *Navettes* (shuttle buses) to central Chamonix, 2km to the northeast, stop right outside.

**Grand Hôtel des Alpes**

HISTORIC HOTEL €€

(☎ 04 50 55 37 80; www.grandhoteldesalpes.com; 75 rue du Docteur Paccard; d/ste €171/350; ☀ closed mid-Apr-mid-Jun & late Sep-mid-Dec; 📶 📺 🍷) Established in 1840, this grand old dame and her 30 rooms exude timeless elegance. In winter a scrumptious and very

## DON'T MISS

## ROOM WITH A VIEW

Run by the same family since 1908, **Hôtel Aiguille du Midi** (☎04 50 53 00 65; [www.hotel-aiguilledumidi.com](http://www.hotel-aiguilledumidi.com); 479 chemin Napoléon, Les Bossons; d €77-158, q €198; ☺ mid-Dec-early Apr & mid-May-Sep; ☺☺) has stunning views of the Aiguille du Midi and Mont Blanc. There are 39 cosy, pine-panelled rooms, an outdoor heated pool and a clay tennis court for summer fun, and a very good restaurant, accessible on half-board packages. Bus and train stops to ChamoniX are right around the corner.

civilised teatime cake buffet (4pm to 6pm) greets skiers back from the slopes.

**Hotel L'Oustalet**

HOTEL €€

(☎04 50 55 54 99; [www.hotel-oustalet.com](http://www.hotel-oustalet.com); 330 rue du Lyret; d/q €155/200; ☺ mid-Dec-mid-May & mid-Jun-mid-Oct; ☺☺) A block from the Aiguille du Midi cable car, this lift-equipped hotel has 15 decent rooms, snugly built of thick pine, that open on to balconies with Mont Blanc views. To unwind, you can curl up by the fire with a *chocolat chaud* or loll about in the Jacuzzi, *hammam* or sauna – or, in summer, take a dip in the garden pool.

**Chalet-Hôtel Hermitage**

HOTEL €€€

(☎04 50 53 13 87; [www.hermitage-paccard.com](http://www.hermitage-paccard.com); 63 chemin du Cé; d €216-275, ste €456; ☺ closed late Apr-mid-Jun & late Sep-mid-Dec; ☺) A family-run treasure, with an open fire crackling in the bar, a kids' playroom and flowery gardens. Decked out from tip to toe in larch wood, the 28 rooms blend traditional Alpine style with mod cons (eg two-person bathtubs) and afford mountain views. There's also a spa and bar to get you back into shape at the end of the day.

**Eating****Hibou Deli**

DELI €

(☎04 50 96 65 13; [www.hibou-chamonix.com](http://www.hibou-chamonix.com); 416 rue Joseph Vallot; mains €8-10; ☺ 11am-9pm mid-Dec-early May & mid-Jun-early Oct; ☺) This tiny shopfront kitchen, owned by a British chef, pumps out fantastic Asian and North African-inflected dishes to takeaway. The lamb *mechoui* is rubbed with spices and cooked over 24 hours to an almost buttery consistency, the Bangkok chicken is fragrant with limes leaves and coconut, and there's always

plenty of veggie options and an interesting *plat de jour*.

**Le GouThé**

DELI €

(☎04 50 78 36 20; [www.legouthé.weebly.com](http://www.legouthé.weebly.com); 95 rue des Moulins; light mains €4-8; ☺ 9am-7pm Jun-Apr; ☺) This sweet tearoom serves tea, coffee and 15 kinds of hot chocolate as well as salads, quiche, sweet and savoury crêpes, muffins and fruit tarts by the metre (apple and rhubarb, pear and cardamom and other combinations).

**Extreme Café**

CAFE €

(☎04 50 21 99 45; 21 place Balmat; light meals €6-7; ☺ 8am-7pm; ☺) If you're watching your pennies in ChamoniX, this little snack bar is good for a cheap panino, glass of wine (from €2.90 a glass) or smoothie (€3.90). There's also free wi-fi and a terrace, heated in winter.

**★ Le Cap Horn**

MODERN FRENCH €€

(☎04 50 21 80 80; [www.caphorn-chamonix.com](http://www.caphorn-chamonix.com); 78 rue des Moulins; lunch menus €20, dinner menus €32-39; ☺ noon-3pm & 7-10.30pm) Housed in a gorgeous, two-storey chalet decorated with model sailing boats – joint homage to the Alps and Cape Horn – this highly praised restaurant, opened in 2012, serves French and Asian-inflected dishes such as pan-seared duck breast with honey and soy sauce, fisherman's stew and, for dessert, *soufflé au Grand Marnier*. Reserve for dinner Friday and Saturday in winter and summer.

**Le Chaudron**

FRENCH €€

(☎04 50 53 40 34; [www.le-chaudron-chamonix.com](http://www.le-chaudron-chamonix.com); 79 rue des Moulins; menus €27-34; ☺ 7-9.30pm or later mid-Dec-Apr & mid-Jun-Sep) Making stylish yet cosy use of a 100-year-old mule stable (the faux cowhide recalling its rustic origins) The Cauldron is guaranteed to give you a warm inner glow on a cold winter's day. Go-to dishes include terrine of Beaufort cheese and beef cheek, slow-cooked in red wine and served with creamy risotto.

**Munchie**

FUSION €€

(☎04 50 53 45 41; [www.munchie.eu](http://www.munchie.eu); 87 rue des Moulins; mains €22-24; ☺ 7pm-2am winter & summer) Franco-Asian-Scandinavian fusion may not be a tried-and-true recipe for success, but this casual, Swedish-skipped restaurant has been making diners happy since 1997. Dishes such as Sichuan-spiced lamb tatak, Japanese coconut rice with egg yolk confit and Thai 'pesto', and cod with ash and leek are so popular that reservations are recommended during the ski season.

**Le Bistrot**MODERN FRENCH **ccc**

(☎) 04 50 53 57 64; [www.lebistrotchamonix.com](http://www.lebistrotchamonix.com); 151 av de l'Aiguille du Midi; lunch menus €20, dinner menus €55-85; ☀ noon-1.30pm & 7-9pm) Sleek and hushed, this is a real gastronome's paradise. Chef Daniele Raimondi, a protégé of Alain Ducasse, experiments with textures and seasonal flavours in creations such as duck breast with polenta, turnip and sour cherry sauce; pan-fried scallops with pumpkin, truffle and hazelnuts; and chocolate and coriander profiteroles with vanilla ice cream.

**Drinking & Nightlife**

Whether you're looking for a glammed-up cocktail bar, a spit-and-sawdust pub, or something in between, Chamonix nightlife rocks. For a bar crawl, head (along with the locals) to central rue des Moulins, where wall-to-wall watering holes keep buzzing until about 1am.

**MBC**

MICROBREWERY

(Micro Brasserie de Chamonix; ☎ 04 50 53 61 59; [www.mbcx.com](http://www.mbcx.com); 350 rte du Bouchet; ☀ 4pm-2am winter & summer, to 1am spring & autumn) Run by the last man standing of four Canadian founders, this buzzing microbrewery is one of Chamonix' most unpretentious and gregarious watering holes. Be it with their phenomenal burgers (€10 to €15), chilli-licked wings (12 for €5.25 – half-price – on Monday), live music (from 9pm) or great craft

beer, MBC delivers. Busiest from 5pm to 11pm.

**Chambre Neuf**

BAR

(☎ 04 50 53 00 31; [www.hotelgustavia.eu](http://www.hotelgustavia.eu); 272 av Michel Croz; ☀ 7am-1am; ☎) Chamonix' most spirited après-ski party (4pm to 8pm), fuelled by a Swedish band and dancing on the tables, spills out the front door of Chambre Neuf. Wildly popular with seasonal workers, it opens its terrace in spring.

**Bar'd Up**

BAR

(123 rue des Moulins; ☀ 3pm-late) This 'Australian' dive bar is one of the friendliest, grungiest places in Cham. A pool table, scuffed arcade-game tables and low ceiling set the scene; the reasonable drinks, merry *seasonaires* and music (live and recorded) finish the job.

**Les Caves**

BAR

(☎ 04 50 21 80 80; [www.caphorn-chamonix.com](http://www.caphorn-chamonix.com); 80 rue des Moulins; ☀ 6pm-2am mid-Dec–Oct) Spread over four levels, with cosy hidden corners and sheepskin seats, this futuristic/rustic disco chalet transforms itself from a quiet cocktail bar into a buzzing danceteria after 10.30pm. Hungry? Order food from adjacent Le Cap Horn.

**Jekyll & Hyde**

PUB

(☎ 04 50 55 99 70; [www.thejekyll.com](http://www.thejekyll.com); 71 rte des Pélerinins, Chamonix Sud; ☀ 4pm-2am Mon-Fri, opens earlier Sat & Sun; ☎) This British-owned

**LOCAL KNOWLEDGE****A TRADITIONAL FOREST LUNCH**

A wooden forest chalet is the setting for Chef Claudy's world-famous *croûte aux fromages* (bread drenched in a secret white-wine sauce, topped with cheese and baked) at **Crèmerie du Glacier** (☎ 04 50 54 07 52; [www.lacremierieduglacier.fr](http://www.lacremierieduglacier.fr); 766 chemin de la Glacière; lunch menus €13, fondue €15-20; ☀ lunch & dinner mid-Dec–mid-May & late Jun–mid-Sep, closed Wed in winter). Other cheesy Savoyard delights here include nine kinds of fondue. Reserve by phone and follow the signpost from the roundabout near the bridge at the southern entrance to Argentière.

To get here, you have several options. In winter, ski down on Piste de la Pierre à Ric (red) or cross-country ski over on Piste de la Moraine. In summer, hike over from the Petit Balcon Nord trail, 15 minutes away. In winter or summer, walk or drive east for about 1km from the base of Téléphérique Lognan-Les Grands Montets; take one-lane chemin de la Glacière in summer and equally narrow chemin de la Rosière in winter.

**Les Vieilles Luges** (☎ 06 84 42 37 00; [www.lesvieillesluges.com](http://www.lesvieillesluges.com); Les Houches; menus €20-35; ☀ lunch daily winter, lunch & dinner by reservation summer, min 25 people) is an impossibly atmospheric 250-year-old farmhouse that can only be reached on skis or by a scenic 20-minute hike from the Maison Neuve chairlift. Hunker under low wood beams to savour dishes such as *grand-mère's* bœuf bourguignon and creamy *farçon* (potato bake prepared with prunes, bacon and cream), washed down with *vin chaud* (mulled wine) warmed over a wood fire. Magic.

après-ski mainstay has a split personality: upstairs the 'Jekyll' has really good pub food (try the steak-and-Guinness pie), live music (Wednesday, Thursday and Sunday from 9.30pm) and DJs; downstairs, the 'Hyde' is cosier and more relaxed. Both have good Irish beer and a friendly vibe, and can be found 350m southwest of the Téléphérique de l'Aiguille du Midi.

### Le Lapin Agile

WINE BAR

(☎ 04 50 53 33 25; www.lapinagile.fr; 11 rue Whymper; ☺ noon-3pm Wed-Sun, 7-10pm Tue-Sun early Dec-mid-May & late Jun-mid-Oct; ☎) This relaxed Italianate wine bar has an extensive choice of *vino* and a free *aperitivo* buffet from 6.30pm to 8pm daily. The Rabbit can also manage more substantial plates (mains €18 to €20), including plenty for vegetarians: perhaps a plate of charcuterie imported from Tuscany, or *fusilli* with mushrooms and Veronese radicchio.

### Bistrot des Sports

PUB

(☎ 04 50 53 00 46; 182 rue Joseph Vallot; ☺ 8am-2am, when busy) Founded in 1878 to cater to muleteers, guides and other mountain folk, this classic pub-cum-bistro is where old-time climbing parties used to assemble before setting out to conquer Mont Blanc, and where many locals and seasonal workers still choose to unwind. The seating area was built for the 1924 Winter Olympics.

### Cooperative Fruitière Val d'Arly

FOOD

(☎ 04 50 93 15 89; www.coopflumet.com; 93 rue Whymper; ☺ 9am-7.30pm) A shopfront for a venerable collective of more than 70 artisanal producers, this *fruitsière* is the best place in Chamonix to stock up on Reblochon, *raclette*, Tomme de Savoie, Morteau sausage and all those other Savoyard delicacies.

## i Information

**PGHM** (☎ 04 50 53 16 89; www.pghm-chamonix.com; 69 rue de la Mollard) Mountain-rescue service for the Mont Blanc area.

**Tourist Office** (☎ 04 50 53 00 24; www.chamonix.com; 85 place du Triangle de l'Amitié; ☺ 8.30am-7pm winter & summer, 9am-12.30pm & 2-6pm in low season; ☎) Information on accommodation, activities, the weather and cultural events.

## i Getting There & Away

### BUS

Chamonix' **bus station** (☎ 04 50 53 01 15; 234 av Courmayeur, Chamonix Sud; ☺ 8am-noon &

1.15-6.30pm in winter, shorter hours rest of year) has moved to av Courmayeur, Chamonix Sud.

**Geneva, Switzerland** (airport and bus station) One way/return €25/50, 1½ to two hours, eight daily in winter, six at other times. Operated by **Starshipper** (☎ 04 56 12 40 59; www.starshipper.com).

**Courmayeur, Italy** One way/return €15/21, 45 minutes, four daily. Run by **Savda** (☎ +39 01 65 36 70 11; www.savda.it), with onward connections to Aosta and Milan.

See the websites or drop by the bus station for timetables and reservations (highly recommended).

### CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Chamonix is linked to Courmayeur in Italy's Val d'Aosta by the 11.5km-long **Tunnel de Mont Blanc** (www.atmb.com; toll one way/return €43.40/54.30).

When the Col des Montets (between Argentière and Vallorcine) is closed by snow, signs will direct you to drive through the rail tunnel. Current conditions can be found at www.chamonix.com.

The valley's only car-hire company is **Europcar** (☎ 03 71 38 40 23 5; www.europcar.com; 36 place de la Gare; ☺ 8.30am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Sat).

### TRAIN

The scenic, narrow-gauge **Mont Blanc Express** glides from St-Gervais-Le-Fayet to the Swiss town of Martigny, taking in Les Houches, Chamonix, Argentière and Vallorcine en route.

From St-Gervais-Le-Fayet, there are somewhat infrequent trains to cities around France, often with a change in Bellegarde or Annecy. Destinations include the following:

**Annecy** €15.70, 1½ hours, 12 daily

**Lyon** €36.60, 3½ to five hours, 10 daily

**Paris** €98.50 to €128, 4¾ to seven hours, 11 daily

## i Getting Around

### BUS

Public buses run by **Chamonix Bus** (www.chamonix-bus.com) serve all the towns, villages, ski lifts and attractions in the Chamonix Valley, from Argentière (Col des Montets in summer) in the northeast, to Servoz and Les Houches in the southwest.

The buses all travel circuits that include the **bus station** in Chamonix Sud throughout the year, and have added destinations and are more frequent in winter (mid-December to mid-April) and summer (late June to early September).

All buses are free with a Carte d'Hôte (Guest Card), except the wintertime Chamo' Nuit night buses linking Chamonix with Argentière and Les Houches (last departures from Chamonix 11.30pm or midnight; €2).

## LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

## Megève & St-Gervais

POP 8925

Megève, 20km due west of Mont Blanc, was developed in the 1920s for Baroness de Rothschild of the famous banking family, who found Switzerland's overcrowded St-Moritz frankly rather tiresome. Today this rustically charming ski village looks almost too perfect to be true: horse-drawn carriages and exquisitely arranged boutique windows spill into its cobbled, medieval-style streets lined with chalets. In winter, Megève attracts a well-off crowd (including lots of families), but the scene is more laid-back in summer.

Slightly lower down the valley, unpretentious St-Gervais-les-Bains is linked to Chamionix by the legendary Mont Blanc Express train. Most of the town is undistinguished 20th-century sprawl, but the lovely central square, with its baroque church, has a distinctly Alpine feel.



### Activities

Megève's **Palais des Sports** (📞 04 50 21 59 09; www.megeve.fr/index.php/sport; 247 rte du Palais des Sports, Megève; 1 session €11.50; ☀️ 9.30am-7pm Thu-Tue, to 8.30pm Wed) has plenty of active distractions, year-round, and the town is known for having lots of kid-friendly activities.

### Bureau des Guides

OUTDOORS

(📞 04 50 21 55 11; www.guides-megeve.com; 76 rue Ambroise Martin, Maison de la Montagne, Megève; ☀️ 9.30am-12.30pm & 3-7pm, closed Sat & Sun low season) Open throughout the year, the Mountain Guides organise activities such as ice climbing, snowshoeing, rock climbing, canyoning and trail running.

### Tramway du Mont Blanc

CABLE CAR

(📞 04 50 53 22 75; www.compagniedumontblanc.co.uk; rue de la Gare, St-Gervais; return to Bellevue/Nid d'Aigle €31/36; ☀️ 5 departures daily mid-Dec-early Apr, 8 daily early Jun-early Jul & late Aug-mid-Sep) Since 1907, France's highest rack-and-pinion railway has ascended from St-Gervais-Le-Fayet (590m) to Bellevue (1800m; one hour). In summer, when you can hike back down, it climbs all the way to Nid d'Aigle, on the cusp of the Bionnassay glacier (2482m; 80 minutes).

### Winter

Having the Mont Blanc massif as a backdrop makes for fabulously scenic **skiing** in areas accessible both from Megève and, via the St-Gervais-Bettex cable car, from near the

## THE POTTER BEHIND THE CHURCH

His name is Monsieur Baranger, but he prefers to be called 'the potter behind the church' – and that's precisely where you will find his rambling, poster-plastered **workshop and gallery** in the centre of St-Gervais. An eccentric and something of a local legend, M Baranger can often be seen at his wheel, where he throws pots, plates, ornaments and vases, which are then glazed in earthy shades of blue and cream. His workshop is open *quand vous voyez de la lumière* (when the lights are on).

centre of St-Gervais (www.ski-saintgervais.com). Downhill runs are divided between three separate collections of slopes: **Mont d'Arbois-St-Gervais**, **Le Jaillet-Combloux-La Giétaz** and **Rochebrune-Cote 2000**. Skiing here is mostly for beginners and cruisy intermediates, though there are also some black runs – all told, the area has 445km of well-groomed pistes to play on. For a lift pass, go to www.ski-megeve.com.

### Summer

In summer, both towns make superb bases for **hiking**, with trails for walkers and hikers of all levels, including young children. Panoramic trails abound, including many in the Bettex, Mont d'Arbois and Mont Joly (2525m) areas. Tourist offices sell IGN hiking maps (€6).

Some of the best **mountain-biking** terrain, with downhill runs accessible by lift, is between Val d'Arly, Mont Blanc and Beaufortain. Bikes can be rented in Megève.

### Bungee Mont Blanc Elastique

ADVENTURE SPORTS

(Viaduc de St-Gervais; 1/2 jumps €80/115; ☀️ Sat & Sun Apr-Nov plus weekdays Jul & Aug) Plunge 65m from the new road bridge in St-Gervais, directly above a waterfall on the River Bonnant.



### Information

**Megève Tourist Office** (📞 04 50 21 27 28; www.megeve.com; 70 rue de Monseigneur Conseil; ☀️ 9am-7pm high season, 12.30pm & 2-6.30pm Mon-Sat other times; 📞) Can help with accommodation and reserve events tickets; it's situated in the pedestrian zone in the centre of town.

**St-Gervais Tourist Office** (☎ 04 50 47 76 08; www.saintgervais.com; 43 rue du Mont-Blanc; ☀ 9am-12.30pm & 2-6pm or later Mon-Sat, also Sun high season; ♿) Can help find accommodation.

## **i** Getting There & Away

### BUS

**Geneva airport** From late December to March, **Starshipper** (p486) links Megève with the airport (€25, 1½ hours, eight daily). Reserve at least 24 hours ahead.

**Sallanches** Bus 83 goes from Megève's bus station to this nearby railhead (€3.50, 25 minutes, six to nine daily Monday to Saturday, also Sunday in high season).

## Les Portes du Soleil

Grandly dubbed 'the Gates of the Sun' (elevation 1000m to 2466m), this gargantuan ski area – the world's largest, if you accept their measurements – encompasses 12 villages on both sides of the unguarded France-Switzerland border. Access to Les Portes du Soleil is easy – by car, it's just 1¼ hours from Geneva airport.

The best known of the villages is **Morzine** (elevation 1000m), which retains some traditional Alpine charm, especially in summer, when visits to *fruitières* (cheese dairies) and traditional slate workshops are popular.

Small, trend-conscious **Avoriaz** (elevation 1800m), a purpose-built ski resort a few kilometres up the valley atop a rock, is completely free of cars. Horse-drawn sleighs (or snowcats) piled high with luggage romantically ferry new arrivals to and from the snowy village centre, enlivened by wacky 1960s architecture.

Arriving by road via Cluses, you hit the smaller ski station of **Les Gets** (elevation 1172m), a family favourite.

## **+** Activities

### Bureau des Guides

OUTDOORS

(☎ 04 50 75 96 65; www.guides-morzine.com/en; 23 Taille de Mas du Plény, Morzine) The Bureau has all the information you need for guided off-piste skiing, and for warm-weather frolics such as hiking, biking, climbing, canyoning and paragliding, and **La Noire de Morzine**, Morzine's heart-stopping 3.2km, 500-vertical-metre bike descent from the top of the Plénéy cable car. A high-mountain guide will set you back at least €360 per day.

### Winter

Depending on how they're measured, between 450km and 650km of **downhill** slopes criss-cross Les Portes du Soleil, served by a whopping 199 lifts covered by a single trans-frontier ski pass (per day/week €49.50/279; 30% off online passes for Tuesdays and Thursdays, January and late season). The area's most famous piste is **Le Pas de Chavanette**, better known as the Swiss Wall, which is so steep and moguled that on the European green-blue-red-black scale it's rated orange (double black).

Frequent powder, nursery slopes for little kids, toboggan runs, a new indoor swimming pool, children's clubs and snow play areas make Les Portes du Soleil a great choice for families. **Morzine** offers ideal beginner and intermediate terrain, with scenic runs through the trees for windy days. The snowsure slopes of higher-elevation **Avoriaz** are great for intermediate skiers but can also challenge the more advanced. Plus, it's freestyle heaven for **snowboarders**, with five snow parks to play in and a fantastic super-pipe near the top of the Prodains cable car.

### Summer

In summer, the slopes attract **mountain bikers**, with invigorating routes such as the 90km circular Tour des Portes du Soleil,

## TRAINS FROM MEGÈVE & ST-GERVAIS

The train station nearest Megève is 12km north in Sallanches; bus 83 connects the two towns. The St-Gervais-Le-Fayet train station is 2km northwest of the centre of St-Gervais. If you're heading to Chamonix, change here for the Mont Blanc Express. Destinations include the following:

TO	FARE (€)	TIME	FREQUENCY
Anancy	15.70	1½hr	4-7 daily
Chamonix	11.20	40min	almost hourly
Geneva (Cornavin)	23.50	2½hr	7-8 daily
Lyon	37	3½-4hr	14 daily
Paris Gare de Lyon	92-121	5-7hr	1-2 per hr

while **walkers** can pick and choose from 800km of marked trails. The extensive summer lift network (late June to early September; €24.50/110 per day/week) takes the slog out of reaching higher altitudes.

### Plénégé Cable Car

CABLE CAR

(summer day pass €24.50) Linking Morzine with Le Gets in the ski season, this gondola, opened in 2013, is also open to bikers and walkers from June to September.

## Sleeping & Eating

Morzine, Avoriaz and Les Gets have the greatest range and extent of accommodation options. As always, book well ahead on weekends and during French school holidays.

### Fleur des Neiges

HOTEL €€

(☎ 04 50 79 01 23; www.hotel-fleur-des-neiges.fr; 227 Taille de Mas de Nant Crue, Morzine; per person per week incl breakfast/half-board €749/917; ☺ mid-Dec–mid-Apr & late Jun–early Sep; 🍷 🍷) A cheery welcome, 31 natural-timber rooms, a sauna, a pool and great food (cooked by long-term chef Patrick) await at this family-run chalet. Situated five long blocks northwest of the tourist office, it's within walking distance of the Super Morzine gondola. Prices drop by more than a third in low season.

### ★ The Farmhouse

BOUTIQUE HOTEL €€€

(☎ 04 50 79 08 26; www.thefarmhouse.fr; Le Mas de la Coutettaz, Morzine; d incl half-board €224-478; ☺ mid-Dec–mid-Apr & Jun–mid-Sep; 🍷) This welcoming British-owned guesthouse has 11 rooms spread across a gorgeous pre-Revolutionary manor house and its delightful gardens. Dining is a lavish, candlelit affair around a banquet table; in summer it's a B&B, and in winter (when a one-week minimum applies) it offers half-board. Situated 600m southeast of Morzine's tourist office.

