Alsace & Lorraine

HIGHLIGHTS

- Coming to grips with the drama of the **Verdun battlefields** (p148)
- Experiencing the sensory explosion of a Riesling decanted in an Alsatian Wine Route cellar (p138)
- Watching storks glide majestically above their rooftop nests in Hunawihr (p145) and other Alsatian towns
- Gawking at the unrivalled view from the top of the Grand Ballon (p145)

TERRAIN

Gently rolling in Alsace, although the Parc Naturel Régional des Ballons des Vosges is hilly; the Verdun battlefields are mainly rolling knolls and plains.

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www.tourisme-lorraine.fr

www.tourisme-alsace.com

Though often spoken of as if they were one, Alsace and Lorraine, neighbouring régions in France's northeastern corner, are linked by little more than a border through the Massif des Vosges (Vosges Mountains) and the imperialism of 19thcentury Germany.

Charming and beautiful Alsace, long a meeting place of Europe's Latin and Germanic cultures, is nestled between the Vosges and the River Rhine - along which the long-disputed Franco-German border has at last found a final resting place. Popularly known as a land of storks' nests and colourful half-timbered houses sprouting geraniums, Alsace offers charming touring in and around its vineyards and gentle, forested mountains.

Lorraine, a land of prairies and forests popularly associated with quiche and de Gaulle's double-barred cross (croix de Lorraine), has little of the picturesque quaintness of Alsace. However, it is home to the battlefields of Verdun, an easy ride physically if not emotionally, which bear silent testimony to the destruction and insanity of WWI.

ALSACE

Tucked between the Vosges mountains and the Rhine, Alsace is a wedge of diverse land-scapes just 190km long and 50km wide. To the south, the stark and windswept ballons (balloons; smooth, round-topped hills) of the Parc Naturel Régional des Ballons des Vosges are, quite simply, stunning. Dominating the north, but running throughout, the undulating Route des Vins d'Alsace (Alsatian Wine Route) is a showcase for the region's mostly white wines (Gewürztraminer and Riesling).

Alsace is one of the most cycle-friendly regions in France. An extensive network of

pistes cyclables (marked bikepaths) and voies vertes (carless greenways) laces through vine lands, orchards, forests, farms and picture-perfect villages of half-timbered, Hansel-and-Gretel-style houses bedecked with geraniums.

Alsace comprises two départements (administrative divisions): Bas-Rhin (Lower Rhine), which takes in the area around Strasbourg, and Haut-Rhin (Upper-Rhine), covering the region's south.

HISTORY

Since the Middle Ages royalty, military and clergy have disputed the borders of Alsace. Over the last 150 years alone, control of Alsace has been hot-potatoed between