### La Ferme de la Fruitière

FRENCH €€

(☎ 04 50 79 77 70; www.alpage-morzine.com; 337 rte de la Plagne, Morzine; mains €18-22; ☺ 10am-2pm & 5pm-midnight) Attached to the Fruitière L'Alpage (a working dairy farm and cheesemaker) this top-notch Savoyard restaurant smells cheesy, in the best possible way. Either watch the golden wheels of Reblochon, Comté and Tomme ripening in the glass-walled downstairs dining room, or toast yourself by the upstairs fireplace as you tuck into the very best fondue, *crozets* and smoked Alpine sausage. Damaged by fire shortly after we visited, it was temporarily closed for repairs in 2016.

## LES PORTES DU SOLEIL CENT SAVER

Les Portes du Soleil's hottest summer deal is the **Multipass**, which costs €2/8 per day/week if you're staying here and €8 for day-trippers. Available from early June to early September, the pass covers cable cars and chairlifts (some of which only run from late June) for hikers, as well as access to sporting facilities such as tennis courts, ice rinks and swimming pools.

### Le Clin d'Oeil

FRENCH €€

(☎ 04 50 79 03 10; www.restaurant-leclin.com; 63 rte du Plan, Morzine; menus €15-41; ☺ noon-2pm & 7-9.30pm Mon-Fri, 7-9.30pm Sat & Sun; 🍷) Brings the food of southwestern France to the Alps. The all-wood interior is inviting for rich, brothy *cassoulet* or duck leg with prunes and Armagnac in winter, while the flowery patio is ideal for lighter dishes such as risotto and seafood in summer. It's down the hill, near the church.

## Information

**Avoriaz Tourist Office** (☎ 04 50 74 02 11; www.avoriaz.com; 44 promenade des Festivals, Avoriaz; ☺ 8.30am-12.30pm & 1.30-7pm daily Dec-Mar, 9am-noon & 2-7pm daily Apr, 9am-12.30pm & 2-7pm daily Jul & Aug, 9am-midday & 2-5pm Mon-Fri May, Jun & Sep-Nov; 🍷) Can book self-catering chalets and studios.

**Morzine Tourist Office** (☎ 04 50 74 72 72; www.morzine-avoriaz.com; 26 place du Baraty, Morzine; ☺ 8.30am-7.30pm winter & summer, 8.30am-noon & 2-7.30pm Mon-Sat spring & autumn; 🍷) Has excellent brochures in English and can help find accommodation.

## Getting There & Away

Les Portes du Soleil is easy to get to from Geneva airport, 83km to the west.

During the ski season **Altibus** (www.sat-leman.com) links the area's resorts with Geneva's airport and bus station (one way/return €30/55, two hours, three daily Friday to Monday, daily in school holidays) and the railheads of Thonon-les-Bains (one way/return €11/22, one hour, one to six daily) and Cluses (one way/return €11/22, one hour, four to 10 daily). To make reservations (required), call ☎ 08 20 32 03 68.

Within the Morzine area, free shuttle buses (seven lines in winter, one in summer) serve all the lifts.

## Évian-les-Bains

POP 8527

The elegant belle-époque spa town of Évian, a favourite country retreat of the Dukes of Savoy, sits grandly on the southern shore of Lake Geneva. Its spas, flowery parks and stately buildings draw crowds mainly in summer.

Discovered in 1790 and bottled since 1826, the mineral water that has made the town famous takes at least 15 years to trickle down through the Chablais Mountains, gathering minerals en route, before emerging at 11.4°C.

### Sights & Activities

Évian is compact and easily explored on foot. Facing the flowery **lakefront promenade** (along quai Baron de Blonay and quai Paul Léger) are a number of impressive Victorian and belle-époque buildings, including (from east to west): the **Palais Lumière** (☎04 50 83 15 90; www.ville-evian.fr/fr/culture/palais-lumiere; Quai Charles-Albert-Besson; ☺ Tue-Sun 10am-7pm, 2-7pm Mon); the **Villa Lumière** (☎04 50 83 10 00; www.ville-evian.fr; rue de la Source de Clermont; ☺ 9-11am & 1.30-5pm Mon-Fri) **FREE**; the **Théâtre** (☎04 50 26 85 00; www.ville-evian.fr; quai Besson) and the **Casino** (☎04 50 26 87 87; www.casino-evian.com; quai Baron-de-Blonay; ☺ 10am-2am Mon-Thu, to 3am Fri-Sun).

### Source Cachat

SPRING

(20 av des Sources; ☺ 24hr) **FREE** Drink your fill of pure Évian at this outdoor tap, the original source of the world-famous water. In a little colonnaded pavilion painted pink and white, it's a block up the hill from 19 rue Nationale (Évian's pedestrianised main drag), to the right as you face the horse-shoe-shaped staircase. The glass, wood and wrought-iron building across the street is the **Buvette Cachat**, an art-nouveau masterpiece from 1903.

### Les Thermes Évian

SPA

(☎04 50 75 02 30; www.lesthermesevian.com; place de la Libération; treatments from €35; ☺ 9am-7.30pm Mon-Fri, to 6pm Sat) Ever dream of bathing in pure Évian mineral water? With medical spa treatments, fitness programs and a 'wellness centre' – all renovated in 2012 – these baths can make that luxurious dream come true. Reserve ahead, bring a swimsuit, bathing cap and flip-flops, and find the complex 700m east of the tourist office.

## CGN Boats to Lausanne

BOATING

(www.cgn.ch; return €33) Join local commuters for the scenic, 35-minute boat ride to the Swiss city of Lausanne. Boats depart from the Port de Commerce every hour or two.

### Sleeping

#### Hôtel Continental

HOTEL €

(☎04 50 75 37 54; www.hotel-continental-evian.com; 65 rue Nationale; s/d/tr €60/78/95; ☎) Owned by a Franco-American couple (Catherine is French, Mike is from North Carolina), this atmospheric hotel, built in 1868, has 32 rooms with belle-époque furnishings, chandeliers, high ceilings and a handsome central staircase connecting all four floors. It's very central (250m southeast of the tourist office) and excellent value.

### Information

**Tourist Office** (☎04 50 75 04 26; www.evian-tourisme.com; place de la Port d'Allinges; ☺ 9am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Sat Sep-Apr, 9am-noon & 2-6pm daily May & Jun, 9am-6pm daily Jul & Aug; ☎) Has information on accommodation, activities, sights and historical walking tours, plus free wi-fi.

## Anancy

POP 54,087 / ELEV 447M

Reclining gracefully by the shores of its mountain-fringed lake, cut by limpid canals, studded with geranium-bedecked houses, and dominated by its turreted château, Anancy is one of the ornaments of Savoie. Made great by the medieval Counts of Geneva, augmented by the Dukes of Savoy, it's kept much of its stunning *vieille ville* (old town), despite being capital of the modern *département* of Haute-Savoie.

The purity of the lake and the beauty of its setting compels Annéciens outdoors – in good weather it seems everyone is hanging out in pavement cafes, mountain-gazing along the lakefront, swimming in the lake, or just aimlessly cycling around it.

### Sights

It's a pleasure simply to wander aimlessly around Anancy's medieval old town, a photogenic jumble of narrow pedestrians-only streets, crystal-clear canals – the reason Anancy is known as 'Venice of the Alps' – and colonnaded passageways. On the tree-fringed lakefront, the flowery Jardins de l'Europe are linked to the grassy Champ de

## Annecy

0 200 m  
0 0.1 miles



## Annecy

## 📍 Sights

- 1 Annecy Waterfront ..... D3  
 2 Château d'Annecy ..... B3  
 3 Palais de l'Isle ..... C3  
 4 Vieille Ville ..... B2

## 🚣 Activities, Courses &amp; Tours

- 5 Anney Plongée ..... D3  
 6 Compagnie des Bateaux ..... C3  
 7 Piscine des Marquisats ..... D4  
 8 Roll'n Cy ..... C3  
 9 Roul' ma Poule ..... D3  
 10 Takamaka ..... A3

## 🛏 Sleeping

- 11 Hôtel Alexandra ..... B2  
 12 Hôtel Central ..... B2

- 13 Hôtel du Château ..... B3  
 14 Hôtel du Palais de l'Isle ..... C3  
 15 Le Pré Carré ..... B1  
 16 Splendid Hôtel ..... C2

## 🍴 Eating

- 17 Creabistro ..... A3  
 18 Food Market ..... B3  
 19 La Ciboulette ..... B2  
 20 La Cuisine des Amis ..... C2  
 21 Le Denti ..... C3  
 22 L'Esquisse ..... A4  
 23 L'Étage ..... B2

## 🍷 Drinking &amp; Nightlife

- 24 Beer O'Clock ..... A3  
 25 Captain Pub ..... B3

Mars, a popular picnic spot, by the poetic iron arch of the Pont des Amours (Lovers' Bridge).

## Château d'Annecy

CASTLE

(www.musees.agglo-annecy.fr; rampe du Château; adult/child €5.20/2.60; ☀️10am-noon & ☀️2-5pm Wed-Mon Oct-May, 10.30am-6pm daily Jun-Sep)

## WORTH A TRIP

## SKI DAY TRIPS FROM ANNECY

**Le Grand Bornand** (☎04 50 02 78 00; www.legrandbornand.com; elev 1000m) A mere hour from Annecy, the Big Bornand (44 pistes and 30 lifts) makes a comfortable day trip for Alpine and cross-country skiers alike. Fans of ice skating, ice climbing and snowshoeing are also well taken care of, while hikers and mountain bikers take over the Chinaillon Valley and Aravis Mountains in summer.

**La Clusaz** (www.laclusaz.com; elev 1100m) With 125km of piste and 49 lifts, this (relatively) low-altitude resort boasts reliable snow and – with access to five connected massifs – terrain to suit all skill levels. At €35 per day, lift tickets are very reasonable, and the journey time from Annecy is under an hour.

**Semnoz** (☎04 50 01 20 30; www.semnoz.fr; elev 1700m) The wooded slopes and superb views of Semnoz, less than 30 minutes' drive from Annecy, make an ideal setting for families just getting into skiing. The cheap ski passes (€15 for eight hours) more than make up for the limited piste and lift network. In summer there's luge, biking and fantastic hiking among the wild flowers.

Rising dramatically above the old town, this 13th- to 16th-century castle was once home to the Counts of Geneva. The exhibits inside are diverse, ranging from medieval sculpture and Savoyard furniture to Alpine landscape painting and contemporary art, with a section on the natural history of Lac d'Annecy. Some signage is multilingual.

**Palais de l'Isle** MUSEUM  
(☎04 56 49 40 37; www.musees.agglo-annecey.fr; 3 passage de l'Île; adult/child €3.80/2; ☼10am-noon & 2-5pm Wed-Mon Oct-May, 10am-5pm Wed-Mon Jun-Sep) Sitting on a triangular islet surrounded by the Canal du Thiou, the 12th-century Palais de l'Isle has been a lordly residence, a courthouse, a mint and a prison over the centuries. The central landmark of Annecy's gorgeous *vieille ville* (old town), it now houses permanent exhibits on local architecture and history, and temporary displays of art.



## Activities

## Sunbathing &amp; Swimming

When the sun's out, the beaches fringing the lake beckon. Some are patrolled in summer, and can become very crowded.

**Plage Impérial** BEACH  
(☎04 50 19 19 73; www.plage-imperial.com; 30 ave d'Albigny; per day €15; ☼10am-7pm Sat & Sun May & Sep, daily Jun-Aug) This manicured private beach next to the elegant, pre-WWI Impérial Casino is part of the Plage de l'Impérial Complexe. Other family-friendly attractions include volleyball, badminton, *pétanque*, table tennis, minigolf and spaces for picnics and kids' swimming.

**Piscine des Marquissats** SWIMMING

(☎04 50 33 65 40; 29 rue des Marquissats; adult/child €4.30/3.30; ☼10am-7pm May-early Sep) This trio of city-run outdoor swimming pools is 600m southeast of the centre, near the lakefront and with views to the mountains.

**Plage d'Albigny à Annecy-le-Vieux** BEACH

(av du Petit Port) **FREE** This gentle, shallow public beach, 1km northeast of the centre of Annecy, is ideal for swimming with kids. There are lifeguards present in July and August only.

## Cycling &amp; Blading

Biking and blading are big, with 46km of cycling track encircling the lake (there's a gap on the eastern shore between Menthon and Perroix), and another gentle path, once a railway grade, leading all the way to Albertville, 44km to the southeast. The tourist office (p495) has free maps.

**Roll'n Cy** SKATING

(☎06 28 34 66 34; www.roll-n-cy.org; ☼8pm Fri) Strap on your skates for the weekly group rides organised by this local rollerblading club. The meeting point is in front of the *mairie* (town hall) at place de l'Hôtel de Ville. Call for updates from 7pm on Friday evening; rides may be cancelled due to rain.

**Roul' ma Poule** CYCLING

(☎04 76 39 77 20; www.roulemapoule.com; 4 rue des Marquissats; ☼9.30am-7pm) This family bike shop rents rollerblades (€15/20 per half/full day), bicycles (€15/20), tandems (€34/44) and kids' trailers (€15/20), and is great source of day-trip recommendations.

## Water Sports

The most relaxed way to see the lake is from the water. From sometime in March to October, pedal and motor boats can be hired for €15/50 per hour/day along the waterfront, at or near Jardins de l'Europe.

**Canoë-Kayak Club d'Annecy** KAYAKING  
(☎ 04 50 45 03 98; www.kayak-annecy.com; 33 rue des Marquisats, Base Nautique; ☀ 9am-noon Mon-Fri, 2-6pm Mon-Sat Apr-Jun & Sep-Nov, extended hours Jul & Aug) Offers kayaking courses.

**Société des Régates à Voile d'Annecy** BOATING  
(☎ 04 50 45 48 39; www.srva.info; 31 rue des Marquisats, Base Nautique; ☀ 10am-12.30pm & 1.30-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-7pm Sun) Rents sailing boats starting at €44 for two hours on a single-person Laser dinghy; windsurfers are €28. Hours vary during school holidays.

**Annecy Plongée** DIVING  
(☎ 04 50 45 40 97; www.annecyplongee.com; 6 rue des Marquisats; ☀ 9am-noon & 2-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-7pm Sat) Annecy Plongée can take you beneath the sparkling water of Lac d'Annecy. The highly experienced instructors have great enthusiasm for the lake and their sport.

**Adventure Sports Takamaka** OUTDOORS  
(☎ 04 50 45 60 61; www.takamaka.fr; 23 rue du Faubourg Ste-Claire; ☀ 9am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun) Offers a wide range of outdoor adventures with licensed guides, including tandem paragliding (€95), rafting (€49), rock climbing (€49), mountain-bike free-riding (€59) and canyoning (€49 for a half-day).

## 👉 Tours

**Compagnie des Bateaux** BOATING  
(☎ 04 50 51 08 40; www.annecy-croisieres.com; 2 place aux Bois; 1hr lake cruises adult/child €14.2/9.60; ☀ late Mar-mid-Dec) The Boat Company runs lake cruises and, from mid-April to late September, trips to villages around the lake. For the romantically inclined there are also dinner cruises aboard the MS *Libellule* (€59 per person).

## Festival & Events

Annecy celebrates the flamboyant **Venetian Carnival** in February (two weeks after its namesake in Venice, Italy); the **Fête du Lac**, with a spectacular 70 minutes of fireworks

## WORTH A TRIP

### YVOIRE

Officially one of 'The Most Beautiful Villages of France', sleepy, wisteria-wrapped Yvoire, 16km west of Thonon on the shores of Lake Geneva, makes for a great day trip. A former fishing village, fortified in the early 14th century, it's a riot of turrets, towers and old stone houses.

Slumbering in the shadow of a 14th-century castle and enclosed by walls, the **Jardin des Cinq Sens** (Garden of Five Senses; ☎ 04 50 72 88 80; www.jardin5sens.net; rue du Lac; adult/child €12/7; ☀ 10am-6.30pm early Apr-mid-Oct) is designed to be experienced through sight, touch, sound, scent and even (within reason!) taste. There's a maze, kids' activities, and more than 1300 plant species. It closes an hour early in the first and last two weeks of its opening period.

over the lake, on the first Saturday in August; and **Le Retour des Alpes**, when the cows come home from summer pasturage in the Alps, wreathed in flowers and bells, on the second Saturday in October. Street performers wow evening crowds at **Les Noctibules**, over four nights in July.

## 🛏 Sleeping

**Annecy Hostel** HOSTEL €  
(☎ 09 53 12 02 90; www.annecyhostel.com; 32 av de Loverchy; dm from €22, d €56; @ ☎) Run by two well-travelled siblings, this friendly, 51-bed hostel has bright, funky dorm rooms with four to six beds, two shared kitchens, a TV lounge and bike rental (per day €12). The back garden – perfect for summer barbecues and meeting people – offers table tennis, a pool table, chickens and a bar with live music until 11pm.

★ **Hôtel Central** BOUTIQUE HOTEL €  
(☎ 04 50 45 05 37; www.hotelcentralannecy.com; 6bis rue Royale; d/tr €70/80; 📺 ☎) Forget the prosaic name – this splendid canalside hotel, occupying a late-17th-century building in the pedestrianised heart of the city, provides comfortably the most eccentric and visually entertaining digs in Annecy. Choose the *Chambre Couture* (complete with dressmaker's doll and antique sewing machine), the psychedelic *Chambre Coco*,

## DON'T MISS

## CHÂTEAU DE MENTHON-ST-BERNARD

The 1000-year-old **Château de Menthon-St-Bernard** (☎ 07 81 74 39 72; www.chateau-de-menthon.com; Menthon-St-Bernard; guided tours adult/child €8.50/4; ☀ 2-6pm Fri-Sun May, Jun & Sep, noon-6pm daily Jul & Aug) – one of the inspirations for Walt Disney's *Sleeping Beauty* castle (so they say) – was the birthplace of St Bernard in 1008. Tours of the medieval interior – courtesy of the 23rd generation of De Menthons to live here – take in tapestry-adorned *salons* and a magnificent library, stacked with more than 12,000 volumes dating to before the Revolution. But it's the sparkling Lac d'Annecy panorama that leaves many visitors speechless. Situated 8.5km southeast of Annecy.

the Chambre Orientale or any of the other 11 rooms: they're all delightful.

## Hôtel du Château

HOTEL €

(☎ 04 50 45 27 66; www.annecy-hotel.com; 16 rampe du Château; s/d/tr/q €59/85/95/110; ☎) Just across the square from the château's imposing gatehouse, this family-run hotel has a sun-drenched, panoramic breakfast terrace and 16 neat, sweetly decorated rooms with rustic pine furniture and pastel walls. Four have lovely lake views.

## Hôtel du Palais de l'Isle

HISTORIC HOTEL €€

(☎ 04 50 45 86 87; www.palaisannecy.com; 13 rue Perrière; s/d €92/139; ☎) In an 18th-century building right in the centre of the old town, this hotel has crisp contemporary decor and 34 minibar-equipped rooms with views of the *palais*, the château or the old town's rooftops. Breakfast – charcuterie, cheese and bread – is €12.

## Splendid Hôtel

BOUTIQUE HOTEL €€

(☎ 04 50 45 20 00; www.hotel-annecy-lac.fr; 4 quai Eustache Chappuis; s/d from €123/137; ☎) This aptly named hotel, with green, breezy views of the adjacent Champ de Mars, has 47 classy, contemporary rooms with parquet floors. It's geared for families: whether you need an extra bed or a babysitter, the friendly staff will oblige.

## Hôtel Alexandra

HOTEL €€

(☎ 04 50 45 49 06; www.hotelannecy-alexandra.fr; 19 rue Vaugelas; s/d/ste €79/99/114; ☎) The 25 smallish rooms, each unique, are sparsely furnished, soundproof and spotless, and the welcome here is warm. Six rooms have balconies and a couple come with canal views.

## Le Pré Carré

BUSINESS HOTEL €€€

(☎ 04 50 52 14 14; www.hotel-annecy.net; 27 rue Sommeiller; s/d from €194/224; ☎) This eight-storey hotel keeps things contemporary with 29 spacious, subdued, business-efficient rooms, almost all with a balcony or terrace. Amenities include a Jacuzzi, sauna and seminar room. Breakfast – a lavish affair starring regional and organic produce – can be taken at the buffet or in your room.



## Eating

## Food Market

MARKET €

(cnr rues Ste-Claire & de la République; ☀ 7am-1am Sun, Tue & Fri) Growing organically through the picturesque arteries of the *vieille ville*, this sprawling market has all the Savoyard delicacies, fresh fruit and vegetables and cheap souvenirs you could possibly need.

## Creabistro

THAI €

(☎ 04 50 23 85 39; www.creabistro.com; 2 rue du Faubourg Ste-Claire; menus €9-18; ☀ noon-3pm & 6.30-10pm Thu-Tue) A fresh alternative to the weight of Savoyard cuisine, this build-your-own Thai noodle bar does a roaring trade from a small shopfront on the rue du Faubourg Ste-Claire. One bite of pad thai reveals the authenticity in the kitchen, and there are a few stools and a table or two for dining in.

## La Cuisine des Amis

FUSION €€

(☎ 04 50 10 10 80; www.lacuisinedesamisannecy.fr; 9 rue du Pâquier; mains €17-20, lunch menus €14.80; ☀ noon-2pm & 7-10.30pm daily, closed dinner Sun & Mon Oct-May; ☎) Welcoming clients like old *amis* (friends), this freshly remodelled bistro serves meat and fish with a creative, international twist. Alongside cheesy Savoyard specialities you'll find Moroccan classics such as couscous royale and *tajine* of lamb and figs.

## Le Denti

FRENCH €€

(☎ 04 50 64 21 17; 25bis av de Loverchy; lunch menus €22, dinner menus €32-42; ☀ noon-1.15pm Thu-Mon, 7.30-9.15pm Mon & Thu-Sat) A few blocks off the beaten track but worth seeking out, this unassuming restaurant serves traditional French cuisine – their speciality is fish – prepared so the taste of the super-fresh in-

redients shines through. The menu changes twice a month according to the seasonal produce available in the markets.

### L'Étage

FRENCH €€

(☎ 04 50 51 03 28; www.letageannecy.com; 13 rue du Pâquier; lunch menus €13-16.50, other menus €19-36; ☺ noon-2.15pm & 7-10.30pm) Feast on local cheeses in the form of fondue or *raclette* (melted cheese, boiled potatoes, charcuterie and baby gherkins), or on French-style meat and fish dishes (eg steak with 'café de Paris' butter) in a building from the 1600s. Mellow music and the cheerful staff keep the ambience relaxed.

### L'Esquisse

GASTRONOMIC €€€

(☎ 04 50 44 80 59; www.esquisse-annecy.fr; 21 rue Royale; lunch menus €25, dinner menus €39-65; ☺ 12.15-1.15pm & 7.30-9pm Mon, Tue & Thu-Sat) A talented husband-and-wife team runs the show at this intimate seven-table restaurant. Their passion shines through in the service, wine list and carefully composed *menus* dotted with delights such as pumpkin consommé with Beaufort cheese and roast scallops with brown butter. Reserve ahead.

### La Ciboulette

GASTRONOMIC €€€

(☎ 04 50 45 74 57; www.laciboulette-annecy.com; Cour du Pré Carré, 10 rue Vaugelas; menus €38-75; ☺ noon-1pm & 7.30-8.45pm Tue-Sat) Crisp white linen sets the scene at this elegant restaurant, where chef Georges Paccard prepares innovative delights such as veal sweetbreads with bitter gentian juice, and grilled turbot with pigs' trotter croquette and tarragon sauce.



## Drinking & Nightlife

### Captain Pub

PUB

(☎ 04 50 45 79 80; www.captain-pub.fr; 11 rue du Pont Morens; ☺ 11am-2.30am Wed-Mon; ☺) The Captain doesn't work too hard at being an 'Irish Pub', but does offer a warren of conviv-

ial nooks festooned with nauticalia, a plum riverside terrace, a great range of whiskys and draught beers, more-than-decent food and an atmosphere of genuine cheer.

### Beer O'Clock

BAR

(☎ 04 50 65 83 78; 18 rue du Faubourg Ste-Claire; 250mL beer €3-5.25; ☺ 5pm-midnight Tue-Fri, to 1am Sat, to 11pm Sun; ☺) Opened in 2014, this laid-back, high-tech establishment serves beer like petrol stations sell gasoline: you only pay for what you pump. After buying credit on a computerised magnetic card, you can drink as much or as little of the 12 brews on offer as you like – a fantastic way to compare and savour lots of microbrews side-by-side.

## Information

**Tourist Office** (☎ 04 50 45 00 33; www.lac-annecy.com; 1 rue Jean Jaurès, courtyard of Centre Bonlieu; ☺ 9am-12.30pm & 1.45-6pm Mon-Sat year-round, plus 9am-12.30pm & 1.45-6pm Sun mid-May-mid-Sep, 9am-12.30pm Sun Apr-early Oct & Dec) Has free maps and brochures, and details on cultural activities all around the lake.

## Getting There & Away

### BUS

The ticket office for the **bus station** (Gare Routière; rue de l'Industrie) is inside the new train station.

**Voyages Crolard** (☎ 04 50 45 08 12; www.voyages-crolard.com) sends buses (every hour or two Monday to Saturday, fewer or none on Sunday) to villages around Lac d'Annecy, including Veyrier-du-Lac (€1.50, 15 minutes) and Talloires (€1.50, 30 minutes), as well as to the ski resorts of La Clusaz (€8, 45 minutes), Le Grand Bornand (€8, one hour) and Albertville (1½ hours). The company also has a service to Lyon's St-Exupéry airport (one way/return €36/54, 2¼ hours, four to six daily).

## TRAINS FROM ANNECY

Direct services from Anancy's **train station** (place de la Gare), opened in 2012, include the following.

TO	FARE (€)	TIME	FREQUENCY
Aix-les-Bains	8.10	40min	hourly
Chambéry	10.30	50min	hourly
Lyon Part-Dieu	26-50	2hr	13 daily Mon-Fri, 8 daily Sat & Sun
Paris, Gare de Lyon	80-101	3¾hr	4-7 daily
St-Gervais-Le-Fayet (for Chamonix)	15.30	1½hr	5 daily Sun-Fri, 3 Sat

## BEST FOOT FORWARD

Anney is a real biper's town: you'll see large numbers of locals jogging serenely along their lakefront at all times of the year, and walking the *vieille ville* is a joy. From Jardins de l'Europe, you can amble along the lakefront northeast towards **Anney-le-Vieux**, and southeast to **Esplanade des Marquissats** and beyond. Anney's commercial centre is a few blocks north of the Canal du Thiou, around rue Royale.

**Forêt du Crêt du Maure**, about 3km due south of Anney, has plenty of walking trails, as do the wildlife-rich wetlands of **Bout du Lac**, 20km from Anney on the lake's southern tip, and the **Roc de Chère** nature reserve, 10km away on the eastern shore. The tourist office sells walking maps, including IGN's *Lac d'Anney* (€12).

**Transalis** (☎04 50 51 08 51; www.transdehautesavoie.com) handles services to Geneva's bus station (lines T72 and T73; €10.50, 1½ hours, 15 daily Monday to Friday, six to eight Saturday and Sunday), Thonon-les-Bains (€14, two hours, twice daily Monday to Friday) and Évian-les-Bains (€14, 2½ hours, twice daily Monday to Friday).

## i Getting Around

Bicycles can be hired from city-run **Vélonancy** (☎04 50 51 38 90; www.velonancy.com; place de la Gare; ☎24hr), at the train station, for €20 per day (including a helmet); the deposit is €250. If you have a valid train ticket, the fee is only €6. In July and August reserve two or three days ahead. Staff can supply you with a bike-path map.

## Chambéry

POP 56,500 / ELEV 270M

Located at the junction of two major Alpine valleys, the château town of Chambéry is an unjustly neglected gem. Twelve kilometres south of twinkling Lac du Bourget, it's within easy reach of two regional parks and preserves many signs of former glory (Chambéry was Savoy's capital from the 13th century until 1563, when the Dukes relocated to Turin). Its surprisingly few visitors are rewarded with crowd-free museums, lively cafes and serene strolls along arcaded streets.

## Sights

### ★ Ville Ancienne

HISTORIC SITE

Chambéry has one of the best-preserved medieval old towns this side of the Alps. Its hidden courtyards, cafe-rimmed squares and lanes flanked by 14th- to 18th-century *hôtels* are great for an aimless amble. Streets worth wandering include tiny **rue du Sénat de Savoie**, cobbled **rue Juiverie** and gallery-dotted **rue de la Métropole**. For a gorgeous perspective in every direction, stand at the intersection of arcaded **rue de Boigne** and long, handsome **place St-Léger**.

Once home to local aristocrats, **rue de la Croix d'Or** hides the Hôtel du Château's rose-draped courtyard, with intricate wrought-iron grilles affording fine views of the castle. Winding to the base of the château's massive walls, 14th-century **rue Basse-du-Château** is most atmospheric when the afternoon sun warms its caramel-coloured façades.

### Fontaine des Éléphants

FOUNTAIN

(place des Éléphants) With its four intricately carved elephants, this fountain looks like the model for an old Indian postage stamp. It was sculpted in 1838 in honour of Général de Boigne (*brwan-y*; 1751–1830), who made his fortune in the East Indies. When he returned home he bestowed some of his wealth on the town and was honoured posthumously with this monument. The genteel arcaded street that leads from the fountain to Château des Ducs de Savoie, **rue de Boigne**, is one of his projects.

### Château des Ducs de Savoie

CASTLE

(☎04 79 70 15 94; place du Château; ☎gardens 9am–6pm Mon–Fri mid-Feb–Jun & Sep–Dec, plus Sat & Sun Jul & Aug, exhibition 9am–noon & 1.30–6pm Tue–Fri, 10.30am–6pm Sat & Sun, closed Jan–mid-Feb) This forbidding medieval castle, once home to the counts and dukes of Savoy, now houses the Préfecture and Conseil Général of the Savoie *département*. The **gardens** and the **Cour d'Honneur** (courtyard) are open free-of-charge, but to see the 14th- and 15th-century **Tour Trésorerie** (Treasury Tower) and the stained glass inside the recently restored **Ste-Chapelle**, built in the 15th century to house the Shroud of Turin, you have to take a tour.

Guided tours (adult/child €6/4.50) depart at 2.30pm Tuesday to Sunday from May to September, and at 2.30pm Saturday and Sunday October to April. They begin at the château's Accueil des Guides office in July

and August, and at the old town's **Hôtel de Condou** (71 rue St Réal), around the corner from the cathedral, the rest of the year.

In the small exhibition, scale models, engravings and paintings present the history and architecture of the château.

The chapel's 70-bell **Grand Carillon** (1993), one of the largest ensembles of bells in the world, peals in concert on the first and third Saturday of each month at 5.30pm (more frequently in summer).

### Cathédrale St-François de Sales

CATHEDRAL

(📍04 79 33 25 00; [www.catholiques-chambery.paroisse.net](http://www.catholiques-chambery.paroisse.net); 6 rue Métropole; ☀️8.45am-noon & 3-5pm Mon-Sat, 9am-12.15pm & 3-8.15pm Sun except during Mass) Built as a Franciscan chapel in the 15th century, Chambéry's cathedral hides some surprises, including Europe's largest assemblage (occupying some 6000 sq metres) of *trompe l'œil* Gothic vaulting, painted by artists Sevesi and Vicario, and a 35m-long maze dating from the mid-19th century.

### Musée Savoisien

MUSEUM

(📍04 79 33 44 48; [www.musee-savoisien.fr](http://www.musee-savoisien.fr); sq de Lannoy de Bissy; ☀️10am-noon & 2-6pm Wed-Mon) Housed in a Franciscan monastery linked to the Cathédrale St-François de Sales by cloisters, this museum showcases the turbulent history, rich culture and diverse ethnography of Savoie. While the museum is closed for major renovations until 2017, the cloisters are accessible between 8.30am and noon then 2pm and 5pm Monday to Friday year-round, and between 10am and noon then 2pm and 5pm on weekends in December, January, July and August.

### Musée des Beaux-Arts

MUSEUM

(📍04 79 33 75 03; [www.musees.chambery.fr](http://www.musees.chambery.fr); place du Palais de Justice; special exhibitions adult/child €3/1.50; ☀️10am-noon & 2-6pm Wed-Mon) **FREE** Occupying a former corn exchange, the light-flooded top-floor gallery showcases 14th- to 18th-century Italian works, with an emphasis on Florentine and Siennese paintings from the Renaissance, including pieces by Caravaggio, Titian and Ghirlandaio. Also worth a look are the many dramatic landscapes of Chambéry and the Alps painted between 1799 and 1975. Signs are in French.

### Musée des Charmettes

HISTORIC BUILDING

(📍04 79 33 39 44; [www.chambery.fr/musees](http://www.chambery.fr/musees); 890 chemin des Charmettes; audioguides €3; ☀️10.30am-6pm Wed-Mon Apr-Nov, 10am-4.30pm

Sat & Sun Dec-Mar) **FREE** Geneva-born philosopher, composer and writer Jean-Jacques Rousseau, a key figure of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, lived with his lover, Baronne Louise Éléonore de Warens, at this charming, late-17th-century country house from 1736 to 1742. His passion for botany lives on in the peaceful garden, filled with medicinal herbs, aromatic flowers and heritage fruit trees and vines. Situated a steep 2km southeast of the centre, along rustic chemin des Charmettes.

### Sleeping

#### Hôtel des Princes

HOTEL €€

(📍04 79 33 45 36; [www.hoteldesprinces.com](http://www.hoteldesprinces.com); 4 rue de Boigne; s/d/tr/q from €88/98/123/143; 📍) The Shroud of Turin was once repaired in the late-15th-century convent that now houses this elegant family hotel in the old town. Renovated in 2015, the 45 medium-sized, modern rooms include chalet-style *chambres* on the top floor – room 11 (€193) is ideal for a family of five. There's also a spa and sauna, bookable for €16 per person per hour.

#### ★ **Petit Hôtel** **Confidentiel**

BOUTIQUE HOTEL €€€

(📍04 79 26 24 17; [www.petithotelconfidentiel.com](http://www.petithotelconfidentiel.com); 10 rue de la Trésorerie; ste €200-450; 📍📍📍) Starting from the ground-floor *épicerie* (grocery) where JJ Rousseau came a' courting in the 18th century, this elegant, family-run boutique hotel has steadily colonised an entire, 15th-century building in the lee of the château. Sophisticated and cosy, its 15 huge suites mostly come with two-person bath-tubs and ultramodern ethanol fireplaces, and all are individually decorated with panache. A five-star gem.

### Eating

#### À l'Herboristerie

VEGETARIAN €

(Café Botanique; 📍04 79 75 62 65; [www.de-labotanique.com](http://www.de-labotanique.com); 193 rue Croix d'Or; mains €14; ☀️noon-2.30pm Tue-Sat; 📍) This gloriously old-fashioned herbalist's shop does a brisk

### CHAMBERY CENT SAVER

Pick up the €2 **Chambéry Pass** at the tourist office from May to October for free entry to temporary exhibitions at the city's museums, substantial discounts on guided tours, 10% discounts at certain restaurants, and three hours of parking at the central Vinci Park garage.

trade in medicinal plants and herbal teas, many from the Alps, while the lunch-only restaurant next door serves up wholesome house-made salads, ravioli and quiches, some made with wild plants and mushrooms. The menu changes daily. The tearoom behind the shop is often open until 7pm.

### La Fruitière d'Augustin

CHEESE €€

(☎ 04 79 33 77 17; 2 place de Genève; ☀ 9am-12.30 & 3-7.15pm Tue-Fri, 7.30am-1pm & 2-7.15pm Sat) Specialising in the cheeses of Savoie, this outlet of the regional *fromagerie*, located just across the square from the **Marché des Halles** (Covered Market; place de Genève; ☀ 7am-noon Tue, Wed, Fri & Sat), is the place for Reblochon, Tome des Bauges, Comté, Beaufort, Grand Colombier, bleu de Termignon and Persillé de Tignes.

### ★ Les Halles

FRENCH €€

(☎ 04 79 60 01 95; www.restaurant-les-halles-chambery.com; 15 rue Bonivard; lunch menus €15-18, dinner menus €26-36; ☀ noon-2pm & 7-10pm Tue-Sat; 🍴) This ordinary-looking bistro, beloved by locals, combines gourmet panache with a warm welcome and faultless service. Try regional specialities including chicken stuffed with *diots* (Savoyard sausages) and creamy Beaufort polenta, or *tête de veau* (calf's head) with tangy/creamy *sauce gribiche*. But save room for *fondant au chocolat* with pecan ice cream!

### L'Atelier

FRENCH €€

(☎ 04 79 70 62 39; www.atelier-chambery.com; 59 rue de la République; lunch menus €21, dinner menus €32-40; ☀ noon-2.30pm & 7-10pm Tue-Sat) Chef Gilles Herard - who's worked in the kitchens of gastronomic princes such as Alain Ducasse and Paul Bocuse - works the stoves in this brick-vaulted wine bar-bistro. His daily menu shows some daring, and there are plenty of wines by the glass to match with unusual dishes such as lamb shank with pumpkin 'cappuccino' and *pain perdu*.

## i Information

**Tourist Office** (☎ 04 79 33 42 47; www.chambery-tourisme.com; 5bis place du Palais de Justice; ☀ 9am-12.30pm & 2-6pm Mon-Sat, plus 10am-1pm Sun Jul & Aug) Can supply English brochures and details on Savoie's cheese and wine routes, and arranges guided old-town tours (in English in July and August), some at night. Staff are happy to help with room reservations (no charge). Situated just northwest of the old town, 300m south of the train station.

## i Getting There & Away

### AIR

**Chambéry Savoie Airport** (☎ 04 79 54 49 54; www.chambery-airport.com; 73420 Viviers-du-Lac; 📍), 10km north of Chambéry at the southern tip of Lac du Bourget, has seasonal flights (mainly December to April) to various British regional airports.

### BUS

While the train station was being renovated, the **bus station** (place Paul Vidal) was at place Paul Vidal, 300m southwest of the train station. It should have returned to place de la Gare in late 2016.

From late June to early September, the Ligne des Plages bus goes to Aix-les-Bains (50 minutes) via the beaches along Lac du Bourget.

### TRAIN

Chambéry's **train station** (www.gares-sncf.com; place de la Gare) underwent a complete renovation through 2016. In the city centre, tickets are available at the **Boutique SNCF** (☎ 08 92 35 35 35; www.voyages-sncf.com; 21 place St-Léger; ☀ 9am-noon & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, to 4pm Sat). Direct services include the following:

**Anncny** €10.20, 50 minutes, hourly

**Geneva** €17.70, 1¼ hours, four to six daily

**Grenoble** €11.90, one hour, at least hourly

**Lyon (Part-Dieu)** €18.40, 1½ hours, almost hourly

**Paris Gare de Lyon** €78 to €100, three hours, 10 daily Monday to Friday, seven Saturday, four Sunday

## i Getting Around

### TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

Buses link the airport with various Alpine ski stations but not, unfortunately, with Chambéry's town centre. The 15-minute journey by taxi costs around €20 - call **Allo Taxi Chambéry** (☎ 04 79 69 11 12; www.taxi-chambery.com).

**Lyon's St-Exupéry Airport** Buses run by **Voyages Crolard** (☎ 04 50 51 08 51; www.voyages-crolard.com) link Chambéry with Lyon's airport (one way/return €24/36, one hour, four to six daily).

**Geneva Airport** Serviced by Aérocar (www.aerocar.fr) buses (one way/return €33.50/41.50, one hour, five daily).

### BICYCLE

City-run **Vélostation** (☎ 04 79 96 34 13; www.velostation-chambery.fr; Parc du Verney; bike rental per hr/day €1.50/6; ☀ 8am-noon & 2-7pm Mon-Fri, 1.30-7pm Sat Nov-Mar, plus 9am-7pm Sun & no midday closure Apr-Oct) rents out

## WORTH A TRIP

## LAKESIDE LEGENDS

**Auberge du Père Bise** (☎04 50 60 72 01; www.perebise.com; 303 rte du Port, Talloires; menus €85; ☀12.30-2pm Wed-Mon & 7.30-9pm daily Jun-Sep, closed Wed late Sep-mid-Dec & mid-Feb-May) is never less than extraordinary. Chef Sophie Bise, a Lac d'Annecy local who comes from a long line of chefs, works wonders with top-notch local produce such as red-clawed crayfish, or lake fish, prepared *à la meunière*. Tea, coffee, pastries and sandwiches are served from 3pm to 6pm – no need to reserve. Situated in Talloires, 12km southeast of Annecy; follow the signs to 'Port-Plage'. Accommodation is available (doubles from €330).

**Yoann Conte** (☎04 50 09 97 49; www.yoann-conte.com; 13 Vieille rte des Pensières, Veyrier-du-Lac; lunch menus €85-126, dinner menus €189-220; ☀noon-1.30pm & 7-8.30pm Wed-Sun, plus 7-8.30pm Tue in summer) is named after the successor to French celebrity chef Marc Veyrat, who once ran the stoves in this delightful lakeside restaurant. Conte's regionalism shines through in dishes such as grilled sea bass in Savoyard Mondeuse wine, and *fêra* (white fish from the adjacent lake) 'as Mr Sarvagnin liked it'. The baby-blue house on the lake also has eight wonderful rooms with magnificent views (doubles €235 to €435). To obtain a table, reserve a week ahead on holidays, for Saturday dinner and from June to early September. It's situated in Veyrier-du-Lac, a village across the lake from Annecy (6km by road). To get there by car from Annecy, follow the signs from the first roundabout you come to in Veyrier-du-Lac.

seven-speed city bikes. It was based next to the bus station (300m southwest of the train station) until late 2016, but should have returned to the train station. The greater Chambéry area has 80km of cycling lanes; staff can supply you with a cycling map.

hiking to the summit of 1867m **Charmant Som**; follow the signs for 'Col de Porte' on the D512. Or you can check out *Into Great Silence* (2007), an almost-silent film about the monastery. Underneath the park's limestone spine are some 280km of caves.

## Around Chambéry

Chambéry is wedged between two national parks, the Parc Naturel Régional du Massif des Bauges and the Parc Naturel Régional de Chartreuse. Both offer rich pickings for hikers, mountain bikers, snowshoers and cross-country skiers.

During the ski season, bus C8 runs from Chambéry's Bus Station to La Féclaz (€8, 50 minutes, two to four per day). Outside winter, you really need a car to explore the national parks around Chambéry properly.

### Parc Naturel Régional de Chartreuse

The 690-sq-km **Chartreuse Regional Nature Park** encompasses the wild, forested slopes of the Chartreuse massif, dubbed the 'desert' by monks of the Carthusian Order who settled here in 1084. Today the **Grande Chartreuse monastery** is home to some 30 monks who have taken a vow of silence, and are known chiefly for distilling the famous Liqueurs Chartreuse. It is off-limits to visitors, but you can see it from above by

## Sights

**Musée de la Grande Chartreuse** MUSEUM (☎04 76 88 60 45; www.musee-grande-chartreuse.fr; La Correrie, St-Pierre-de-Chartreuse; adult/child €8.50/3.90; ☀10am-6.30pm May-Sep, 1.30-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun Apr & Oct) This intriguing museum explores the millennium-long history of the Grande Chartreuse monastery, some 2km away. Thirty-odd Carthusian monks reside there, withdrawn in silence from the world.

## Information

**Maison du Parc** (Park Headquarters; ☎04 76 88 75 20; www.parc-chartreuse.net; place de la Mairie, Saint-Pierre-de-Chartreuse; ☀9am-noon & 2-5pm Mon-Fri) Has information on the local environment, flora and fauna, and runs visits to the distillery where Chartreuse liqueur is produced. It closes for the Christmas/New Year's week, and two weeks in August. Located with the tourist office.

### Parc Naturel Régional du Massif des Bauges

Hiking and biking enthusiasts can explore 900 sq km of pastures, plateaux and

wilderness in the little-known **Massif des Bauges Regional Nature Park**, northeast of Chambéry. Several marked trails set out from the **Maison Faune-Flore** (☎04 79 54 97 77; www.parcdesbauges.com; Chef Lieu, École; adult/child €2.50/1.50; ☀10am-1pm & 2-6.30pm Wed-Mon Jul, Aug & daily in Christmas/New Year holidays, see website for other times) in École, where you can learn how to spot some of the many hundreds of chamois and mouflons inhabiting the park.

Chambéry's favourite weekend retreat for a little snow action is nearby **Savoie Grand Révard** (www.savoiegrandrevard.com; 1-day Nordic ski pass adult/child €8.20/4.80, 1-day Alpine ski pass €19/14.60).

## **i** Information

**Le Châtelard Tourist Office** (☎04 79 54 84 28; www.lesbauges.com; av Denis Therme, Le Châtelard; ☀9am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Sat May-Oct, to 5pm Mon-Wed & Fri Nov-Apr, see website for other times) The park's main tourist office, 36km northeast of Chambéry, has the low-down on all winter and summer activities.

**La Féclaz Tourist Office** (☎04 79 25 80 49; www.savoiegrandrevard.com; Station, La Féclaz; ☀9am-noon & 3-7.30pm) The ski-station tourist office, 21km northeast of Chambéry, has information on accommodation and snow sports in the Bauges.

## Aix-les-Bains

POP 28,700

With its leafy shores, grand casino and historic villas, Aix-les-Bains (*eks-ley-bah*), a small thermal spa 17km north of Chambéry, exudes an air of discreet gentility. Come to stroll, pedal, skate, sail, row or swim around France's largest natural lake, **Lac du Bourget**. The town centre is about 2.5km east of the lakefront.

## **👁** Sight

### Musée Faure

MUSEUM

(☎04 79 61 06 57; www.aixlesbains.fr/culture/museefaure; 10 bd des Côtes; adult/child €5/free; ☀10am-noon & 1.30-6pm Wed-Mon Apr-Oct, closed Mon & Tue Nov-Mar) This excellent little museum, housed in the former villa of collector Dr Jean Faure, is a must-see for fans of impressionism. And it's not all about Degas, Cézanne and Pissarro: the Faure's Rodin collection is perhaps only exceeded by the Rodin Museum in Paris.

### Temple of Diana

RUINS

(place Maurice Mollard, La Mairie) This 1st-century Roman temple – dedicated originally not to Diana, but probably a local Celtic god – is inside the town hall, a 16th-century château built over the ruin. To see it, and the accompanying archaeological collection, ask about guided tours at the tourist office.

## LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

### CHARTREUSE: THE MONASTIC LIQUEUR

Either acid green or radioactive yellow, Chartreuse may be the brightest, most shockingly hued herbal elixir of the cocktail and digestif world. Mixologists sing its praises and in ski resorts it adds a splash of Alpine fire to hot chocolate in Green Chaud. Its surge in global popularity over the past decade might have something to do with it being hailed as 'the only liqueur so good they named a colour after it' in Quentin Tarantino's 2007 thriller *Death Proof*. It certainly isn't because the Carthusian monks who make it have been brashly broadcasting its wonders, for this is a liqueur shrouded in secrecy and silence.

The production of Chartreuse began in 1737 and, at first, it was intended as a medicine. The green version, which celebrated its 250th birthday in 2014 (see www.chartreuse-verte250.com), is produced by macerating 130 hard-to-find mountain herbs, roots and plants in alcohol and leaving the mixture to age in oak casks.

Today, Chartreuse's exact ingredients remain a closely guarded secret, and word has it only two monks know the recipe. Perhaps closest to the original is the Elixir Végétal (69% alcohol), sold as a tonic, but potent, spicy, chlorophyll-rich Chartreuse Green (55% alcohol) and milder, sweeter Chartreuse Yellow (40% alcohol) are much better known. You can taste these otherworldly liqueurs, bone up on their history and tour barrel-lined cellars at the **Caves de la Chartreuse** (☎04 76 05 81 77; www.chartreuse.fr; 10 bd Edgar-Kofler, Voiron; ☀9am-11.30am & 2-6pm daily Apr-Oct, Mon-Fri Nov-Mar) distillery, 45km southwest of Chambéry.

## **i** Information

**Tourist Office** (☎ 04 79 88 68 00; www.aixles-bains.com; place Maurice Mollard; ☀ 9am-noon & 2-6pm Apr-Oct, 9am-12.30pm & 2-5.30pm Mon-Sat Nov-Mar) For details on what to see and do in the area, including lake cruises to the 12th-century Abbaye d'Hautecombe on the other side of the lake, contact the font of all things spa-, hike- and culture-related in Aix-le-Bains.

## **i** Getting There & Away

Aix-les-Bains is linked by train and SNCF bus (once or twice an hour) with Annecy (€8.10, 30 to 45 minutes) and Chambéry (€3.50, 11 to 23 minutes).

## Les Trois Vallées

This is the big one you've heard all about: vast, fast and a contender for largest ski area in the world. It's impossible to tire of all this terrain: depending on how it's reckoned, there are more than 600km of pistes and 180 lifts linking eight resorts and three parallel valleys. Among these are **Val Thorens**, Europe's highest at a heady 2300m; wealthy and ever-so-British **Méribel** (elevation 1450m), founded by Scotsman Colonel Peter Lindsay in 1938; and playground of the super-rich **Courchevel**, which stretches over three purpose-built resorts at 1550m, 1650m and 1850m and is a fave of the Moët-at-five brigade and ultra-wealthy Russians. In between are a number of lesser-known Alpine villages – **Le Praz** (Courchevel-Le Praz; 1300m), **St-Martin de Belleville** (1450m) and *très anglais* **La Tania** (1400m); all are linked by speedy lifts to higher-elevation slopes.

## **🏔️** Activities

### Winter

Les Trois Vallées is blessed with some of the world's best skiable terrain – the pistes here are vast and varied enough to satisfy even the most demanding skiers. The season here is also among the longest in France, running from early December to late April (and even longer in Val Thorens). Save time queuing by buying your pass and lessons online at www.les3vallees.com.

Sunny, relaxed **Méribel** is intermediate heaven, with 150km of cruisy (mostly blue and red) runs, 46 ski lifts, two slalom stadiums, two (Albertville) Olympic runs, two **snow parks** with jumps, pipes and rails,

and plenty of activities for kids. Packed with Brits and *seasonaires*, it's also famous for après-ski partying.

In glitzy **Courchevel** there's another 150km of well-groomed pistes, including some knee-trembling black *couloirs* (steep gullies), and excellent off-piste terrain. The 2.5km-long floodlit **toboggan run** through the forest, illuminated from 5pm to 7.30pm, is a fun après-ski alternative.

Watched over by glacier-licked peaks, **Val Thorens**, founded in 1972, enjoys a snow pack that's the envy of lower-altitude stations, superb **extreme skiing** and a **snow park**. Or bounce down the **toboggan run** (one run, with sledge and helmet, is €14.50 and takes 45 minutes), France's longest at 6km, with a drop of 700m.

Off-piste skiers seeking guidance should head for **La Croisette**, at the top of the Verdons ski lift: the **Maison de la Montagne** houses both the **ESF** (☎ 04 79 08 07 72; www.skischoolcourchevel.co.uk; rue du Forum, La Croisette; 2hr private lesson €135) and the **Bureau des Guides** (☎ Courchevel 06 23 92 46 12, Méribel 04 79 00 30 38; www.guides-courchevel-meribel.com; Maison de la Montagne, La Croisette; ☀ 9am-6pm).

### La Tyrolienne

ADVENTURE SPORTS

(www.la-tyrolienne.com; €50) Accessible only to skiers, this is the world's highest zip line. From the top of the Bouchet chair, those who dare fly 1300m in one minute and 45 seconds at speeds of up to 100km/h, dangling 200m from the ice below.

### Summer

Summer in Les Trois Vallées – mid-June to mid-September – is a playground of stunning mountain scenery, hidden lakes and wild flower-strewn pastures. Diversions range from walking and hiking to rock climbing, paragliding and canyoning – tourist offices in the principal villages can help you find the right guides. Or you can clip on to two vertigo-inducing **via ferrata** fixed-cable routes: one at Levassaux (near Les Menuires), the other at Le Cochet (St-Martin de Belleville).

The resorts are criss-crossed by hundreds of kilometres of circuits and downhill runs for **mountain bikers**. IGN biking maps and details on bike rental outlets (there's at least one in each station) are available at tourist offices.

## Sleeping & Eating

Tourist offices run accommodation services in **Courchevel** (☎ 04 79 08 00 29; www.courchevel.com; ☀ 9am-noon & 2-6pm winter, 9am-noon & 2.30-6.30 Sat, Sun, Wed & Thu summer), **Méribel** (☎ 04 79 00 50 00; www.meribel.net; rte du Centre; ☀ 9am-1pm & 2-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon & 3-7pm Sat, 9am-noon Sun winter, reduced hours other seasons) and **Val Thorens** (☎ 04 79 00 01 06; www.valthorens.com; Grand Rue, Maison de Val Thorens; ☀ 9am-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-8pm Sat, to 7pm Sun winter & summer, 9am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Fri spring & autumn).

### Méribel

**Le Roc** HOTEL €€  
(☎ La Taverne 04 79 00 36 18; www.alpine-bars.com; rte du Centre, Méribel; d/tr €135/150; ☀ Dec-Apr, Jul & Aug) For some of the cheapest beds in central Méribel, this is the place to come. The smallest rooms have been recently refurbished but, situated directly over the late-opening and lively La Taverne bar, they're not recommended for families or light sleepers! Reception is in the bar.

**La Fromagerie** FRENCH €€  
(☎ 04 79 08 55 48; Galerie des Cimes, Méribel; menus €19-28.50; ☀ fromagerie 9.30am-12.30pm & 3.30-7.30pm ski season, 7-10pm ski season, Jul & Aug) Only the tangiest, creamiest Alpine cheeses feature at this *fromagerie*-cum-restaurant, which serves Méribel's tastiest fondues and *raclette* in the rustic cellar. Book ahead for dinner, especially on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. Situated 200m up the main drag from the tourist office.

**Evolution** INTERNATIONAL €€  
(☎ 04 79 00 44 26; www.evolutionmeribel.com; rte de la Chaudanne, Méribel; menus €25-30; ☀ 8.30am-1.30am; ☎☎) Brits, locals and seasonal workers flock to this charismatic cafe-brasserie for full English breakfasts, Sunday roasts and international fare such as curries, burgers and falafel. There's an eclectic live-music program (Tuesday, Saturday and Sunday from 10pm) and the whole outfit is only a 50m stumble from the Chaudanne ski lift.

### Courchevel

**Hôtel Tournier** HOTEL €€  
(☎ 04 79 04 16 35; www.hoteltournier.com; rue des Verdons, Courchevel 1850; d €139-179, extra bed €30; ☀ Dec-Apr; ☎) Decorated in kitschy

'chalet' accents (timber, taupe, and faux deer heads) the Tournier has 35 of the cheapest rooms in Courchevel 1850. It also has a lovely bar-bistro, L'Equipe, a bountiful breakfast buffet (7.30am to noon, €18 per person) and a central location, just a block from Parking La Croisette.

**Le Chabichou** HOTEL €€€  
(☎ 04 79 08 00 55; www.chabichou-courchevel.com; rue des Chenus, Courchevel 1850; d incl breakfast 6 nights winter €640-900, 1 night summer €245; ☎☎) Washed as white as the goat's cheese for which it is named, this handsome, slope-side hotel and spa manages to quietly blend modern amenities with wood-pannelled charm throughout its cosy public areas and 41 tasteful rooms. There's a six-night minimum stay during the ski season.

The hotel is open year-round, while the restaurants and spa close from late April to mid-June, and from early September to mid-December.

### Val Thorens

**Hotel des 3 Vallées** HOTEL €€  
(☎ 04 79 00 01 86; www.hotel3vallees.com; Grande Rue, Val Thorens; d incl half-board €120-308; ☀ late Nov-mid-May; ☎) The 28 rooms and four apartments here – half with balconies, almost all with great south-facing views – are wonderfully rustic, dressed with Christmassy bursts of red and green and wood reused from old barns. The traditional French cuisine is a treat (menus €23), as is the wellness area with Jacuzzi, sauna and *hammam*. Situated just 80m from the slopes.

### Les Allues

**La Croix Jean-Claude** HOTEL €€  
(☎ 04 79 08 61 05; www.croixjeanclaude.com; Les Allues; d/ste incl half-board €112/137; ☀ Jun-Apr; ☎) Far from the madding crowd, Les Allues' only hotel, built in 1848, combines the charm of a real Alpine village with quick access to Méribel's slopes via the Olympe bubble lift or a free shuttle. Florals lend a homey touch to the 15 cosy rooms, and market-fresh produce features on the menu.

### La Tania

**Le Façon** FRENCH €€€  
(☎ 04 79 08 80 34; www.lefaçon.fr; Immeuble Le Kalinka, La Tania; lunch menus €38-68, dinner menus €62-110; ☀ noon-1.30pm & 7.30-9.30pm daily mid-Nov-Apr, Tue-Sun mid-Jun-mid-Sep) The

carefully crafted *menus* of Michelin-starred chef Julien Machet contain delights such as young leeks with *vin de Savoie* from Apremont, and free-range pork with sweet onions and Parmesan. All the produce is top-notch and local, and the walk-in wine cellar is a cave of delights. Reservations are a good idea, especially during school holidays.



## Drinking & Nightlife

Hang out with the rich kids in Champagne-sipping Courchevel, slalom down to Méribel for the energetic après-ski scene or, until about 5pm, party it up high above Méribel and Val Thorens at the two incredibly popular piste-side branches of **La Folie Douce** (☎ 04 79 00 04 27; www.lafoliedouce.com; Piste Plein Sud, Val Thorens; ☺ 9am-5pm in high season; ☎). Most places are open only during the ski season.

### ★ Le Rond Point

BAR

(☎ 04 79 00 37 51; www.alpine-bars.com; near Meribel Rond Point; ☺ 9am-7.30pm ski season) This piste-side terrace café turns into a huge après-ski party at about 4pm. Shuffle in your ski boots and sing along to pumping live music (5pm to 7pm) between mouthfuls of chips and toffee vodka (the house speciality) at what *seasonaires* (seasonal workers) fondly call 'the Ronnie'.

### La Taverne

BAR

(☎ 04 79 00 30 94; www.alpine-bars.com; rte du Centre, Méribel; ☺ 8.30am-1.30am ski season, flexible hours rest of year; ☎) Within a solid stone-and-timber building in the centre of Méribel sits this friendly, informal bar whose terrace, après-ski, is jam-packed with skiers and boarders talking epic descents. Has live music (in winter, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Sunday from 9.30pm), screens major sports events and serves pub food from 6.30pm to 10pm.



## Information

**Courchevel 1850 Tourist Office** (☎ 04 79 08 00 29; www.courchevel.com; ☺ 9am-noon & 2-6pm winter, 9am-noon & 2.30-6.30 Sat, Sun, Wed & Thu summer; ☎) Has other offices at Courchevel 1650m, 1550m and 1300m.

**Méribel Tourist Office** (☎ 04 79 08 60 01; www.meribel.net; rte du Centre; ☺ 9am-7pm in winter, closed midday in summer & weekends in spring & autumn) Has the low-down on winter and summer activities.

**Val Thorens Tourist Office** (☎ 04 79 00 08 08; www.valthorens.com; Grand Rue, Maison de

Val Thorens; ☺ 8.30am-7pm winter & summer, closed midday & weekends spring & autumn) Has plenty of information in English.

## i Getting There & Away

### TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

For all airport buses, reserve 48 hours ahead.

In winter, **Altibus** (☎ Chambéry office 08 20 32 03 68; www.altibus.com; ☺ call centre 8am-6pm Mon-Sat, midday closure Apr-Nov) links all three Les Trois Vallées resorts with the following airports:

**Chambéry** one way/return €37/61, 2½ to four hours

**Geneva** one way/return €85/144, 3½ hours, three daily Sunday to Friday, six Saturday

**Lyon St-Exupéry** one way/return €73/115, 3¼ to four hours

The nearest railway station is in Moûtiers. From there, during the ski season, **Belle Savoie** (☎ Altibus in Chambéry 08 20 32 03 68, Méribel 04 79 08 54 90; www.altibus.com) runs buses to Val Thorens, Méribel and Courchevel (lines T3, T4 and T5, respectively, one way/return €12.30/21).

### TAXI

Taxis wait at Moûtiers' train station for the trip up to Méribel (€60), Courchevel (€70 to €80) and Val Thorens (€110).

### TRAIN

Moûtiers (Moûtiers-Salins-Brides-les-Bains) is the nearest railhead, with services to/from:

**Chambéry** €14.50, 1½ hours, hourly Monday to Friday, 13 per day Saturday and Sunday

**Paris Gare de Lyon** €90 to €124, 4½ to six hours, hourly Monday to Friday, four Saturday and Sunday

On weekends from mid-December to early April, **Eurostar** (www.eurostar.com) operates direct overnight and day trains from London to Moûtiers (one way/return from €165/290, seven hours).

## Val d'Isère

POP 1637 / ELEV 1850M

Accessible only by a sinuous access road clinging to the heights of the upper Tarentaise Valley, Val d'Isère is enchanting and challenging in equal measure. Drawn by the abundance of skiing and boarding terrain, including plenty of off-piste action, devotees also rave about the culture – either slopeside partying, or the quieter charms of a real Alpine village, huddled around the 16th-century Église St-Roch.

The mighty dam walls of the Lac du Chevril loom large on the approach to Val d'Isère, 32km southeast of Bourg St-Maurice. **Tignes** (elevation 2100m), a purpose-built lakeside village, and nearby Val d'Isère form the gargantuan **Espace Killy** skiing area, named after Jean-Claude Killy, who grew up in Val d'Isère and won three slalom and downhill golds at the 1968 Winter Olympics in Grenoble. The area is especially popular with Brits, Danes and Swedes.



## Activities

### Centre Aquasportif

SPA

(☎04 79 04 26 01; [www.centre-aquasportif.com](http://www.centre-aquasportif.com); rte de la Balme; 1 entry, multiple facilities €18.40; ☀10am-9pm) Situated next to the Téléphérique Olympique, this glass-and-stone complex is great for a postslope unwind. Besides pools with jets and bubble beds, it offers first-class sports facilities, a climbing wall, and a spa area with saunas, steam rooms and whirlpools.

### Espace Killy

SKIING

([www.espacekilly.com](http://www.espacekilly.com)) Killy's ski season runs from very late November until very early May, offering a great mix of beginner, intermediate and advanced skiing on 300km of pistes between 1550m and 3456m – and miles of glorious off-piste. Its height makes summer skiing possible, on the Grande Motte and Pissailas glaciers.

### Bureau des Guides

OUTDOORS

(☎03 77 08 09 76; [www.guides-montagne-valdisere.com](http://www.guides-montagne-valdisere.com)) Be it for canyoning, mountaineering or off-piste winter adventures, this office can arrange experienced local guides. Ask at the Mountain Proshop, Galerie des Cimes, av Olympique.

### Top Ski

SKIING

(☎07 82 85 88 89; [www.topski.fr](http://www.topski.fr); av Olympique, Immeuble Les Andes) This highly regarded independent ski school arranges one-to-one and group tuition in on- and off-piste skiing, boarding, ski touring, heliskiing and snowshoeing with expert guides. They're the ideal companions with which to explore Espace Killy.

### ESF

SKIING

(☎04 79 06 02 34; [www.esfvaldisere.com](http://www.esfvaldisere.com); place des Dolomites, Val Village; ☀9.30am-12.30pm & 2.30-5pm in high season) Based in Val Village, the ESF can help skiers and boarders of all levels progress, from €45 for two hours.

## Village des Enfants

OUTDOORS

(☎04 79 40 09 81; [www.valdisere-levillagedesenfants.com](http://www.valdisere-levillagedesenfants.com); Rond Point des Pistes; child 3-13yr half/full day with lunch €46.50/66.50; ☀9am-5.30pm Sun-Fri) Nursery and activities for children aged 6 months to 13 years. Booking at least a month in advance is advisable.

## Winter

**Ski touring** in the area is fabulous, especially in Parc National de la Vanoise. The many ski schools include well-regarded Top Ski and the ESF.

At 2300m, the **snow park** is on the back of Bellevarde mountain. Graded from green (easy) to black (experts only), it has rails, jumps, hips, quarters and a boardercross – everything an aficionado of freestyle (skiing or snowboarding) could ask for. Other winter options range from ice climbing to mushing, and ice skating to winter paragliding – or you can head to the Centre Aquasportif for swimming pools (great for kids), sports facilities and a spa. For more children's activities, head to the Village des Enfants.

You can buy lift passes online or in person from **STVI** (☎04 79 06 32 32; [www.valdiserepass.com](http://www.valdiserepass.com); Gare Centrale; adult/reduced per day €54/43.50, 6 days €270/216; ☀8.30am-5pm in high season). Five free lifts on the lower slopes let novices find their feet without having to purchase a lift ticket.

## Summer

Espace Killy is one of only two places in France (the other is Les Deux Alpes) that still has **summer skiing**: here it's on the Grande Motte and Pissailas glaciers, which are near Tignes and Val d'Isère, respectively.

The valleys and trails that wind their way from Val d'Isère into the nearby Parc National de la Vanoise are a hiker's dream. If you fancy more of a challenge, you can play (safely) among the cliffs at La Daille's two via-ferrata fixed-cable routes. For canyoning, mountaineering or rock climbing with a guide, contact the Bureau des Guides.

**Mountain biking** (Vélo Tout Terrain, or VTT) is big in Val (but forbidden within the national park), with an assortment of downhill (green, blue, red and black), endurance and cross-country circuits. Bikes can be rented at local sport shops. Five lifts are open for no charge to downhill cyclists as well as hikers.

The summer season runs from late June to the first weekend in September. Stop by

the tourist office for details on family-friendly activities, including pony rides.

## Sleeping

To rent an apartment or a chalet, contact tourist-office-run **Val Location** (☎ 04 79 06 74 32; www.valdisere-reservation.com). To buy a four-bedroom apartment in the centre of town, bring at least €2 million.

### **Hôtel L'Avancher**

HOTEL €€

(☎ 04 79 06 02 00; www.hotel-lavancher.com; rte du Prariond; d €144-183, tr/q €231/280; 🍷) The welcome is always warm and attentive at this hotel, one of the oldest in the valley. Its 17 snug rooms are sweetly decorated, chalet style (hearts jigsawed into wood panels, faux-fur bedspreads), plus there's a small lounge with board games and a piano, and a ski/mountain bike workshop.

### ★ **Les Cinq Frères**

BOUTIQUE HOTEL €€€

(☎ 04 79 06 00 03; www.les5freres.com; rue Nicolas Bazile; d incl breakfast €240-355, q incl breakfast €495; 🎿 ski season & mid-Jun–Aug; 🍷) Situated 150m up the main street from the tourist office, this family hotel has been going strong since 1936. Named for the five sons of its founder, it offers rustic-chic luxury with a lovely lounge area, a playroom for kids and 17 tasteful yet character-filled rooms, some with giant old-style bath-tubs.

## Eating

### **Le Salon des Fous**

CAFE €

(☎ 04 79 00 17 92; www.lesalondesfous.com; 10 av Olympique, Centre Village; light mains €7-10; 🕒 8am-10.30pm mid-Nov–Apr & mid-Jun–late Sep) With regular live acts and understated style, the 'Fool's Salon' is one of Val d'Isère's most relaxing boltholes. Light meals served throughout the day – salads, quiches, cheesecake crêpes and the like (€3.50 to €13) – pair nicely with teas such as the 'Secret Tibétain' (jasmine, lavender, ginger, ginseng and vanilla).

### ★ **La Fruitière**

MODERN FRENCH €€

(☎ 04 79 06 07 17; www.lafoliedouce.com; mains €18-29; 🕒 noon-3pm Dec-May) At the top of the La Daille gondola (and next to La Folie Douce, the famous piste-side bar), this *restaurant d'altitude* is legendary for its fine dining and breathtaking mountain views. The creative cuisine is prepared with farm-fresh produce and paired with top wines. Save room for the Savoyard cheese plate.

## DON'T MISS

### ALPINE CHEESE

Part of Val d'Isère's charm is that it's a real village with year-round residents. Claudine is one of them and she runs **La Fermette de Claudine** (☎ 04 79 06 13 89; www.lafermettedeclaudine.com; Val Village, Val d'Isère; 🕒 7am-8pm Dec-May, Jul & Aug). Walk in the door of this *fromagerie*-cum-delicatessen and you'll be enveloped by the heady odours of Alpine cheeses and artisanal sausages.

Claudine's family dairy farm, **La Ferme de l'Adroit** (☎ 04 79 06 13 02; www.lafermedeladroit.com; Val d'Isère; 🕒 fromagerie 9am-noon & 3-7pm Mon-Sat year-round), is also open to the public. All that dairy goodness is served up at the adjacent **L'Étable d'Alain** (☎ 04 79 06 13 02; www.lafermedeladroit.fr; Val d'Isère; menus €40-45; 🕒 noon-2pm Tue-Sun, 7-10pm daily; 🍷).

### **L'Edelweiss**

MODERN FRENCH €€

(☎ 06 10 28 70 64; www.restaurant-edelweiss-valdisere.com; Piste Mangard, Le Fornet; 2-/3-course menus €24/28.50; 🕒 9.30am-4pm Dec-Apr) Perched halfway up Le Fornet's Mangard blue run, this wood-and-stone chalet has wondrous views around the valley. And the food matches the prospect: duck breast with honey and Sichuan pepper, veal with morels and spot-on tarte Tatin. It's good value, and reservations are recommended.

### ★ **L'Atelier d'Edmond**

MODERN FRENCH €€€

(☎ 04 79 00 00 82; www.atelier-edmond.com; rue du Fornet, Le Fornet; menus €95-155; 🕒 lunch Wed-Sun, dinner Tue-Sun Dec-early May) Candlelight bathes stone walls, low beams and family heirlooms in this gorgeous double-Michelin-starred restaurant, where locally sourced ingredients are imaginatively transformed into dishes such as smoked pigeon with cocoa beans and pumpkin. Call ahead to secure one of the Atelier's limited seats, and find it 2km east of Val Village, across from the Téléphérique du Fornet ski lift.



## Drinking & Nightlife

The après-ski scene in Val d'Isère is way up there with the craziest in the French Alps.

### ★ **La Folie Douce**

BAR

(www.lafoliedouce.com; La Daille; 🕒 9am-5pm Dec-Apr) Why wait until you're back down in the

village to party? From 2.30pm every day, DJs, singers, choreographed dancers and live bands fuel a riotous après-ski bash on this outdoor terrace at the top of the La Daille cable car. Ibiza in the snow!

### La Cave...sur le Comptoir

WINE BAR

(☎ 04 79 22 27 81; www.cuisinaval.com; av Olympique; ☼ 7pm-1am) One of the most relaxed spots to raise a glass in the valley, this convivial bar offers not only 30 wines by the glass (€5 to €8; *grand cru* wines €9 to €12) but also delightful ballast in the form of *fromage* and charcuterie. Situated 100m down the hill from the bus station.

### Moris Pub

PUB

(☎ 06 19 20 16 80; av du Prariond, Centre Village; ☼ 4pm-1.30am Mon-Fri, 1pm-1.30am weekends Dec-Apr) A scuffed timber interior and tattooed staff belie the warm welcome at this buzzy British pub. There are also big-screen sports, gourmet burger deals, regular live music (5pm to 7pm and 11pm to 1.30am) and the occasional fancy-dress theme party. Go easy on the toffee vodka.

### Dick's Tea Bar

CLUB

(☎ 06 51 39 99 81; www.dicksteabar.com; rue du Parc des Sports; after 1am €10; ☼ 11pm-5am) Val d'Isère's party HQ and the fabled home of *vodka pomme* (vodka with apple juice), Dick's has been catering to the valley's night owls since 1979. Live music (sax with percussion) from 11pm gives way to resident and international DJs in the small hours. Dress is 'smart casual'.

### Le Petit Danois

BAR

(☎ 04 79 06 27 97; www.lepetitdanois.com; rue du Coin, Centre Village; ☼ 9.30am-1.30am Dec-Apr) Live music and free shots between 5pm and 7pm, €7.50 cocktails, unlimited popcorn and revved-up partygoers dancing on the tables – lucky this Danish-owned party bar serves a full English breakfast the next morning to mop up the mess (€13). Situated 100m behind the bus station.

## i Information

**Tourist Office** (☎ 04 79 06 06 60; www.valdisere.com; place Jacques Mouffier, Centre Village; ☼ 8.30am-7.30pm daily Dec-Apr & Jun-Aug, 9am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Fri low season; ☎) Can supply you with lots of excellent brochures on winter and summer activities, including several for families with kids, and *ValScope*, a weekly schedule of cultural events that comes out each Friday. Internet computers and wi-fi cost €5 per hour.

## i Getting There & Away

### TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

**Chambéry airport** Direct buses during the ski season (one way/return €32/51, two hours, six daily Thursday, Saturday and Sunday).

**Geneva airport** Aérobus (www.altibus.com; www.alpski-bus.com) has direct services (one way/return €68/115, four hours, at least three daily from early December to mid-April). A cheaper ski season option (one way/return €44/75, Saturday and Sunday morning) is run by Ben's Bus (www.bensbus.co.uk), which also serves Grenoble airport.

**Lyon St-Exupéry airport** Seasonal services run by Altibus (☎ 08 20 32 03 68; www.altibus.fr) (one way/return €73/115, 3½ hours, three or four daily Friday, Saturday and Sunday). Another option is to take the train to Bourg St-Maurice (4½ hours) and then bus T14.

Advance reservations are essential during school holiday periods and can be made online or by phone. Tickets are slightly cheaper if bought online.

### BUS

From December to May, **Belle Savoie Express** (☎ 08 20 20 53 30; www.mobisavoie.fr) links the railhead of Bourg St-Maurice, 32km north-west of Val d'Isère, with Val d'Isère and Tignes.

### CAR & MOTORCYCLE

The roads up to Val d'Isère, outfitted with lots of *paravalanche* (avalanche protection) shelters, are narrow, winding and can get traffic-clogged.

**Col de l'Iseran** (2764m), on the D902 south-east to Bonneval-sur-Arc, and **Col du Petit-St-Bernard** (2188m), which leads from Bourg St-Maurice northeast to the Aosta valley in Italy, are blocked by snow for all but the summer months.

### TRAIN

Bourg St-Maurice, the nearest railhead, has train connections to destinations all over France (eg Chambéry and Lyon-Part Dieu) and seasonal bus links to Val d'Isère.

From mid-December to early April on weekends, **Eurostar** (www.eurostar.com) operates direct daytime and overnight services between Bourg St-Maurice and London (one way/return from €156/279, 7½ to nine hours).

## Parc National de la Vanoise

Rugged snowcapped peaks, mirrorlike lakes and an incredible 53 sq km of glaciers are just a few of the sublime natural attractions in the 529-sq-km Parc National de la Vanoise, neatly sandwiched between the

Tarentaise and Maurienne Valleys. This incredible swathe of wilderness was designated France's first national park in 1963. Five nature reserves and 28 villages border the highly protected core of the park, where marmots, chamois and France's largest colony of *bouquetins* (Alpine ibexes) – around 1600 of them – graze freely and undisturbed beneath the larch trees. Overhead, 20 pairs of golden eagles and the odd bearded vulture fly in solitary wonder.

You can base yourself in **Lanslebourg-Mont-Cénil** or **Bonneval-sur-Arc**, two pretty villages along the southern edge of the park (note that the road north to Val d'Isère is open only in summer).



## Activities

The park is hiker's heaven, although heavy snow can make walking trails inaccessible for all but a fraction of the year – June to late September, usually. The **Grand Tour de Haute Maurienne** ([www.hautemaurienne.com](http://www.hautemaurienne.com)), a hike of seven days or more around the upper reaches of the valley, takes in national-park highlights. The GR5 and GR55 cross it, and other trails snake south to the Parc National des Écrins and east into Italy's Grand Paradiso National Park.



## Information

The tourist offices in **Lanslebourg** (☎ 04 79 05 23 66; [www.haute-maurienne-vanoise.com](http://www.haute-maurienne-vanoise.com); 89 rue du Mont-Cenis, Lanslebourg; ☀ 9am-noon & 2-6.30pm mid-Dec–mid-Apr & mid-Jun–Aug, to 5pm Tue, Thu, Fri & Sat May–mid-Jun) and **Bonneval-sur-Arc** (☎ 04 79 05 95 95; [www.bonneval-sur-arc.com](http://www.bonneval-sur-arc.com); Bonneval-sur-Arc; ☀ 9am-noon & 2-6pm late Dec–mid-Apr) stock practical information on walking, limited skiing (cross-country and downhill) and other activities in and around the park. **Termignon-la-Vanoise**, 6km southwest of Lanslebourg, houses the national park's small information centre, the **Maison de la Vanoise** (☎ 04 79 20 51 67; [www.parcnational-vanoise.fr](http://www.parcnational-vanoise.fr); place de la Vanoise, Termignon; ☀ 9am-noon & 2-6pm late Jun–early Sep, to 5pm Mon–Fri low season, Tue–Sat shoulder season).



## Getting There & Away

Trains serving the Arc River valley leave from Chambéry and run as far as Modane, 23km southwest of Lanslebourg, from where **Transdev Savoie** (☎ Altibus 08 20 32 03 68; [www.altibus.com](http://www.altibus.com)) runs three to four daily buses (one or none in the low season) to/from Termignon (€7.40, 35 minutes), Val Cénis-Lanslebourg (€12.30, 45 minutes) and Bonneval-sur-Arc (€12.30, 1¼ hours).

## DAUPHINÉ

Named for the dolphin (*dauphin*) that leapt joyously across the coat of arms of its prior rulers, the historic region of Dauphiné encompasses the territories south and southwest of Savoy, stretching from the River Rhône in the west to the Italian border in the east. It roughly corresponds to the *départements* of Isère, Drôme and – in the *région* of Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, which stretches south to the Mediterranean – Hautes-Alpes. It includes the city of Grenoble (the former capital) and, southeast of there, the mountainous Parc National des Écrins. The relatively gentler terrain of western Dauphiné is typified by the Parc Naturel Régional du Vercors, much loved by cross-country skiers. In the southeast, the bastion town of Briançon stands sentinel near the Italian frontier.

## Grenoble

POP 160,215 / ELEV 215M

Known as the 'Capital of the Alps', Grenoble boasts great museums, excellent dining, effervescent nightlife, outstanding quality of life and a superb public transport system. Home to a slew of high-tech industries, the 1968 Winter Olympic City is the focal point for a wider metropolitan area of more than 650,000 Grenobloises and Grenoblois, nearly 10% of them students.

The city is dramatically sited among the looming massifs of the Parc Naturel Régional de Chartreuse and Parc Naturel Régional du Vercors, with clear sight lines to Mont Blanc itself. Cut by the swift-flowing River Isère, Grenoble delivers mostly mild weather thanks to its low elevation.



## Sights

The pedestrian-friendly city centre is on the left (south) bank of the River Isère, between the Musée de Grenoble (to the east) and Pont de la Porte de France (a bridge). To the north, Fort de la Bastille, a vast hilltop fortress, towers over the area from across the river. The train and bus stations are 500m southwest of Pont de la Porte de France.



## Musée de Grenoble

MUSEUM

(☎ 04 76 63 44 44; [www.museedegrenoble.fr](http://www.museedegrenoble.fr); 5 place de Lavalette; adult/child €8/free; ☀ 10am-6.30pm Wed–Mon) It's worth a trip to Grenoble just to experience this grand tour of Western art from the 13th century, which includes 20th-century luminaries such as Bonnard,



## Grenoble

### 📍 Top Sights

- 1 Musée de Grenoble ..... F1

### 📍 Sights

- 2 Bishops' Palace..... F2  
 3 Musée Dauphinois..... D1  
 4 Musée de la Résistance et de la  
 Déportation de l'Isère..... G4  
 5 Musée de l'Ancien Évêché ..... F2  
 6 Musée Stendhal ..... D3  
 7 Téléphérique Grenoble-Bastille ..... D2

### 📍 Activities, Courses & Tours

- Bureau des Guides et  
 Accompagnateurs de  
 Grenoble..... (see 9)  
 8 Club Alpin Français..... A3  
 9 Maison de la Montagne ..... E4

### 📍 Sleeping

- 10 Hôtel de l'Europe..... D3  
 11 Le Grand Hôtel ..... E3

### 📍 Eating

- 12 Ciao a Te ..... F3  
 13 Halles Ste-Claire..... E3  
 14 La Cuisine des Tontons ..... F3  
 15 La Ferme à Dédé ..... E2  
 16 La Fondue ..... E2  
 17 La Petite Idée ..... A3  
 18 Le Petit Bouche ..... B3

### 📍 Drinking & Nightlife

- 19 Le 365 ..... F2  
 20 Le Tord Boyaux ..... F3

### 📍 Shopping

- 21 Cave de la Laiterie Bayard..... F3  
 22 Épicerie Fine J.P. Bresson ..... F3

Calder, Giacometti, Léger, Magritte, Miró, Modigliani, Picabia, Soutine, de Staël and Van Dongen. Among the other highlights: superb 19th-century landscapes of the Dauphiné region; four absolutely huge canvases by the 17th-century Spaniard Zurbarán; and the gorgeous, light-filled building itself, opened in 1994. Audioguides (€2) are available in French, English and Italian.

### Fort de la Bastille

FORTRESS

(www.bastille-grenoble.com) Built to defend France against the Duchy of Savoy, its great Alpine rival of the early 1800s, this massive fortress sprawls 300m atop the limestone outcrop dominating Grenoble, incorporating earlier defences. From February to December the **Téléphérique Grenoble-Bastille** (quai Stéphane Jay; adult/child one way €5.50/3.35, return €8/4.70; ☉11am-6.30pm Tue-Sun Feb-Apr & Oct-Dec, 9.30am or 11am-7.30pm daily May-Sep, closed Jan) leads directly from the south bank of the Isère to the fortress; alternatively, there are paths for the steep hour-long hike. At the top, a number of walking trails, including the GR9, start or pass by.

From the top, the views are spectacular: on clear days you can see not only the peaks of the Vercors but also the snowy hump of Mont Blanc. On the viewing platform known as the **Belvédère Vauban**, panels (in French and English) indicate what you're looking at. The fort complex has five places to eat, a **tourist office** (☎04 76 89 46 45; ☉1.30-6.30pm Wed, Sat & Sun May-Sep, to 5.30pm

Oct-Apr, daily in school holidays), and the absorbing **Musée des Troupes de Montagne** (French Alpine Troops Museum; ☎04 76 44 33 65; www.bastille-grenoble.fr; adult/child €3/free; ☉11am-6pm Tue-Sun Oct-Dec & Feb-Apr, 9am-6pm daily May-Sep).

### Le Magasin – Centre National d'Art Contemporain

MUSEUM

(☎04 76 21 95 84; www.magasin-cnac.org; 155 cours Berriat; adult/child €4/2.50; ☉2-7pm Wed-Sun) A cavernous glass-and-steel warehouse built by Gustave Eiffel has been turned into one of France's leading centres of contemporary art. Many of the cutting-edge temporary exhibitions were designed specifically for this space. It's situated about 2km west of the centre; to get there, take tram A to the Berriat-Le Magasin stop.

### Musée Dauphinois

MUSEUM

(☎04 57 58 89 01; www.musee-dauphinois.fr; 30 rue Maurice Gignoux; ☉10am-6pm Wed-Mon Sep-May, to 7pm Jun-Aug) **FREE** Occupying a 17th-century convent, this *département*-run museum has examined the people, cultures, crafts and traditions of the Dauphiné highlands since 1906. Permanent exhibitions in French and English – tracing subjects such as the history of skiing (from the Stone Age to the snowboard age) – are complemented by well-curated temporary displays. It's situated on the hillside below Fort de la Bastille, 300m up the hill from Pont St-Laurent over the River Isère.

## **i** GRENOBLE CENT SAVER

The pick-and-mix **Grenoble Pass** (2/3 attractions €12.50/16.50), sold at the tourist office, can save you money if you'll be visiting the Grenoble or Stendhal museums, travelling by cable car up to Fort de la Bastille, or taking a guided or audioguide tour of the city.

### Musée de l'Ancien Évêché

MUSEUM

(☎04 76 03 15 25; www.ancien-veche-isere.fr; 2 rue Très Cloîtres; ☺9am-6pm Mon, Tue, Thu & Fri, 1-6pm Wed, 11am-6pm Sat & Sun) The 13th-century Bishops' Palace now houses a rich collection tracing the area's development from pre-history, through Gallo-Roman and medieval times to the early 20th century. Underneath place Notre Dame you can see part of Roman Grenoble's 3rd-century defensive walls and a 4th-century baptistry, discovered in the late 1980s during tram-line construction. Tours are free, and some signage is in English.

### Musée de la Résistance et de la Déportation de l'Isère

MUSEUM

(☎04 76 42 38 53; www.resistance-en-isere.fr; 14 rue Hébert; ☺9am-6pm Mon & Wed-Fri, 1.30-6pm Tue, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun) **FREE** This emotive, finely curated museum presents the history of Grenoble's famously vigorous resistance to Italian and then German forces during WWII, and of the deportation of a thousand local Jews – including 80 children – to Nazi camps. There are temporary exhibitions and signs in French, English and German.

### Musée Stendhal

MUSEUM

(☎04 76 86 52 08; www.bm-grenoble.fr/1083-musee-stendhal.htm; 20 Grande Rue; admission with audioguide/audioguide €3/5; ☺10am-noon & 2-6pm Sat, 2-6pm 1st Sun of month) This modest museum, housed in the restored apartment of his maternal grandfather, Docteur Gagnon, celebrates the milieu and work of the author of *The Red and the Black*. Correspondence, lithographs, statuary and other mementos of his life are on display. Contact the museum in advance for guided tours during the week (available from 10am to noon and 2pm to 6pm Tuesday to Friday).

## **🚴** Activities

Grenoble is well set up for exploring on two wheels: bikes can easily be hired from 32 Métrovélo (p513) stations across the city.

## ★ Acrobastille

ADVENTURE SPORTS

(☎04 76 59 30 75; www.acrobastille.fr; Fort de la Bastille; adult/child €27/19; ☺Mar-Nov) Adrenaline junkies should head up to the Bastille (p509) and hop on one of Acrobastille's two 300m-long zip lines, plunge into the Spéléobox (caving simulator) or try out the new Mission Bastille (a labyrinth worthy of Indiana Jones). Check the website for reservations and opening hours (subject to change due to weather conditions). Admission includes all a trip up and back in the cable car.

## Maison de la Montagne

OUTDOORS

(☎04 76 44 67 03; www.grenoble-montagne.com; 3 rue Raoul Blanchard; ☺9.30am-12.30pm & 1-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm & 2-5pm Sat) This city-run centre provides advice on the perennial action of the Dauphiné Alps – including ski touring, ice climbing (on frozen waterfalls), hiking, rock climbing, biking, canyoning, paragliding and caving – plus weather and avalanche bulletins, and help planning overnight stays in the mountains. It also has all the maps you'll need, including the free METROPOLE guide to nature walks around Grenoble.

## Bureau des Guides et

### Accompagnateurs de Grenoble

OUTDOORS

(☎04 38 37 01 71; www.guide-grenoble.com; 3 rue Raoul Blanchard, Maison de la Montagne; ☺9.30am-12.30pm & 1-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm & 2-5pm Sat) The dedicated guides from this bureau can help climbers, hikers, rafters and high-altitude thrill seekers of all levels explore Les Alpes.

## Club Alpin Français

OUTDOORS

(☎04 76 87 03 73; www.cafgrenoble.com; 32 av Félix Viallet; ☺3-5pm Tue & Fri, 5-7pm Wed & Thu, reduced days in Jul & Aug) The French Alpine Club runs outings and mountain day trips: details are posted in its front window and on its website, and casual purchasers of a €6 'Discovery Card' can join in. This branch runs most of the *refuges* (overnight mountain stays) in the Isère *département*.

## \*\*\* Festivals & Events

### Les Détours de Babel

WORLD MUSIC

(☎04 76 89 07 16; www.detoursdebabel.fr; ☺late Mar-mid-Apr) A three-week festival of jazz and world music with some innovative ticketing ideas: it's possible to buy a 'solidarity ticket' for someone who can't afford to attend, or to pay what you feel selected events are worth (to you).

**Vues d'en Face**

FILM

(www.vuesdenface.com; ☺ early Apr) The rainbow flag flies high for this 10-day gay and lesbian film fest.

**Cabaret Frappé**

MUSIC

(www.cabaret-frappe.com; 3 nights €39; ☺ late Jul) This much-loved festival, free in 2016, brings a week of fresh-air concerts to the Jardin la Ville.

 **Sleeping**

Many of Grenoble's hotels cater to the business trade, meaning prices are initially reasonable, then drop considerably on the weekend (Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights) and in August. A number of inexpensive hotels can be found right around the train station.

**Hôtel de l'Europe**

HISTORIC HOTEL €

(☎ 04 76 46 16 94; www.hoteleurope.fr; 22 place Grenette; s/d/tr/q from €82/87/94/104; ☺) On the city centre's liveliest square, this hotel occupies two historic buildings – one from 1820, the other from 1905. All but a few of the 39 immaculately kept rooms have wrought-iron balconies (ask for a mountain view) and a family of parakeets lives on the *entresol* floor. Breakfast is €9.50 and off-site parking is available at a 50% discount. Rates drop on weekends.

**Hostel Grenoble**

HOSTEL €

(☎ 04 76 09 33 52; www.hihostels.com; 10 av du Grésivaudan, Échirolles; dm incl breakfast €20; ☺ reception 24hr; @ ☺) Grenoble's ultra-modern, ecoconscious hostel, with 126 beds, is set in parkland in the suburb of Échirolles, 5km southwest of the centre. The top-notch facilities include a bar, kitchen, games room, sun deck and laundry.

Served by bus 1; get off at 'La Quinzaine' stop. Non-HI-members must buy a full membership to stay.

**Splendid Hôtel**

HOTEL €€

(☎ 04 76 46 33 12; www.splendid-hotel.com; 22 rue Thiers; d €99-149, f €149; ☺ @ ☺) Its lobby and 45 rooms jazzed up with funky and disparate designs, this charismatic place is a welcome break from Grenoble's workaday hotel scene. Some of the cosy rooms have hydromassage showers, and studio apartments can also be had for a week or more. Enclosed parking costs €5.90, or take trams A, B or E.

**Le Grand Hôtel**

HOTEL €€

(☎ 04 76 51 22 59; www.grand-hotel-grenoble.fr; 5 rue de la République; s/d from €99/118; ☺ @ ☺) This family-run affair, the only four-star hotel in central Grenoble, makes great use of a stately, late-19th-century building. Beyond the sleek, colourful reception and 'Stendahl' bar are well-appointed, monochromatic rooms with spacious bathrooms, triple-pane soundproof windows and video-on-demand. From the upper floors, balconies look out across the city to the Alps beyond.

 **Eating**

As the one-time capital of Dauphiné, Grenoble is the place to sample *gratin dauphinois* (finely sliced potatoes oven-baked in cream with a pinch of nutmeg).

**Halles Ste-Claire**

MARKET €

(place Ste-Claire; ☺ 7am-1pm Tue-Sun, 3-7pm Fri & Sat) Pick up picnic fixin's or fresh meat, vegetables and pasta at this covered food market, built in 1874.

**La Ferme à Dédé**

FRENCH €

(☎ 04 76 54 00 33; www.restaurantlafermeade.com; 24 rue Barnave; mains €18; ☺ noon-2.30pm & 7-11.30pm) One of three 'farms' Dédé keeps in Grenoble and nearby Sassenage, this is a good place to get up to speed on what eating in the Dauphiné is all about. Grilled hangar steak with morel mushrooms and *gratin dauphinois* is a good place to start.

**La Petite Idée**

FRENCH €

(☎ 04 76 47 52 95; www.la-petite-idee.fr; 7 cours Jean Jaurès; lunch menus €14-18, dinner menus €18-30; ☺ noon-2pm & 7-10pm Tue-Sun; ☺) At this convivial restaurant, the traditional French *menu* changes two or three times a year but always features market-fresh, seasonal dishes such as rosemary-rubbed lamb with creamy *gratin dauphinois*. The €10 lunchtime *plat du jour* is great value.

**Le Petit Bouche**

BISTRO €€

(☎ 04 76 43 10 39; 16 rue Docteur Mazet; lunch plats du jour €8.50, menu €27-32; ☺ noon-2pm & 7-9pm Mon-Fri) Festooned with vintage bric-a-brac, with time-scuffed floors and a narrow open bar-kitchen, Le Petit Bouche enjoys a loyal following. Its classic bistro fare, such as *boudin noir* with apple, is great value.

**Ciao a Te**

ITALIAN €€

(☎ 04 76 42 54 41; 2 rue de la Paix; lunch menus €16 & €22, mains €12-29; ☺ noon-2pm & 7.30-10pm Tue-Sat Sep-Jul) Emilian and Pugliese

dishes jostle with the food of Naples and Sicily in this perennially popular trattoria. Enter through the kitchen and loosen your belt for freshly made pasta, crispy *panzerotti* (deep-fried calzone), or veal stuffed with mozzarella and napped with tomato sauce. Dinner bookings are advisable.

**La Cuisine des Tontons** FRENCH €€  
(☎04 76 25 25 00; www.lacuisinedestontons.fr; 9 rue Bayard; menus €19.90-29.90; ☺noon-2pm & 7.30-10pm Tue-Sat) One for those with a 'meat tooth', this whimsically decorated bistro – decked out in homage to the 1963 French caper flick *Les Tontons Flingeurs* – does no fewer than eight different versions of *tartare*: alongside the classic, others involve Roquefort, nuts and other innovations.

**La Fondue** FRENCH €€  
(☎04 76 15 20 72; www.lafonduegrenoble.fr; 5 rue Brocherie; mains €16-22; ☺noon-1.30pm & 7pm-1am Mon-Sat) Faced with slightly kitsch wood panelling and serving 17 kinds of cheese and meat fondue, this is a great place to warm your insides on a cold Grenoble evening. *Raclette* and *tartiflette* round out the Savoyard offerings, and, for dessert, there's chocolate fondues laced with G n pi or Chartreuse.

## Drinking & Nightlife

There's a cluster of cafes and pubs a couple of blocks south of the river, on and around place aux Herbes, adjacent place Claveyson and nearby place St-Andr . When it's warm enough, place Grenette, three blocks further southwest, fills with cafe tables.

**Le Tord Boyaux** WINE BAR  
(☎04 76 44 18 90; www.tord-boyaux.fr; 4 rue Auguste Gach ; ☺6pm-1am Tue & Wed, to 2am Thu-Sat) This unique establishment, popular with students, features 40+ *vins aromatis s* (flavoured wines; €2.50) that, believe it or not, you drink on the rocks. Some of them are quite extravagant: *chataigne* (chestnut), *G n pi-fraise* (G n pi-strawberry), *mangue piment e* (spicy mango) and the mysterious *p tite pillule bleu* (little blue pill). Come during *les heures joyeuses* (6pm to 9pm) and put your taste buds through their paces.

**Le 365** WINE BAR  
(☎04 76 51 73 18; 3 rue Bayard; ☺6pm-1am or 2am Tue-Sat) A clutter of oversized glass bottles, oil paintings and candles create a relaxed setting for sipping wine – about 30 are available by the glass (€2.50 to €6). You can snack on cheese, sausages and terrines,

wig out to live bands (two Wednesdays per month) or get into the spirit of monthly themed parties.

## Shopping

** picerie Fine J.P. Bresson** FOOD & DRINKS  
(☎04 76 44 42 08; 2 rue Auguste G che; ☺8.30am-12.30pm & 2.30-7pm Tue-Sat) An irresistible trove of comestibles, this handsome wooden-shuttered * picerie* (grocer's) is stuffed rigid with wines, confectionery, *confits des fleurs* (preserves made from violet, rose, jasmine and other petals) and Grenoble specialities such as hazelnut oil.

**Cave de la Laiterie Bayard** FOOD & DRINKS  
(☎09 60 40 27 13; 17 rue Bayard; ☺7am-12.30pm & 3-7pm Mon-Sat) Established in 1931, this richly lactic-smelling dairy shop does a roaring trade in Alpine cheeses, fresh milk, yoghurt, butter, wine and spirits. The milk-bottle door handles and Alpine scenes on the walls ensure there's no confusion as to their line of business.

## Information

**Tourist Office** (☎04 76 42 41 41; www.grenoble-tourisme.com; 14 rue de la R publique; ☺1-6pm Mon, 9am-6pm Tue-Sat, 9am-noon Sun Oct-Apr, to 7pm Mon-Sat May-Sep; ☎) Has very useful free maps and guides in English.

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

During the ski season, a clutch of budget airlines, including easyJet, Ryanair and Jet2.com, link **Grenoble Is re Airport** (☎04 76 65 48 48; www.grenoble-airport.com), 45km northwest of Grenoble, with major British airports.

### BUS

**Eurolines** (www.eurolines.com; 11 place de la Gare; ☺6am-8pm Mon-Sat, 7am-8pm Sun), which connects with most European countries, has a desk at Grenoble bus station

**Transaltitude** (☎08 20 08 38 38; www.transaltitude.fr) has frequent buses to various ski stations during the ski season, including Alpe d'Huez and Les Deux Alpes (€18, 95 minutes, three to nine per day) and Chamrousse (€14, 75 minutes, one to six per day).

**Transis re** (www.transisere.fr) can get you to Bourg d'Oisans (bus 3000; €6.50, 1¼ hours, at least five daily).

**VFD** (www.vfd.fr; www.bus-et-clic.com) goes – faster than the train – to Brian on (€30.50, 2½ hours, one to three daily).

## TRAIN

**Train station** (1 place de la Gare) About 1km west of the centre; linked to the centre by tram lines A and B.

**SNCF boutique** ([www.sncf.com/fr](http://www.sncf.com/fr); 15 rue de la République; ☺ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat) Sells train tickets in the city centre, right across the street from the tourist office.

## Getting Around

### TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

The intercity train and **bus stations** (11 place de la Gare; ☺ 6am-8pm Mon-Sat, 7am-8pm Sun) are adjacent to one another, 1km northwest of the town centre. Take trams A or B, or walk 15 minutes, to the city centre.

**Grenoble Isère Airport** is 45km north of the city, accessible by **shuttle bus** (☎ 04 76 06 48 66; [www.actibus.com/aeroport](http://www.actibus.com/aeroport)) or taxi. Shuttles also run to and from Lyon St-Exupéry and Geneva airports, run by **Faure Vercors** (☎ 08 25 82 55 36; [www.faurevercors.fr](http://www.faurevercors.fr)) and **Aérocarr** (☎ 09 74 50 07 50; [www.aerocar.fr](http://www.aerocar.fr)), respectively.

For details on seasonal buses from Grenoble Isère Airport to various ski stations, see [www.actibus.com/aeroport](http://www.actibus.com/aeroport), [www.bensbus.co.uk](http://www.bensbus.co.uk) and [www.mobsavoie.fr](http://www.mobsavoie.fr).

## BICYCLE

Compact, and with extensive cycle infrastructure, Grenoble is great for two-wheeled exploration. Pick up *Les Itinéraires Cyclables*, a free map of Grenoble-area cycling routes, from **Métrovélo** (☎ 08 20 22 38 38; [www.metrovelo.fr](http://www.metrovelo.fr); place de la Gare) or the **tourist office**.

## Around Grenoble

Grenoble is within striking distance of two gorgeous, mountainous national parks: Parc Naturel Régional du Vercors and Parc National des Écrins. Both are wonderful for cross-country skiing, walking, caving, wildlife and just generally immersing yourself in the unhurried culture of the region.

### Parc Naturel Régional du Vercors

The gently rolling pastures, highland plateaux, chiselled limestone peaks and pastoral hamlets of this 2062-sq-km nature park, southwest of Grenoble, are quieter and cheaper than the Alps' high-profile resorts. The wildlife-rich park draws families seeking fresh air and low-key activities such as cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, hiking (on a whopping 3000km of trails), mountain biking and caving. Topping it all is the Ré-

serve Naturelle des Hauts-Plateaux, at 170 sq km, France's largest terrestrial nature reserve.

## Sights & Activities

### Grotte de la Luire

CAVE

([www.grottedelaluire.com](http://www.grottedelaluire.com); Le passage, 26420 Saint Agnan en Vercors; adult/child €8.50/6; ☺ Dec 17–Nov 13) Filled with karst springs and enormous, spectacularly lit chambers, the Grotte de la Luire was used as an emergency hospital during WWII. Up to five tours depart daily, but days of operation vary greatly throughout the year: check the website to be certain.

### Les Accompagnateurs Nature et Patrimoine

WALKING

(☎ 04 76 95 08 38; [www.accompagnateur-vercors.com](http://www.accompagnateur-vercors.com); ☺ year-round) Leaving from the tourist offices of Villard de Lans (p514) or Lans-en-Vercors, Les Accompagnateurs walks in the Vercors park are conducted by knowledgeable guides. In spring, summer and autumn they offer half-day (adult/child €17/11) and day walks (adult/child €27/20) among Alpine wild flowers and wildlife, while half-day snowshoeing tours (adult/child €20/15) are offered in winter.

### Gorges du Furon

CANYON

Canyoning, abseiling and walking are all popular in the spectacular Gorges du Furon, carved through the Vercors limestone by the rushing River Furon. You'll see the gorges (in fact, pass through them) just before you reach Lans-en-Vercors, on the D531 from Grenoble.

## Sleeping & Eating

### À la Crécia

B&amp;B €

(☎ 04 76 95 46 98; [www.gite-en-vercors.com](http://www.gite-en-vercors.com); 436 chemin des Cléments, Les Cléments, Lans-en-Vercors; s/d/tr/q incl breakfast €58/63/78/93) ☺ Renovated by Véronique and Pascal, this ecoconscious 16th-century farm, home to goats, pigs and poultry, has five large guest rooms panelled in spruce and pine. Dinner is a feast of farm-fresh produce, with wine included (*menus* €19). You'll find it 1.8km south of Lans-en-Vercors' church, on the far outskirts of the village.

### Au Gai Soleil de Mont-Aiguille

HOTEL €

(☎ 04 76 34 41 71; [www.hotelgaisoleil.com](http://www.hotelgaisoleil.com); Chichilianne; d/superior €48/73; ☺ ☎) At the foot of striking Mont Aiguille, this simple inn has fabulous views, superb access to local hiking routes, a rustic country restaurant, a spa and

two massage rooms for treating weary muscles at trail's end.

### Gîte d'Alpage de la Molière

FRENCH €

(☎06 09 38 42 42; <http://gitedelamoliere.aufilduvercors.org>; 41 impasse des Frênes, Les Eperouses, Autrans; menus €15-28; ☺lunch daily Jun-Sep) High above Lans-en-Vercors, this welcoming trail-side *refuge* with incomparable views serves simple mountain fare (savoury vegetable tarts, salad with smoked trout, and raspberry, blueberry and walnut pies) on umbrella-shaded picnic tables astride an Alpine meadow. The picnic hampers, only €12 per adult, are a great option for rambblers.

## i Information

**Tourist Office (Villard de Lans)** (☎04 76 95 10 38; [www.villarddelans.com](http://www.villarddelans.com); 101 place Mure-Ravaud, Villard de Lans; ☺9am-noon & 2.30-6.30pm daily Jul & Aug, other times hours vary; 📞) Villard de Lans' tourist office has an online service for booking hotels and *chambres d'hôte*, and should be your first port of call for information on outdoor activities and local guides. Its opening hours follow a complicated seasonal pattern, so check online before visiting!

## i Getting There & Away

Buses 5100 and 5110, run by **Transisère**, (☎08 20 08 38 38; [www.transisere.fr](http://www.transisere.fr)) link Grenoble with Lans-en-Vercors (€5.90, 45 minutes, seven to 10 daily) and Villard de Lans (€5.90, one hour, four to seven daily). The trip, which passes through the looming **Gorges du Furon** (p513), is quite beautiful.

## Les Deux Alpes

POP 2200 / ELEV 1600M

Les Deux Alpes were once a brace of quiet mountain hamlets. Today, with glorious powder for off-piste fans, summer skiing on a glacier, thrilling mountain-bike descents and a party to rival anywhere in the French Alps, this buzzing resort brings as much attitude as altitude.

## 🗨 Sights & Activities

Contact the Bureau des Guides for ice climbing, snowshoeing and off-piste skiing in winter; and rock climbing, canyoning and biking expeditions in summer.

### Grotte de Glace

CAVE

(Ice Cave; adult/child €5/4; ☺10am-3.30pm winter & summer) Ice statues representing crea-

tures from prehistory glisten in this ice cave, carved 30m deep into the Glacier des Deux Alpes. To get there, take the Jandri Express lift to 3200m.

## Winter

Les Deux Alpes' winter season runs from December to April. The main **skiing** domain lies below (ie west of) the summit of **La Meije** (3983m), one of the highest peaks in the Parc National des Écrins. Lots of lifts (per day/week €47.50/268.10 for an adult, €38.10/214.50 for a child) come right into the village, making ski-in ski-out a cinch; five beginners' lifts – great for kids – are free. The higher you go, the easier the pistes are.

Free-riders come from far and wide to tackle the breathtaking, near-vertical **Valions de la Meije** descent in La Grave, 24km (by road) east of Les Deux Alpes on the other side of the mountain. The stuff of myth, the off-piste run plummets from 3800m to 1400m – that's 2400 vertical metres! – and is strictly for the crème de la crème of off-piste riders.

Other winter options include ice skating, careening around on an ice bumper car (for kids) and going on a *motoneige* (snowmobile) expedition; the tourist office has details.

### La Grave

SKIING

(☎04 76 79 91 09; [www.la-grave.com](http://www.la-grave.com)) One gondola from the charming stone village of La Grave (€47.50 for a day pass, 30 minutes) drops the adventurous off at 3200m, from where they find their way down unmarked and unpatrolled slopes. It's possible to link by foot with Les Deux Alpes, at 3500m; a guide is strongly recommended.

## Summer

Thanks to the **Glacier des Deux-Alpes** (2900m to 3600m), Les Deux Alpes is one of only two places in France where you can **ski** (or learn to ski) on a glacier in summer (the other is Espace Killy, above Val d'Isère and Tignes). When it's clear, the 360-degree panorama takes in much of southeastern France, including Mont Blanc, the Massif Central and Mont Ventoux. The season runs from about 21 June to August and reopens for a week in late October/early November; a day pass, valid for skiing and the **snow park** from 7.15am to 12.30pm (and for other activities in the afternoon), costs €38.50/31 for an adult/child.

You can combine morning skiing with **mountain biking** on scores of nail-biting

descents (in winter they're ski pistes) and cross-country trails. A pass to seven bike-accessible lifts costs €20/24.50 for a half/full day. Les Deux Alpes also offers numerous **hiking trails** and plenty of opportunities for **paragliding** as well as ice skating, swimming, summer luge, tennis etc.

Many ski shops rent out Alp-ready mountain bikes in the summer.

## Sleeping & Eating

### Hotel Serre-Palaz

HOTEL €

(☎04 76 80 56 33; www.hotelserre-palaz.fr; 13 place de Venosc; d incl breakfast €55-143) With 24 bright, quiet rooms, a snug bar for après-ski and marvellous views of the Écrins national park, this spick-and-span chalet is excellent value. Lionel, your affable host, is a ski instructor and can give you plenty of insider tips. It's situated at the southern edge of town, near the gondola to Venosc.

### ★ Hotel Côte Brune

HOTEL €€€

(☎04 76 80 54 89; www.hotel-cotebrune.fr; 6 rue Côte Brune; d incl half-board €170-260; 🍷) You can ski in and out of this hotel, with its swanky new spa and sprawling slopeside terrace bar. The 18 wood-panelled rooms radiate Alpine charm, the south-facing ones have balconies, and some are geared for families.

### Le Raisin d'Ours

FRENCH €€

(☎04 76 79 29 56; www.leraisindours.fr; 98 av de la Muzelle; menus €26-40; ☺ noon-2pm & 7-10pm) This stylishly rustic restaurant serves French Alpine cuisine – *diots* (Savoyard sausages), ravioli in cream, and similarly sustaining fare – accompanied by wines from every region of France (the owner, Aurélie, is a sommelier). The mood is relaxed, the service attentive.

## Drinking & Nightlife

### Smithy's Tavern

BAR

(☎04 76 11 36 79; www.smithystavern.com; 7 rue du Cairou; 🍷) Doing its best to live up to the clunky motto 'The Avoidance of Sameness', this rocking, English-owned pub is one of the premier party spots in the Deux Alpes. The low, timbered ceiling and long, battle-scarred bar downstairs oversee regular gigs, DJ nights and head-spinning parties, while the upstairs grill pumps out fajitas, burgers and steaks.

### Smokey Joe's

BAR

(place des Deux Alpes; ☺9am or 10am-midnight late Nov-late Apr & mid-Jun-Aug; 🍷) A daily

happy hour (4pm to 7pm), spicy Tex-Mex food, pizzas and dice shots are bound to get you grooving in your snow boots at this British-owned hang-out very near the base of the Jandri lift. There's also foosball, pool, and a staff of native English speakers.

## Information

**Maison des Deux Alpes** (4 place des Deux Alpes; ☺8am-7pm in high season) is home to the **Tourist Office** (☎04 76 79 22 00; www.les2alpes.com; 4 place des Deux Alpes; ☺8am-7pm late Nov-late Apr & mid-Jun-Aug, 9am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Fri in low season; 📞). **ESF** (☎04 76 79 21 21; www.esf2alpes.com; Maison des Deux Alpes; ☺8.30am-6.30pm in high season) and **Bureau des Guides** (☎04 76 11 36 29; www.guides2alpes.com; 4 place des Deux Alpes; ☺3.30-6.30pm).

## Getting There & Away

Les Deux Alpes is 67km southeast of Grenoble and 19km southeast of Bourg d'Oisans. Airport transfers are available from Grenoble and Lyon airports, and **Transaltitude** (☎08 20 08 38 38; www.transaltitude.fr) buses connect to Grenoble, in high season.

Book online or at **Agence Transisère VFD** (☎04 76 80 51 22; 112 av de la Muzelle).

## Alpe d'Huez

POP 1700 / ELEV 1860M

The Alpe d'Huez Grand Domaine Ski Area combines the resorts of Alpe d'Huez, Auris-en-Oisans, Huez-en-Oisans, Oz-en-Oisans, Vaujany and Villard Reculas. Ranging from 1250m to 3330m, it boasts 250km of well-groomed pistes that range from dead easy to death-defying. The ski season lasts from early December to late April, when the sun on its south-facing slopes can become a problem.

Summer (July and August) brings a mix of hikers and mountain bikers – and, often, the Tour de France.

## Activities

For adventure activities such as ice climbing, mountain climbing, via ferrata and glacier hiking, contact the Bureau des Guides.

### Bureau des Guides

OUTDOORS

(☎04 76 80 42 55; www.guidesalpedhuez.com; Rond-Point des Pistes, Chalet ESF; ☺9.30am-12.30pm & 2.30-5.30pm) This should be your first port of call for off-piste, back-country and guided skiing, and for mountaineering

and climbing in the warmer months. A half-day's guided skiing costs €250.

### ESF

(☎ 04 76 80 31 69; www.esf-alpedhuez.com; SKIING place Paganon, La Maison de l'Alpe; ☼ 9am-7pm ski season, 9am-noon & 1.30-5.30pm rest of year) Housed in the same building as the principal tourist office in Alpe d'Huez, the French Ski School has lessons for skiers and boarders of all levels. A one-hour lesson for one or two people costs €48.

### Skiing

The **Pic Blanc** (3330m), Alpe d'Huez' highest point, commands magical panoramas that reach across one-fifth of France. Accessible winter and summer via the Tronçon and Pic Blanc cable cars, it's possible to ski over two vertical kilometres from this awesome eyrie. Then there's Europe's longest black run, the breathtakingly sheer, 16km, **La Sarenne** (also accessed from the Pic Blanc car).

### Hiking & Biking

In summer, marked **hiking trails** lead up and across the slopes to jewel-like lakes such as the **Lac Blanc**, **Lac de la Fare** and **Lac du Milieu**.

For **mountain-biking** enthusiasts, the area is downhill heaven, with more than 260km of trails to rattle and roll down, and four bike parks. A one-day summertime lift pass costs €16 for both pedestrians and cyclists.

Alpe d'Huez is (in)famous for its incredibly steep, 14km access road, whose 21 hair-pin curves are a regular highlight of the Tour de France.

### Sleeping & Eating

Few places to stay are ski-in ski-out, but the free Télécentre lift connects the village with Rond-Point des Pistes at the village's upper edge, departure point for lots more lifts. Stay in central Alpe d'Huez to be close to the action, or consider a quieter billet in one of the outlying villages.

### Le Tremplin

(☎ 04 76 80 33 99; Centre de Jour, Bergers; mains €10-22; ☼ 8am-10pm in high season) Dominating the northern side of the Commercial Centre in the Quartier des Bergers is this briskly efficient, all-purpose brasserie, ideal for post-piste pizzas, *galettes* every-which-way, traditional Alpine dishes, or a warming après-ski *vin chaud* on the decking.

### Le Passe-Montagne

FRENCH €€

(☎ 04 76 11 31 53; www.lepasse-montagne.com; 122 rte de la Poste; menus lunch/dinner €19.50/32.50; ☼ 11.45am-1.30pm & 6.30-9.30pm; 🍴) An open fire burns in the beamed dining room of this stylish wooden chalet, a fine place for a tête-à-tête over *ravioles du royans* (Comte-stuffed pasta squares, perhaps with cream and snails) or a steak, hot-stone grilled at your table.

### Information

Information hub **Maison de l'Alpe** (place Paganon; ☼ 8.45am-7pm Dec-Apr, 9am-noon & 2-5pm Mon-Fri Sep-Nov; 📞) sells ski passes and houses the helpful **tourist office** (☎ 04 76 11 44 44; www.alpedhuez.com; place Paganon; ☼ 8.45am-7pm Dec-Apr, 9am-noon & 2-5pm Mon-Fri Sep-Nov; 📞), **accommodation reservation centre** (☎ 04 76 11 59 90; www.reservation.alpedhuez.com; place Paganon, La Maison de l'Alpe) and ESF.

### Getting There & Away

Alpe d'Huez is 64km southeast of Grenoble. From late December to March, **Transaltitude** (☎ 08 20 08 38 38; www.transaltitude.fr) buses link Alpe d'Huez with Grenoble's train and bus stations (€6.50, two hours, at least three daily) via Bourg d'Oisans.

## Bourg d'Oisans

POP 3228 / ELEV 720M

A gateway to several world-famous resorts, the valley village of Bourg d'Oisans – starting point for the serpentine, 23km road to Alpe d'Huez – makes an excellent base for hiking, mountain biking and snow sports.

### Sights & Activities

For information on the area, check out <http://oisans.com> and [www.bikes-oisans.com](http://www.bikes-oisans.com), which have details on trails, maps and bike hire. For details on activities such as kayaking on the Drac's turquoise waters, rock climbing, via-ferrata routes and paragliding, contact the tourist office.

### Musée des Minéraux et de la Faune des Alpes

MUSEUM

(☎ 04 76 80 27 54; www.musee-bourgdoisans.fr; place de l'Église; adult/child €5.15/2.30; ☼ 2-6pm Sat & Sun mid-Dec-mid-Nov, 2-6pm Wed-Mon Apr-Jul & school holidays) Bone up on the national park's fascinating geology, flora and fauna, including ibex and chamois, at this nature-savvy museum.

## Cycles et Sports

CYCLING

(📍04 76 79 16 79; [www.cyclesetsports.com](http://www.cyclesetsports.com); place du Docteur Faure; ☀️9am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Sat Oct-Apr, 8.30am-7pm daily May-Sep) For those mad enough to tackle the remorseless climb up Alpe d'Huez (21 bends, an ascent of nearly 1220m, and an average gradient of 7.9%) this boutique operation hires out high-end road bikes for between €42 and €90 per day.

## Sleeping & Eating

Aside from brasseries and restaurants serving robust Alpine fare, pizza is the most widely available food in Le Bourg. Establishments fan out from the junction of av de la République and rue du Général de Gaulle, and there's an outdoor **food market** in the village centre on Saturday, from 7am to 1pm, plus Wednesdays in July and August.

## Ferme Noémie

B&amp;B €

(📍04 76 11 06 14; [www.fermenoemie.com](http://www.fermenoemie.com); chemin Pierre Polycarpe, Les Sables; apt per week €375-1500, luxury tents per day/week €65/450, camp sites €10.50-25; ☀️campground Apr-Oct) Run by a British couple, Melanie and Jeremy Smith, Ferme Noémie has barn-conversion apartments with four to six beds, four-bed luxury tents and old-fashioned camp sites. Prices depend on seasonal demand. To get there from the D1091, follow the signs for about 500m.

## Information

The **Maison du Parc** (📍04 76 80 00 51; [www.ecrins-parcnational.fr](http://www.ecrins-parcnational.fr); 120 rue Gambetta; ☀️1.30-5pm Mon-Thu Sep-Jun, 10am-noon & 3-6.30pm daily Jul & Aug) is great for information on the Parc National des Écrins, while the **Tourist Office** (📍04 76 80 03 25; [www.bourgdoisans.com](http://www.bourgdoisans.com); quai Girard; ☀️9am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Sat Sep-Jun, 9am-6pm Jul & Aug; 📞) is good for everything else.

## Getting There & Away

During the ski season, **Transalitude** (📍08 20 08 38 38; [www.transalitude.fr](http://www.transalitude.fr)) runs buses from Grenoble's bus station, through Bourg d'Oisans, to Alpe d'Huez and Les Deux Alpes (€18, 95 minutes, three to nine per day). During the same period, **LER** (📍08 21 20 22 03; [www.info-ler.fr](http://www.info-ler.fr)) operates buses to/from Bourg, on the way between Grenoble and Briançon (€20, three hours, four daily).

## Briançon

POP 11,570 / ELEV 1320M

Briançon's Cité Vauban (walled old town), perched high on a hill, is straight out of a fairy tale, with sweeping views of nearby Vauban fortifications and the snowcapped Écrins peaks. The Italian vibe is no coincidence – Italy is just (a dizzying) 20km away. Briançon is proud of its 300 sunny days a year.

No matter whether you come by bus or car, it feels like a long, long way to Briançon – but it's worth every horn-tooting, head-spinning, glacier-gawping minute. The road from Grenoble is pure drama, and not just because of the scenery. The locals adopt a nonchalant attitude to driving, the general consensus being: overtaking on hairpin bends, *pas de problème!* But brave it behind the wheel and you'll be richly rewarded with views of thundering falls, sheer cliffs and jagged peaks razoring above thick larch forests as you drive from Isère into the sunny and distinctly southern Hautes-Alpes *département*.

## Sights

### Cité Vauban

HISTORIC SITE

(Vieille Ville) Surrounded by mighty starburst-shaped ramparts, Briançon's hilltop old town looks much as it did centuries ago, its winding cobbled lanes lined with Italianate, pastel-painted townhouses. The steep main street, the **Grande Rue** – also known as the Grande Gargouille (Great Gargoyle) because of its gushing rivulet – was laid out in 1345. You can walk all the way around the interior of Vauban's upper ramparts, enjoying spectacular views, by following the streets marked as the **chemin de Ronde**.

### Vauban Fortifications

HISTORIC SITE

Three centuries ago, Briançon – situated at the confluence of five river valleys – was highly vulnerable to attack by France's Alpine arch-rival of the era, the Duchy of Savoy. Under Louis XIV and his successors, vast effort was expended on constructing hilltop fortresses to defend the remote town, marvels of military engineering that, along with a dozen other Vauban sites in France, were given Unesco World Heritage status in 2008.

Perched atop a rocky crag high above the Cité Vauban, the **Fort du Château** (1326m) can be visited on foot from late April to November. Across the 55m-high **Pont d'Asfeld** (erected 1720), a graceful stone bridge over the River Durance, **Fort des Trois Têtes**

(1435m) can be seen on a walking tour in the warm season and on snowshoes in winter (€25; most Thursdays at 1.50pm). Also accessible on foot and by snowshoes is **Fort des Salettes** (1400m).

For details on tours, contact the **Service du Patrimoine** (☎04 92 20 29 49; www.ville-briancon.fr; Porte de Pignerol, Cité Vauban; tours adult/child €6.20/4.60; ☀10am-noon & 2-5.30pm Tue-Fri & Sun Sep-Jun, Mon-Sat Jul & Aug), inside the Cité Vauban's main gate.



## Activities

For information on hiking in the **Parc National des Écrins**, ie in the mountains west of town, stop by the **Maison du Park** (☎04 92 21 42 15; www.ecrins-parcnational.fr; place du Médecin Général Blanchard; ☀10.30am-6.30pm Jul & Aug, 2-6pm Mon-Fri Sep-Jun), a three-storey visitor centre situated at the bottom of the Cité Vauban's Grande Rue.

### Serre Chevalier

SKIING

(www.serre-chevalier.com; ☀Dec-Apr) The Serre Chevalier ski area, properly called Le Grand Serre Chevalier, links 13 villages and 250km of pistes along the Serre Chevalier Valley between Briançon and Le Monétier-les-Bains, 15km northwest. To get to the slopes (and warm-season trails) directly from Briançon, take the **Télécabine du Prorel** lift, located 1.8km across the valley – on the western edge of Ste-Catherine – from the Cité Vauban.

### Bureau des Guides et

#### Accompagnateurs de Briançon

OUTDOORS

(☎04 92 20 15 73; www.guides-briancon.fr; 24 rue Centrale; ☀10am-noon & 3-7pm Mon-Fri, 3-7pm Sat, 10am-1pm Sun in summer, 4-7pm rest of year) Organises off-piste outings, snowshoeing and ice climbing in winter; and trekking, mountain climbing, mountaineering, via-ferrata climbs, glacier traverses, mountain biking and canyoning in summer.



## Sleeping & Eating

### Hôtel de la Chaussée

HISTORIC HOTEL €

(☎04 92 21 10 37; www.hotel-de-la-chaussee.com; cnr av de la République & rue Centrale, Ste-Catherine; s/d/tr €80/88/135; ☎) The Bonnaffoux family has run this place with charm and efficiency for five generations – since 1892, in fact. The 16 rooms fulfil every Alpine chalet fantasy: wood panelled, beautifully furnished and oh so cosy.

### Au Plaisir Ambré

MODERN FRENCH €€

(☎04 92 52 63 46; www.auplaisirambre.com; 26 Grande Rue; menus €23-32; ☀noon-1.15pm by reservation & 7-9.15pm Fri-Tue year-round, plus Wed Jul & Aug) At this Alpine-chic bistro, French dishes with Italian and Asian touches are perfectly matched with wines and followed by indulgent desserts such as *soufflé glacé à la Chartreuse*.

## Information

The **tourist office** (☎04 92 21 08 50; www.ot-briancon.fr; Maison des Templiers, 1 place du Temple, Cité Vauban; ☀9am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-noon & 2-5pm Sun; ☎) can help with last-minute accommodation. Room availability information is posted on the door.

## Getting There & Away

### BUS

The bus station is next to the train station. **LER** (☎08 21 20 22 03; www.info-ler.fr) bus 35, run by the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur région, links Briançon with Grenoble (€30.50, 2½ hours, one to three daily) via Bourg d'Oisans. LER bus 29 goes to Gap (€13.90, two hours, six daily Monday to Saturday), Aix-en-Provence (€37.80, five hours, two daily Monday to Saturday) and Marseille (€42, 5½ hours, two daily Monday to Saturday).

### CAR & MOTORCYCLE

The **Col de Montgenèvre** (1850m), linking Briançon with neighbouring Italy, is kept open year-round, as is the **Col du Lautaret** (2058m) between Briançon and Grenoble. Both, though, occasionally get snow-bogged.

### TRAIN

The **train station** (av du Général de Gaulle), terminus of a rail spur that heads northwestward from Gap, is 1.8km southwest the Cité Vauban and 1km south of Ste-Catherine (the city centre). It is linked to the rest of town by local TUB buses 1 and 3. To Grenoble, the bus is much faster than the train.

To get to Paris (€95 to €116, seven to nine hours), you can either take an overnight train to Gare d'Austerlitz, or a day train to Gare de Lyon; the latter requires changing in Grenoble, Valence TVG and/or Gap. But the fastest way to get to Paris is to take a bus to the Italian town of Oulx (€10, one hour, six daily from December to mid-April) – reserve 36 hours ahead on ☎04 92 50 25 05 or via www.05voyageurs.com – and then a TGV to Paris' Gare de Lyon (€113, 4½ hours).

Other destinations:

**Grenoble** €33.40, 4½ hours, five daily  
**Gap** €14.80, 1¼ hours, at least nine daily  
**Marseille** €45, 4½ hours, five daily

## TOUR DE FRANCE

No event gets the wheels of the cycle-racing world spinning quite as fast as the Tour de France, or 'Le Tour' as it is popularly known in France. This is the big one: one prologue, 21 stages, some 3500km clocked in three weeks by about 180 riders, an entire country – and, often, bits of its neighbours – criss-crossed by bicycle. Broadcast around the world every July, it is a spectacle of epic determination and endurance, of mountain passes steep enough to turn thighs to rubber, of hell-for-leather sprints, of tears and triumph.

The brainchild of journalist Géo Lefèvre, the race was first held in 1903 to boost sales of *L'Auto* newspaper, with 60 trailblazers pedalling through the night to complete the 2500km route in 19 days. Since then, the Tour has become *the* cycling event. And despite headlines about skulduggery, doping and scandal, the riders' sheer guts and hard-won triumphs never fail to inspire.

## THE JURA MOUNTAINS

The dark wooded hills, limestone plateaux, rolling dairy country and vine-wreathed villages of the Jura Mountains stretch for about 250km from Lake Geneva northeast to Belfort, along both sides of the Franco-Swiss border. Rural, deeply traditional and *un petit peu* eccentric, the Jura – from a Gaulish word meaning 'forest' – is ideal if you're seeking serenity, authentic farmstays and the simple pleasures of mountain life. Wayside farms invite you to stop, relax and sample the tangy delights of Comté cheese and *vin jaune* (yellow wine) – a sure way to experience those 'ahhh, *c'est la vie!*.. moments.

The Jura – after which the Jurassic period in geology is named – is France's premier cross-country skiing area. The region is dotted with small ski stations, and every year it hosts the **Transjurassienne** ([www.transjurassienne.com](http://www.transjurassienne.com); ☺ Feb), one of the world's toughest cross-country skiing events.

## Besançon

POP 116,353 / ELEV 262M

Hugging a *bouclé* (hairpin curve) of the River Doubs, the cultured and very attractive capital of Franche-Comté remains refreshingly modest and untouristy, despite charms such as a monumental Vauban citadel, a graceful 18th-century old town and France's first public museum.

In Gallo-Roman times, Vesontio (over the centuries, the name evolved to become Besançon) was an important stop on the trade routes linking Italy, the Alps and the Rhine, and some striking remains of this period survive.

## Sights

For a lovely stroll, you can walk paths along either bank of the River Doubs, where it encircles the old city.

### ★ Citadelle de Besançon

CITADEL

([www.citadelle.com](http://www.citadelle.com); 99 rue des Fusillés de la Résistance; adult/child €10.60/8.50; ☺ 10am-5pm Jan-Mar & Oct-Dec, 9am-6pm Apr-Jun & Sep, 9am-7pm Jul & Aug, closed early Jan) Dominating the city from Mt St Etienne, 120 vertical metres above the old town, the 17th-century Citadelle de Besançon – designed by Vauban for Louis XIV – commands sweeping views of the city and the serpentine River Doubs. Along with 11 other Vauban works, it was recognised as a Unesco World Heritage site in 2008.

The entry fee includes two audioguides, available in French, English and German. Two cafes serves edibles.

For an introduction to the citadel's architecture, head to **Espace Vauban**, where exhibits include a fascinating 3D film (14 minutes). Booklets in English and German are available at the entrance. The **chemin de Rond** lets you walk along two sections of the citadel's outer ramparts.

The **Musée de la Résistance et de la Déportation** is one of France's most in-depth and comprehensive WWII museums. Each room is supposed to have an information sheet in English (look for a wall-mounted holder) but the 20 rooms of evocative photos, documents and artefacts are best visited with a free audioguide. Some of the photographs are unsuitable for young children. During WWII, the Germans imprisoned British civilians in the citadel, and German firing squads executed about 100 resistance fighters here. Nearby, the **Musée Comtois** presents local life in centuries past.

Kids are sure to be fascinated by the **Insectarium**, with creepy-crawlies such as tarantulas, scorpions and stick insects; the small **Aquarium**, where you can pet the koi; the ho-hum **Noctarium**, where a few of the Jura's nocturnal rodents snuffle around; and, at the southeast end, the **zoo**, home base for the free-range peacocks that strut their stuff around the fort.

If you don't fancy the uphill trudge, take Ginkobus' bus 17 (€1.30) from the city centre or Parking Rodia, which runs one to five times an hour from April to mid-October.

### ★ Musée des Beaux-Arts et d'Archéologie

MUSEUM

(☎03 81 87 80 67; www.mbaa.besancon.fr; 1 place de la Révolution; adult/child €5/free; ☺9.30am-noon & 2-6pm Mon & Wed-Fri, 9.30am-6pm Sat & Sun) France's oldest public museum, founded in 1694, is famous for its stellar collection of local Gallo-Roman archaeology; its Cabinet des Dessins, with some 6000 drawings from the 15th to 20th centuries, including masterpieces by Dürer, Delacroix and Rodin; and its 14th- to 20th-century paintings, with standouts by Titian, Rubens, Goya and Matisse. The museum will be closed for renovations until mid-2018.

### FRAC Franche-Comté

MUSEUM

(☎03 81 87 87 40; www.frac-franche-comte.fr; 2 passage des Arts, Cité des Arts; adult/child €4/2; ☺2-6pm Wed-Fri, to 7pm Sat & Sun) Bringing contemporary art to the Franche-Comté region is the *raison d'être* of this museum, which opened in 2013. The riverside building, with its distinctive chequerboard timber façade, was designed by the Japanese architect Kengo Kuma.

### Horloge Astronomique

MONUMENT

(☎03 81 81 12 76; http://horloge-besancon.monuments-nationaux.fr; rue du Chapitre; adult/child €3/free; ☺guided tours hourly 9.50-11.50am & 2.50-5.50pm Wed-Mon Apr-Sep, Thu-Mon Oct-Mar) The base of 18th-century **Cathédrale St-Jean's** (☎03 81 83 34 62; www.cathedrale-besancon.fr; 10ter rue de la Convention; ☺9am-7pm, to 6.15pm winter) bell tower houses an incredible astronomical clock, powered by 11 weights, that has rung the church's bells since its installation in 1860. The ornate gadget has 30,000 moving parts and 57 clock faces and, among other things, tells the time in 16 places around the world and indicates the tides in eight different French ports.

### Porte Noire

HISTORIC SITE

(Black Gate; square Castan) Erected in AD 175 in honour of Marcus Aurelius, this Roman triumphal arch stands very near where the columns of a Roman theatre and the vestiges of an aqueduct (all still visible) were discovered in 1870. The site, which attests to the importance of Besançon as a site of Gallo-Roman civilisation, was restored as an 'English-style architectural garden' in 2006.

### Musée du Temps

MUSEUM

(☎03 81 87 81 50; www.mdt.besancon.fr; 96 Grande Rue; adult/child €5/free; ☺9.15am-noon & 2-6pm Tue-Sat, 10am-6pm Sun) Housed in the grand 16th-century Palais Granvelle, this museum testifies to the proud history of *horologie* (watchmaking) in Besançon. Astrological clocks, watches, cabinet clocks, watchmaking tools: the beauty and precision of the artefacts on display is arresting.

### Maison Natale de Victor Hugo

MUSEUM

(☎03 81 41 53 65; 140 Grande Rue; adult/child €2.50/1.50; ☺10.30am-5.30pm Wed-Mon Nov-Mar, to 6pm Apr-Oct) Victor Hugo, famous for masterpieces such as *Les Misérables* and *Notre-Dame de Paris* (The Hunchback of Notre Dame), was born here in 1802. Exhibits focus on the great man's public life and political activism.

### Parc Micaud

PARK

(av Édouard Droz) For that must-have snapshot of the hilltop citadel with the swiftly flowing Doubs in the foreground, take a stroll along this leafy riverside promenade, a great spot for a picnic with a view. A carousel, a playground and donkey rides keep kids entertained.

## Tours

### Vedettes de Besançon

BOATING

(☎06 64 48 66 80; www.vedettesdebesancon.com; Pont de la République; adult/child €12/9; ☺2-3 launches daily Apr-Jun, Sep & Oct, 5 daily Jul & Aug; 🚢) This 1½-hour river cruise is a relaxed way to see Besançon from the Doubs' hairpin curve and the 375m-long boat tunnel that goes underneath the citadel. *Menus* (€16 to €50) are served on some launches and only bespoke bookings are taken between November and March.

## Sleeping

Most hotels lower their rates on Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights, when business demand dwindles. There are a number of reasonably priced hotels facing the train station.

★ **Residence Charles Quint** APARTMENT €  
 (☎ 03 81 82 00 21; www.residence-charlesquint.com; 3 rue du Chapitre; d/apt €80/110; 📶) Slumbering behind the cathedral, in the shade of the citadel, this discreetly grand 18th-century townhouse is now a sublime 'residence' featuring period furniture, sumptuous fabrics, a peaceful private garden and a wood-panelled dining room.

Parking (€5 per night) is available and a buffet breakfast (€13.50) can be taken at the nearby Hotel Sauvage. Minimum three-night stay.

★ **Hôtel de Paris** DESIGN HOTEL €€  
 (☎ 03 81 81 36 56; www.besanconhoteldeparis.com; 33 rue des Granges; s/d €71/90; 📶) Housed in an 18th-century coaching inn that has hosted luminaries such as the novelist Colette and the historian Jules Michelet (coiner of the word 'Renaissance'), this stylishly refurbished establishment is ideally placed in the heart of the old city. Of the 50 spacious rooms, a few open, motel-style, on to the enclosed parking lot (€8 per night) and three are wheelchair-accessible.



## Eating

There are a number of small restaurants in the northwest corner of the old town, along rue Claude Pouillet. Across the river, cheap ethnic eats can be found on and near rue Battant.

**Marché Beaux-Arts** MARKET €  
 (☎ 03 81 87 81 86; place de la Révolution; ☀ 7am-7pm Tue-Sat, 8am-1pm Sun) This covered food market has a lively outdoor extension on Wednesday morning, Friday morning and Saturday. Grab half a dozen super-fresh oysters (€8.25) at the tiny central 'restaurant' while shopping for charcuterie, fresh produce and cheese.

**Le Mascareigna** MADAGASCAN €  
 (☎ 03 81 50 53 89; 21 rue du Lycée; menus €15; ☀ noon-3pm & 6.30-10pm Tue-Sun) If you've ever wanted to try *cuisine réunionnaise* (the food of the Francophone tropical island of Réunion), this pleasant little neighbourhood restaurant, decked out like an island hut, is a great place to start. Samosas, curries, pickles and delicious rum-based ti' punch await.

**La Petite Adresse** BISTRO €  
 (☎ 03 81 82 35 09; 28 rue Claude Pouillet; lunch/dinner menus €11/18; ☀ noon-2pm & 7-10.30pm Mon-Sat; 📶) A little address that's big on cheese dishes such as *boîte chaude* (hot box; two-person minimum), made with seasonal

Vacherin Mont d'Or; and another Jura speciality, *saucisse de Morteau* (Morteau sausage).

**Le Poker d'As** FRENCH €€  
 (☎ 03 81 81 42 49; www.restaurant-lepokerdas.fr; 14 square St-Amour; menus €23.50-55; ☀ noon-1.30pm & 7.30-9.30pm Tue-Sat) With its thoughtful blend of traditional and creative French fare – trout tartare with top-grade olive oil and fine herbs; chicken with morels and *vin jaune*; cod with puy lentils and black radish cream – the 'Poker Ace' usually wins.

**Brasserie 1802** BRASSERIE €€  
 (☎ 03 81 82 21 97; www.restaurant-1802.fr; place Granvelle; 3-course menus €29; ☀ noon-2pm & 7-10pm; 📶) With a terrace spilling out on to tree-shaded place Granvelle, this glass-fronted brasserie serves up French classics such as Charolais rib steak, plus such Franc-Comtois specialities as trout with savagnin (*vin jaune*) *beurre blanc*.

**Hambourgeois** BURGERS €€  
 (☎ 03 81 57 59 49; 2 rue Jean Petit; menus €22; ☀ 11am-2pm & 6-11pm Mon-Sat) Trying to up the ubiquitous burger a notch, Hambourgeois uses good-quality ingredients in its five different offerings, with unusual inclusions such as *cabécou*, a soft goat's cheese. The *menu* includes a burger, salad, fries, wine and dessert.

★ **Le Saint-Pierre** MODERN FRENCH €€€  
 (☎ 03 81 81 20 99; www.restaurant-saintpierre.com; 104 rue Battant; menus €40-75; ☀ noon-1.30pm Mon-Fri, 7.30-9pm Mon-Sat) Crisp white tablecloths, exposed stone and subtle lighting are the backdrop for intense flavours, such as lobster lasagne with spinach and lobster bouillon, which are expertly paired with regional wines. At €40 the three-course *menu du marché*, which includes wine and coffee, is excellent value.



## Drinking & Nightlife

Students spice up the nightlife in Besançon. Pubs can be found around the northern end of the Grande Rue (eg along tiny rue Claude Pouillet) and, across the river, in the more diverse and gritty Battant quarter.

**Green Man** BAR  
 (☎ 03 81 50 99 59; 21 rue Pasteur; ☀ 7am-midnight Mon-Fri, 10am-midnight Sat) Technically an Irish bar (some effort has been made to invoke the Emerald Isle through decor, although the instruments hanging on the walls could be from many European countries) this convivial little bar really marches to a Gallic

## Besançon



beat: coffee and food during the day, and aperitifs and conversation later on.

### Brass'éliande

**PUB**  
 (☎ 03 81 81 15 25; [www.brasseliandecafe.fr](http://www.brasseliandecafe.fr); 1 place Jouffroy d'Abans; ☎ 11am-1am) Beer is the first order of business at this quayside pub with a handsome stone exterior and woody interior, complete with faux foliage. *Tartines* (open sandwiches) with *fromage blanc*, ham and other toppings (€4 to €6) provide the ballast for a broad range of draught and bottled beers, while pints are half price between 7pm and 9pm every day but Saturday.

### ★ Entertainment

#### Les Passagers du Zinc

LIVE MUSIC

(☎ 03 81 81 54 70; [www.lespassagersduzinc.com](http://www.lespassagersduzinc.com); 5 rue Vignier; €5; ☎ 4pm-1am Tue & Wed, to 2am Thu-Sat) You'd never guess that behind an anonymous, black-shuttered shopfront lies one of Besançon's best venues for live music. Opening only when a gig's on (usually between 9pm and midnight on Thursday, Friday or Saturday – it could be rock, hardcore, synth-pop or electro), it has battered leather sofas and a suitably grungy vibe.

## Besançon

### 📍 Top Sights

- 1 Citadelle de Besançon ..... D5
- 2 Musée des Beaux-Arts et d'Archéologie ..... B2

### 📍 Sights

- Cathédrale St-Jean ..... (see 4)
- 3 FRAC Franche-Comté ..... D3
- 4 Horloge Astronomique ..... D4
- 5 Maison Natale de Victor Hugo ..... C4
- 6 Musée du Temps ..... C3
- 7 Parc Micaud ..... D1
- 8 Porte Noire ..... D4

### 🚢 Activities, Courses & Tours

- 9 Vedettes de Besançon ..... C2

### 🛏 Sleeping

- 10 Hôtel de Paris ..... C2

- 11 Residence Charles Quint ..... D4

### 🍷 Eating

- 12 Brasserie 1802 ..... C4
- 13 Hambourgeois ..... B2
- 14 La Petite Adresse ..... A2
- 15 Le Mascareigna ..... B3
- 16 Le Poker d'As ..... C2
- 17 Le Saint-Pierre ..... B1
- 18 Marché Beaux-Arts ..... B2

### 🍷 Drinking & Nightlife

- 19 Brass'éliande ..... A2
- 20 Green Man ..... B3

### 🎪 Entertainment

- 21 Les Passagers du Zinc ..... A2

## 📍 Information

Following a suspected arson attack on the Hôtel de Ville, the **tourist office** (📞 03 81 80 92 55; [www.besancon-tourisme.com](http://www.besancon-tourisme.com); 2 place de la 1ère Armée Française, Parc Micaud; 🕒 10am-12.30pm & 1.30-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun Sep-Jun, 10am-6pm daily Jul & Aug; 📶) is now located at the northwestern end of the Parc Micaud.

## 📍 Getting There & Around

### 🚲 BICYCLE

**VéloCité** ([www.velocite.besancon.fr](http://www.velocite.besancon.fr); per hr/day €1/4) Besançon's credit-card-operated automatic bike-rental system has 30 pick-up and drop-off sites across the city.

### 🚆 TRAIN

The train station, **Gare Besançon-Viotte** (Besançon Train Station; 2 av de la Paix; 🕒 4.30am-12.15am), refurbished in 2014, is 800m north (up the hill) from northern edge of the city centre. Services include the following:

**Arc-et-Senans** €7.50, 25 minutes, 18 daily

**Arbois** €9.90, 40 minutes, 13 daily

**Belfort** €14.70 to €25.50, one hour, one or two per hour

**Dijon** €16.50 to €22, one hour, two or three per hour

**Paris-Gare de Lyon** €66 to €90, 2½ to 3¼ hours, 14 daily, including three direct

Connections to major cities are often cheaper and/or quicker from Gare TGV Besançon Franche-Comté, on the TGV line linking Dijon with Mulhouse. Situated 10km northwest of the centre, it's a 15-minute hop by hourly shuttle train from Gare Besançon-Viotte.

Buy tickets at the **Boutique SNCF** (2 ave de la Paix; 🕒 7am-7.30pm Mon-Fri, to 7pm Sat, 10am-7pm Sun).

## Southwest of Besançon

Southwest of Besançon is wine and cheese country, home of the Route des Vins du Jura, the golden elixir *vin jaune*, and sweet, nutty Comté cheese. It's also strongly identified with the scientific pioneer Louis Pasteur, who was born in Dole, raised in Arbois, and who taught in Besançon itself. It's a peaceful region of vineyards, rolling dairy farms, and old stone villages.

## Arbois

The Route des Vins du Jura (Jura Wine Trail) is a delightful 80km of chardonnay, savagnin and pinot noir vineyards, time-worn stone villages and darkly wooded slopes. It begins in Arbois, a beautiful Jura-rassien, wine-producing village.

## 📍 Sights & Activities

The 2.5km-long **Chemin des Vignes** walking trail and the 8km-long **Circuit des Vignes** mountain-bike route meander through the vines. Both trails (marked with orange signs) begin at the top of the steps next to Arbois' Château Pécauld; a booklet with details is available at the tourist office.

High above Arbois is tiny **Pupillin**, a cute yellow-brick village famous for its wine production. Some 10 different *caves* (wine cellars) are open to visitors.

## ROYAL SALTWORKS

Envisaged by its designer, Claude-Nicolas Ledoux, as the 'ideal city', the 18th-century **Saline Royale** (Royal Saltworks; ☎ 03 81 54 45 45; www.salineroyale.com; Grande Rue; adult/child €8.80/4.50; ☀ 10am-noon & 2-5pm Nov-Mar, 9am-noon & 2-6pm Apr, May & Oct, 9am-6pm Jun & Sep, to 7pm Jul & Aug) is a showpiece of early Industrial Age town planning. Although his urban dream was never fully realised, Ledoux's beautifully symmetrical creation has been a Unesco World Heritage Site since 1982. Arc-et-Senans is 35km southwest of Besançon, on route D17. Three-star accommodation is available here (single €84, double €113).

## Musée de la Vigne et du Vin du Jura

MUSEUM

(☎ 03 84 66 40 45; www.arbois.fr; adult/child €3.50/free; ☀ 10am-noon & 2-6pm Wed-Mon Mar-Oct, 2-6pm Wed-Mon Nov-Feb) The history of the precious yellow wine is told in this understated museum, housed in the turreted Château Pécauld. A short video, in French, includes footage of the tasting of *vin jaune* laid down before the Revolution.

## ★ Festivals & Events

### La Percée du Vin Jaune

WINE

(www.percee-du-vin-jaune.com; entry & 14 tasting tickets €14; ☀ Feb) The festival of the 'Opening of the Yellow Wine' brings a little sunshine to the Jura wine region in early February, when the vintage produced six years and three months earlier is cracked out. Villages take turns holding the two-day celebration, during which the new vintage is blessed and rated and *vin jaune* aficionados enjoy street tastings, cooking competitions, cellar visits and auctions.

## 🛏 Sleeping & Eating

Sampling the local wines, both in the glass and on the plate, is made easy by the region's abundance of excellent restaurants and brasseries. *Coq au vin jaune* with morel mushrooms is a local classic that goes spectacularly with a glass of Arbois Savagnin.

### ★ Closerie les Capucines

B&amp;B €€

(☎ 03 84 66 17 38; www.closerielescapucines.com; 7 rue de Bourgogne, Arbois; d/q incl breakfast from €125/250; ☀ Feb-Dec; 📞 📺 📺) A 17th-centu-

ry stone convent has been lovingly transformed into this boutique B&B, with five rooms remarkable for their pared-down elegance, a tree-shaded garden by the river and a plunge pool.

### ★ Bistrot des Claquets

FRENCH €

(☎ 03 84 66 04 19; www.bistrot-des-claquets.com; 33 rue de Faramand; 2-/3-course menus €13/16; ☀ 7.30am-9pm Tue-Sat; 📞) Loved by *vignerons* (winegrowers) and other locals, this unpretentious, convivial little *bistrot* serves fantastic French country fare, but only at lunchtime! If you miss the *petit salé* (lentils with salt pork), *blanquettes de veau* (poached veal in white sauce) or whatever else is cooking that day, it's still worth popping in to sample the *vin jaune* and happy chatter.

### La Balance Mets et Vins

FRENCH €€

(☎ 03 84 37 45 00; www.labalance.fr; 47 rue de Courcelles, Arbois; weekday lunch menus €16.30-19.80, other menus €24-67; ☀ noon-2pm & 7-9pm Tue-Sat Feb-Jun & Sep-mid-Dec, Tue-Sun Jul & Aug; 📞 📞) La Balance uses local, organic produce to produce signature dishes such as *coq au vin jaune* with morel mushrooms and crème brûlée with *vin jaune*. Accompanying wines can be had for €24 (*vin du Jura*) or €29 (*vin jaune*) and youngsters and teetotalers can enjoy three organic grape juices for €9. Reserve ahead on Saturday and holidays, especially from May to August.

## 📍 Information

Arbois' **tourist office** (☎ 03 84 66 55 50; www.arbois.com; 17 rue de l'Hôtel de Ville, Arbois; ☀ 10am-12.30 & 2-5.30pm Mon-Sat year-round, 10am-noon Sun May-late Jun, 10am-noon & 3-5.30pm Sun late Jun-mid-Sep) is located on the southern side of the main bridge over La Cuisance, in the centre of town.

## 📍 Getting There & Away

**Car** This is excellent driving country, and having your own transport brings more villages and wineries into play.

**Trains** Run between Arbois and Besançon (€9.90, 40 minutes, one per hour between 6am and 8pm).

## Poligny

POP 4158

The small town of Poligny, 60km southwest of Besançon, is the centre of the Jura's hugely important Comté cheese industry. Dozens of *fruitières* (cheese cooperatives) are open to the public.



## Activities

### Maison du Comté

FOOD

(☎03 84 37 78 40; [www.maison-du-comte.com](http://www.maison-du-comte.com); av de la Résistance; adult/child €5/3; ☹2-5pm Tue-Sun Apr-Jun, Sep & Oct, 10am-noon & 2-5.30pm Jul & Aug) Learn how 450L of milk is transformed into a 40kg wheel of tangy Comté cheese and have a nibble at the Maison du Comté. Between two and nine guided tours leave per day, depending on the season, while tours for 10 or more can be arranged at any time of the year. Check the website for 'exceptional' opening times.



## Sleeping & Eating

You can't leave the area without sampling the AOC-protected Comté. Made exclusively from the milk of Montbeliard and Simmental cows in the Franche-Comté region, the real thing is aged for four, 18 or 24 months, in which time its sweet, nutty flavour intensifies remarkably. Luckily, there's an abundance of *fruitières* and factory shops in Poligny, eager for you to try their wares.

### Hôtel de la Vallée Heureuse

HOTEL €€

(☎03 84 37 12 13; [www.hotelvalleeheureuse.com](http://www.hotelvalleeheureuse.com); rte de Genève; s/d/q €99/133/185; ☹) In a beautifully converted 18th-century mill by a rushing stream, this serene country retreat has 11 large, tastefully decorated rooms and a restaurant (lunch menus €29, dinner menus €42 to €70) specialising in traditional French cuisine. Run by the welcoming Isabelle and Patrice, it's on the road from the centre of town towards Champagnole and

Geneva (N5), 400m past the sign indicating that you're leaving Poligny.



## Shopping

### Caveau des Jacobins

WINE

(☎03 84 37 14 58; 1 rue Hyacinthe Friant; ☹10am-noon & 2.30-6.30pm Mon-Sat) This 13th-century Gothic church, abandoned by the Jacobins (Dominicans) after the Revolution and nabbed by the vigneronns of Poligny in 1907, makes for an unforgettably atmospheric place to sample the wines of Jura. Gone is the religious statuary, and in its place are not only colossal barrels of savagnin, chardonnay and *vin jaune*, but also expositions of local art.



## Information

**Tourist Office** (☎03 84 37 24 21; [www.poligny-tourisme.com](http://www.poligny-tourisme.com); 20 place des Déportés; ☹10am-12.30pm & 1.30-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-12.30pm & 2-5pm Sat) Has details on cheesemakers and wineries in the region, plus accommodation, *restauration*, and cultural events.



## Getting There & Away

Poligny's train station is about 15 minutes' walk northwest of the centre. There are regular trains to Besançon (€11.90, 45 minutes, 13 per day) and Lons-le-Saunier (€6.40, 20 minutes, 16 per day).

## Baume-les-Messieurs

POP 182

Nestled at the foot of towering, lushly wooded limestone cliffs and wedged between three glacial valleys, Baume-les-Messieurs is a picturesque village of honey-coloured

## LIQUID GOLD

**Château-Chalon**, a quiet medieval village of yellow stone atop a rocky prominence in a sea of vineyards, is reputed to produce the best *vin jaune*.

Legend has it that *vin jaune* (yellow wine) was invented when a winemaker came across a forgotten barrel, six years and three months after he'd filled it, and discovered that its contents had been miraculously transformed into gold-coloured wine.

A long, undisrupted fermentation process gives Jura's signature wine its unique characteristics. Savagnin grapes are harvested late and their sugar-saturated juice left to ferment for a minimum of six years and three months in oak barrels. A thin layer of yeast forms over the wine, preventing oxidation; there are no top-ups to compensate for wine that evaporates (known as *la part des anges*, 'the angels' share'). In the end, 100L of grape juice ferments down to just 62L of *vin jaune* (lucky angels!) which is then bottled in a special 0.62L bottle called a *clavelin*.

*Vin jaune* is renowned for ageing extremely well, with prime vintages easily keeping for more than a century. A 1774 vintage was a cool 220 years old when sipped by an awestruck committee of experts in 1994.

Visit [www.jura-tourism.com](http://www.jura-tourism.com) to plan your sojourn in the land of *vin jaune*.

## ROUTE PASTEUR

The Route Pasteur tracks significant landmarks in the life of pioneering biochemist Louis Pasteur (1822-95), who developed the first rabies vaccine and, of course, pasteurisation, meandering through very pleasant wine and dairy country as it does so. It begins in the handsome medieval city of **Dole**, his birthplace and former capital of Franche-Comté, 20km west of Arc-et-Senans along the D472. A scenic stroll along the **Canal des Tanneurs** brings you to his childhood home, which now houses the **Musée Pasteur** (La Maison de Natale Pasteur; ☎ 03 84 72 20 61; www.musee-pasteur.com; 43 rue Pasteur, Dole; adult/child €5/free; 🕒 2-6pm Feb-Apr, Oct & Nov, 9.30am-12.30pm & 2-6pm May-Sep), an atmospheric museum whose exhibits include his cot, first drawings and university cap and gown.

From here, the route wends 47km southeast through Franche-Comté, taking in smaller sites such as Salins-les-Bains and the village of Aiglepieprie, and ending, happily, in the major wine-producing town of Arbois, 35km southeast of Dole, where Louis Pasteur's family settled in 1827. His laboratory and workshops here can be seen at the **Maison de Louis Pasteur** (☎ 03 84 66 11 72; www.terredelouispasteur.fr; 83 rue de Courcelles, Arbois; adult/child €6.50/4; 🕒 2-6pm Feb-Apr, Oct & Nov, 9.30am-12.30pm & 2-6pm May-Sep), still decorated with original 19th-century fixtures and fittings.

stone houses and red-tiled rooftops. It's located 20km south of Poligny.

### Sights

#### Grottes de Baume

CAVE

(Baume Caves; ☎ 03 84 48 23 02; www.baumelesmessieurs.fr; adult/child €8/4; 🕒 guided tours 10.30am-12.30pm & 1.30-5pm, 6pm or 7pm Apr-Sep, no midday closure Jul & Aug) About 2km south of Baume-les-Messieurs, the 30-million-year-old Grottes de Baume feature some impressive stalagmites and stalactites, arrayed in more than a kilometre of accessible galleries. If you plan on visiting the Abbaye Impériale too, a combined ticket costs €10/5 per adult/child.

#### Abbaye Impériale

MONASTERY

(Imperial Abbey; www.baumelesmessieurs.fr; adult/child €6/4; 🕒 guided tours Mar-Sep) Baume-les-Messieurs' abandoned Benedictine Abbaye Impériale has an exquisite polychrome Flemish altarpiece dating from the 16th century (the time when the abbey, which grew from a simple 7th-century monastic cell, was at its apogee). Combined tickets to the Grottes de Baume and the abbey cost €10/5 per adult/child.

### Sleeping & Eating

#### Le Grand Jardin

B&amp;B €

(☎ 03 84 44 68 37; www.legrandjardin.fr; 6 place Guillaume de Poupet; d incl breakfast €68-99; 🕒 closed Tue & Wed Sep-Jun) This delightful, family-run *chambre d'hôte*, opposite the abbey, has three sunny, wood-floored rooms in a 16th-century house backed by carefully

tended gardens. French and Franc-Comtoise dishes such as slow-cooked pork fillet with Comtoise polenta feature on the restaurant menu (*menus* €25 to €45).

### Getting There & Away

Baume-les-Messieurs isn't on the train line from Besançon to Lons-le-Saunier, but there are occasional buses from Voiteur, which is on it (see www.jurago.fr).

## Belfort

POP 50,196

Once part of Alsace's Haut-Rhin *département*, Belfort put up 229 days of tenacious resistance to the Prussian siege of 1870-71, thanks to which it managed to remain French after the rest of Alsace was annexed to Germany. Today, the city is neither Alsatian nor Jurassien but rather its own *territoire* (territory), known for its Vauban-built **Citadelle** and its role in producing super-speedy TGV trains.

Belfort makes a convenient stopover on the way from Alsace to Paris, Burgundy or the Alps.

### Sights

#### Musée de l'Aventure Peugeot

MUSEUM

(☎ 03 81 99 42 03; www.museepeugeot.com; Carrefour de l'Europe, Sochaux; adult/child €8.50/4.50; 🕒 10am-6pm) Gleaming old-timers, concept cars and thumb-size miniatures - it's Peugeots *à gogo* at this automobile museum, 18km south of Belfort (towards Besançon) in So-

chaux. Reserve ahead for a weekday tour of the ultramodern Peugeot factory, one of Europe's largest car plants (adult/child €18/12, no children younger than 12).

## Festivals & Events

### Les Eurockéennes

MUSIC

(www.eurockeenes.fr; ☀ Jul) A huge, three-day open-air alternative rock festival held on the first weekend in July. Three nights of thoughtfully curated music, plus camping, will set you back only €115.

## Sleeping & Eating

Don't leave Belfort without biting into a *Belflore*, a scrumptious almond-flavoured pastry filled with raspberries and topped with hazelnuts.

### Hôtel Vauban

HOTEL €

(☎ 03 84 21 59 37; www.hotel-vauban.com; 4 rue du Magasin; s/d/tr €70/75/88, breakfast €8.50; 📶) This friendly, great-value hotel, built as a house in 1902, has 14 midsized en-suite rooms decorated in crisp, sometimes whimsical modern styles. There are also colourful oil paintings (by the owner's husband, Guy) to admire, and a lovely back garden, complete with koi pond.

Situated one long block northeast, along the river, from the tourist office.

### Grand Hôtel du Tonneau d'Or

HISTORIC HOTEL €€

(☎ 03 84 58 57 56; www.tonneaudor.fr; 1 rue du Général Reiset; d/tr €105/133; 📶) A grand belle époque hotel right in the city centre, the 'Golden Barrel' combines its original Corinthian columns, coffered ceilings and a sweeping central staircase with 52 large, modern rooms. Rates drop 25% from Friday to Sunday.

## Information

**Tourist Office** (☎ 03 84 55 90 90; www.belfort-tourisme.com; 2bis rue Clémenceau; ☀ 9am-12.30pm & 2-6pm Mon-Sat year-round, plus 10am-1pm Sun Jul & Aug) Has city, cycling and hiking maps, plus details on cultural activities and local producers.

## Getting There & Away

**Belfort's train station** (6 av Wilson) has direct links to Besançon (€17.40, 1¼ hours, up to three per hour), and direct and indirect TGVs and TERs to Paris-Gare de Lyon (from €79, 2½ to four hours, one or two every hour).

Belfort-Montbéliard TGV station, 12km south-east of the city centre, is a stop on the LGV Rhin-Rhône service linking Marseille with Strasbourg and Frankfurt.

## Parc Naturel Régional du Haut-Jura

To experience the Jura in all of its upland beauty, head to the Haut-Jura Regional Park, whose 1780 sq km – in the *départements* of Ain, Doubs and Jura – stretch from Chapelle-des-Bois southward almost to the western tip of Lake Geneva. The park's prime sports hub, in both winter (skiing) and summer, is **Les Rousses**.

**Col de la Faucille** (1323m; open year-round), a serpentine 13km east of Lajoux and 29km north of Geneva Airport, has incredible views across Lake Geneva to the snowy Alps beyond.

## Sights & Activities

### Maison du Parc du Haut-Jura

MUSEUM

(☎ 03 84 34 12 30; www.parc-haut-jura.fr; 29 Quale Village, Lajoux; adult/child €5/3; ☀ 9am-12.30pm & 1.30-6pm Tue-Sun Jun & school holidays, Tue-Fri other times) The park's visitor centre has interactive, tactile exhibits on the Jura's flora and fauna that kids will love, as well as temporary displays, literature and regional products. It's in Lajoux, 19km east of the park's largest town, St-Claude.

## Sleeping

There are seven or eight hotels in Les Rousses, mainly two- and three-star. Mijoux and

### DON'T MISS

#### RONCHAMP

Le Corbusier designed the surreal modernist **Chapelle de Notre-Dame du Haut** (☎ 03 84 20 65 13; www.colline-notredameduhaut.com; rue de la Chapelle; adult/child €8/4; ☀ 9am-7pm Apr-Oct, 10am-5pm Nov-Mar) on this age-old site of Marian pilgrimage, 22km northwest of Belfort. With a sweeping concrete roof, dazzling stained-glass windows and plastic features, it's considered a masterpiece of mid-20th-century architecture. There's also a convent and a visitor centre (La Portererie) set into the hillside, both designed by Renzo Piano.

St-Claude are two other centres with multiple options, including *chambres d'hôte*.

**Le Clos d'Estelle** B&B €  
(☎ 03 84 42 01 29; www.leclosdestelle.com; 1 La Marcantine, Charchilla; d/q incl breakfast €85/140; @) Surrounded by fields and sheep, Christine and Jean-Pierre warmly welcome guests to four very spacious, wood-built *chambres d'hôte* (B&B) in their mid-19th-century farmhouse. Situated in Charchilla (*shar-shiy-a*), 200m down the hill behind the church.

**La Mainaz** CHALET €€  
(☎ 04 50 41 31 10; www.la-mainaz.com; Col de la Faucille; d/q from €150/285; ☺) This charming high-end chalet, run by the same family since 1945, has spectacular panoramas of Lake Geneva and Mont Blanc, 21 rooms and excellent French and regional cuisine (*menus* €20 to €50). Situated 800m towards Geneva from Col de la Faucille.

### Eating

*Soufflé au Comté, Potée Franc-Comtoise* (salt pork and Morteau sausage simmered with vegetables) and other highlights of Jurassien cuisine will never taste as good as they do at a restaurant in the High Jura, after a stiff walk in the woods.

**Les Louvières** INTERNATIONAL €€  
(☎ 03 84 42 09 24; www.leslouvieres.fr; Pratz; 2/3-course menus €40/48; ☺ noon-2pm Wed-Sun, 7.30-9pm Wed-Sat) The 'wolf's lair' is both elegant and creatively modern, with gorgeous Jura views and delicious, *gastronomique* cuisine. Chef Philippe Vaufrey is fond of adding coriander, ginger, lychees and oth-

er Asian touches to distinguish his use of prime local ingredients.

Reserve ahead and find the lair between Pratz (pronounced 'prah') and Moirans, 1.8km along a one-lane road from the D470 (follow the signs).

### Information

**Tourist Office** (Station des Rousses; ☎ 03 84 60 02 55; www.lesrousses.com; 495 rue Pasteur, Les Rousses; ☺ hours vary, see website for details) The go-to source for information on culture, activities and accommodation in the park.

### Getting There & Away

Public transport is scant in the High Jura. The local bus network, **Jurago** (www.jurago.fr), connects Lons-le-Saunier with St-Claude, then with smaller destinations within the park. It's a flat €2 per journey.

## Métabief & Around

POP 1089 / ELEV 1000M

Métabief vies with Les Rousses for the honour of Jura's leading cross-country ski resort. Winter and summer lifts take you almost to the top of Mont d'Or (1463m), the area's highest peak, where a fantastic 180-degree panorama stretches over the foggy Swiss plain to Lake Geneva (Lac Léman) and all the way from the Matterhorn to Mont Blanc.

### Sights & Activities

**Château de Joux** CASTLE  
(☎ 03 81 69 47 95; www.chateaudejoux.com; La Cluse-et-Mijoux; adult/child €7.50/4.20; ☺ 10am-noon & 2-4.30pm Apr-Jun & Sep-Nov, 10am-5.30pm Jul & Aug) Clinging to a picturesque limestone

### DON'T MISS

#### HOT BOX & JÉSUS

It's hot, it's soft and it's packed in a box. Vacherin Mont d'Or is the only French cheese to be eaten with a spoon – hot. Made between 15 August and 15 March with *lait cru* (unpasteurised milk), it derives its unique nutty taste from the spruce bark in which it's wrapped. Connoisseurs top the soft-crust cheese with chopped onions, garlic and white wine, wrap it in aluminium foil and bake it for 45 minutes to create a *boîte chaude* (hot box). Only 11 factories in the Jura are licensed to produce Vacherin Mont d'Or.

Mouthe, 15km south of Métabief Mont d'Or, is the mother of *liqueur de sapin* (fir-tree liqueur). *Glace de sapin* (fir-tree ice cream) also comes from Mont d'Or, known as the North Pole of France due to its seasonal subzero temperatures (record low: -38°C). Sampling either is rather like ingesting a Christmas tree. Then there's *Jésus* – a small, fat version of *saucisse de Morteau* (Morteau sausage), easily identified by the wooden peg on its end, attached after the sausage is smoked with pinewood sawdust in a traditional *tuyé* (mountain hut).

outcrop, Château de Joux, 10km north of Métabief, used to guard the route between Switzerland and France. Today it houses France's most impressive arms museum and a 147m-deep well. Guided tours are gripping, full of anecdotes and stories, and available in English (ring ahead). In summer, torchlit night-time tours are organised for extra spookiness.

### Parc Polaire

WILDLIFE RESERVE

(☎ 03 81 69 20 20; www.parcpolaire.com; Cernois Veuillet et les Fo, Chaux-Neuve; adult/child €9/7.50; ☀ 10am-5.30pm late Dec-Oct, to 6.30pm in summer holidays) The closest you'll get to the North Pole in these parts is the Christmassy Parc Polaire in Chaux-Neuve, where the friendly team will introduce you to huskies, reindeer

and some mighty hairy yak, on a 1½-hour guided tour.

### Sleeping

#### Hôtel Étoile des Neiges

HOTEL €€

(☎ 03 81 49 11 21; www.hoteletoiledesneiges.fr; 4 rue du Village; d/f €60/108; ♿ ♿) Family-run Hôtel Étoile des Neiges has bright, well-kept rooms, including great mezzanine family rooms. There's an indoor pool, a sauna, a tiny fitness centre and a canteen-style restaurant.

### Getting There & Away

Métabief is 58km east of Arbois and 75km south-east of Besançon, on the main road to Lausanne (Switzerland). There is no train station, but SNCF runs an *autocar* (bus) service to Frasne, which is on the TGV line from Lausanne to Paris.

Lonely Planet

# Map Legend

## Sights

- Beach
- Bird Sanctuary
- Buddhist
- Castle/Palace
- Christian
- Confucian
- Hindu
- Islamic
- Jain
- Jewish
- Monument
- Museum/Gallery/Historic Building
- Ruin
- Shinto
- Sikh
- Taoist
- Winery/Vineyard
- Zoo/Wildlife Sanctuary
- Other Sight

## Activities, Courses & Tours

- Bodysurfing
- Diving
- Canoeing/Kayaking
- Course/Tour
- Sento Hot Baths/Onsen
- Skiing
- Snorkelling
- Surfing
- Swimming/Pool
- Walking
- Windsurfing
- Other Activity

## Sleeping

- Sleeping
- Camping

## Eating

- Eating

## Drinking & Nightlife

- Drinking & Nightlife
- Cafe

## Entertainment

- Entertainment

## Shopping

- Shopping

## Information

- Bank
- Embassy/Consulate
- Hospital/Medical
- Internet
- Police
- Post Office
- Telephone
- Toilet
- Tourist Information
- Other Information

## Geographic

- Beach
- Gate
- Hut/Shelter
- Lighthouse
- Lookout
- Mountain/Volcano
- Oasis
- Park
- Pass
- Picnic Area
- Waterfall

## Population

- Capital (National)
- Capital (State/Province)
- City/Large Town
- Town/Village

## Transport

- Airport
- Border crossing
- Bus
- Cable car/Funicular
- Cycling
- Ferry
- Metro station
- Monorail
- Parking
- Petrol station
- S-Bahn/Subway station
- Taxi
- T-bane/Tunnelbana station
- Train station/Railway
- Tram
- Tube station
- U-Bahn/Underground station
- Other Transport

## Routes

- Tollway
- Freeway
- Primary
- Secondary
- Tertiary
- Lane
- Unsealed road
- Road under construction
- Plaza/Mall
- Steps
- Tunnel
- Pedestrian overpass
- Walking Tour
- Walking Tour detour
- Path/Walking Trail

## Boundaries

- International
- State/Province
- Disputed
- Regional/Suburb
- Marine Park
- Cliff
- Wall

## Hydrography

- River, Creek
- Intermittent River
- Canal
- Water
- Dry/Salt/Intermittent Lake
- Reef

## Areas

- Airport/Runway
- Beach/Desert
- Cemetery (Christian)
- Cemetery (Other)
- Glacier
- Mudflat
- Park/Forest
- Sight (Building)
- Sportsground
- Swamp/Mangrove

Note: Not all symbols displayed above appear on the maps in this book



**Daniel Robinson**

**Lille, Flanders & the Somme, Loire Valley** Co-author (with Tony Wheeler) of Lonely Planet's first *Paris* guide, Daniel has been writing about France for over 25 years. Passionate about history, he is always moved by the grand châteaux of the Loire, the sombre cemeteries of the Somme, and the dramatic and tragic events that both embody. Daniel's travel writing has appeared in the *New York Times*, *National Geographic Traveler* and many other publications, and has been

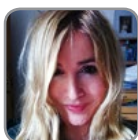
translated into 10 languages. He holds degrees in history from Princeton and Tel Aviv University.



**Regis St Louis**

**Pyrenees, Normandy** Regis' French ancestry fuelled an early interest in all things francophone, which led to Serge Gainsbourg records, François Truffaut films and extensive travels around France. For his latest journey, Regis walked the drizzly beaches of Normandy, explored Joan of Arc lore in Rouen and idled behind sheep-powered roadblocks in the Pyrenees. A full-time travel writer since 2003, Regis has covered numerous destinations for Lonely Planet, including Montreal,

Senegal and New York City. Follow his latest posts on Twitter @regisstlouis.



### **Kerry Christiani**

**Alsace & Lorraine, Champagne** France was *le coup de foudre* (love at first sight) for Kerry, and she's been travelling there since her school days to brush up her *français*, which she went on to study to MA level. Touring the cellars of Champagne, (over)indulging on Alsatian food and wine on the storybook Route des Vins and striking out into the forested peaks of the Vosges made writing this edition memorable. Kerry authors a number of Lonely Planet's central and southern

European titles and tweets @kerrychristiani.



### **Gregor Clark**

**Burgundy, Corsica** Gregor Clark's love affair with France started on the midnight streets of Paris at age 14 when, jet-lagged and culture shocked, he successfully ordered a crêpe using his never-before-tested high-school French. He's been feeding his France obsession ever since, and writing for LP since 2000. Highlights of this research trip included discovering the stunning beauty of Corsica, chasing down Good Friday processions in remote mountain villages and indulging in way

too many *beignets de brocciu* (best snack ever!).



### **Anita Isalska**

**Auvergne, Toulouse Area** Anita's passion for France began on childhood ferry rides to Calais and bloomed during an enriching year living in Lille, though she hit peak Francophilia during her European Literature M.St at Oxford. While her enthusiasm for 19th-century French *fantastique* literature has found few practical applications, Anita loves flexing her language skills on regular travels to France. Anita writes about travel in Europe, Asia and beyond for a host of websites and

magazines; read her stuff on [www.anitaaisalska.com](http://www.anitaaisalska.com).



### **Catherine Le Nevez**

**Paris, Around Paris, Languedoc-Roussillon** An award-winning, Paris-based travel writer, Catherine first lived in the French capital aged four and has been hitting the road at every opportunity, completing her Doctorate of Creative Arts in Writing, Masters in Professional Writing, and postgrad qualifications in Editing and Publishing along the way. Over the last dozen-plus years she's written scores of Lonely Planet guides, along with numerous print and online articles, covering

Paris, France, Europe and far beyond. Wanderlust aside, Paris remains her favourite city on earth.



### **Hugh McNaughtan**

**French Alps & the Jura Mountains** A former English lecturer, Hugh swapped grant applications for visa applications, and turned his love of travel into a full-time thing. Having done a bit of restaurant-reviewing in his home town (Melbourne) he's now eaten his way across the Alps and Jura, working up an appetite on the slopes at any opportunity. He's never happier than when on the road with his two daughters. Except perhaps on the cricket field...



### **Christopher Pitts**

**Paris, Around Paris** Christopher Pitts first moved to Paris in 2001. He initially began writing about the city as a means to buy baguettes – and to impress a certain Parisian (it worked, they're now married with two kids). Over the past decade, he has written for various publications, in addition to working as a translator and editor. Visit him online at [www.christopherpitts.net](http://www.christopherpitts.net).



## OUR STORY

A beat-up old car, a few dollars in the pocket and a sense of adventure. In 1972 that's all Tony and Maureen Wheeler needed for the trip of a lifetime – across Europe and Asia overland to Australia. It took several months, and at the end – broke but inspired – they sat at their kitchen table writing and stapling together their first travel guide, *Across Asia on the Cheap*. Within a week they'd sold 1500 copies. Lonely Planet was born.

Today, Lonely Planet has offices in Franklin, London, Melbourne, Oakland, Dublin, Beijing and Delhi, with more than 600 staff and writers. We share Tony's belief that 'a great guidebook should do three things: inform, educate and amuse'.

## OUR WRITERS



### Nicola Williams

**Paris, Around Paris, Atlantic Coast** British writer Nicola Williams has lived in France and written about it for more than a decade. From her hillside house on the southern shore of Lake Geneva, road trips beckon to Provence, Paris, to the Dordogne and onwards to the Atlantic Coast where she has spent endless years revelling in its extraordinary landscapes, architecture and seafaring cuisine.

Nicola has worked on numerous Lonely Planet titles, including *Discover France* and *Paris*. Find her on Twitter and Instagram @Tripalong.



### Alexis Averbeck

**Dordogne, Limousin & the Lot** Alexis Averbeck first came to France when she was four and now visits every chance she gets. Whether browsing markets in the Dordogne, sampling oysters in Brittany, or careening through hilltop villages in Provence (she also contributes to the *Provence & Côte d'Azur* book), she immerses herself in all things French. A travel writer for two decades, Alexis has lived in Antarctica for a year, crossed the Pacific by sailboat, and is also a

painter – see her work at [www.alexisaverbeck.com](http://www.alexisaverbeck.com).



### Oliver Berry

**Provence, French Basque Country** Oliver Berry has explored nearly every corner of France for Lonely Planet, travelling all the way from the mountains of Corsica to the beaches of Normandy. He has also photographed and written about France for many newspapers, magazines and online publications. For this trip he returned to the beaches and hilltop villages of the South of France, and practised his *pelota* skills in the French Basque Country. His latest work is published at

[www.oliverberry.com](http://www.oliverberry.com).



### Jean-Bernard Carillet

**Lyon & the Rhône Valley** Paris-based (and Metz-born) journalist and photographer, Jean-Bernard has clocked up countless trips to all French regions and is a passionate ambassador of his own country. As a hopeless French gourmand and *amateur de bon vins* (wine lover), he was all too happy to research Lyon (pike dumplings, anyone?), La Dombes (that yummy frog pie), Beaujolais (oh, that St-Amour lingers long on the palate) and the Rhône Valley down to the

Gorges de l'Ardèche.

OVER MORE  
PAGE WRITERS

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