

French Alps & the Jura Mountains

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Best Place to Eat

- » Les Vieilles Luges (p483)
- » Flocons de Sel (p487)
- » L'Esquisse (p493)
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- » Le Saint-Pierre (p522)

Best Places to Stay

- » Farmhouse (p488)
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- » Châteaude Allues (p500)
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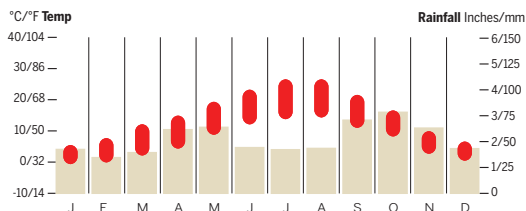
Why Go?

The French Alps are a place of boundless natural beauty. We could rhapsodise about colossal peaks, wondrous white glaciers and sapphire lakes, but seeing really is believing when it comes to Europe's Alpine heartland. Schussing down slopes with Mont Blanc hogging the horizon, driving roller coaster roads up to middle-of-nowhere Alpine passes, hiking to summits where mountain huts perch like eyries: this region will elevate you, make your heart pound and leave you crying 'encore!' like few other places on earth.

As the mountains taper north to Lake Geneva, the picture softens. This is Jura: a soothingly green region of rounded heights and vine-wreathed villages. Lakes are strung like a daisy chain across its forested depths, and wayside farms invite you to stop, relax and sample the tangy delights of Comté and *vin jaune* (yellow wine). Jura's appeal is one of simple, back-to-nature pleasures and 'ahhh, *c'est la vie...*' moments.

When to Go

Grenoble



Feb-Mar Venetian carnival in Anney, world music in Grenoble and *vin jaune* (yellow wine) feasts in Jura.

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

Dec Christmas markets, free-style events and fun as the first snow dusts the Alps.

JURA SPECIALITIES

Sipnutty *vin jaune* (yellow wine) on the Route des Vins de Jura (p525) and spoon hot Vacherin Mont d'Or cheese in Métabief Mont d'Or. And that's just for (unusual) starters.

Fast Facts

- » **Population** 7.4 million
- » **Area** 59,900 sq km
- » **Hotel overnights/year** 12.1 million
- » **Signature drinks** Char treuse liqueur; rich, golden *vin jaune*

Planning Your Trip

- » Skip the queue by pre-booking your ski pass and ski hire online. One good website is www.ifyouiski.com.
- » Save by buying a SnowBall Pass (www.snowballpass.com), offering discounts on ski passes, tuition and equipment hire.
- » Book your stay at *refuge* (mountain hut) on the Club Alpin Français website (www.ffcam.fr, in French).

Resources

- » **France Montagnes** (<http://ski-resort-france.co.uk>) For Alps resort guides, maps, snow reports and more.
- » **Piste Hors** (<http://pistehors.com>) If you're planning to head off-piste.
- » **Météo France** (www.meteofrance.com, in French) For up-to-the-minute weather reports.

PeakSummer

Peaks spiralling into cobalt blue skies, wildflower-brushed slopes, Alpine lakes – it's all up there for the exploring in summer. Be it scaling Mont Blanc, hiking the multiday Grand Tour de Haute Maurienne through the ruggedly beautiful Parc National de la Vanois, or strolling languidly around Lake Annecy (maximum views, minimum exertion), there's a trail with your name on it. Contact the Club Alpin Français (www.ffcam.fr, in French) for the low-down on *refuges* (mountain huts).

EPIC SKIING

Lift-pass expense and airport distance be damned: the French Alps is a land of infinite world-class pistes, of top-of-Europe elation. Ski touring in the shadow of Mont Blanc; Val d'Isère's roller coaster Olympic runs; big air in Les Deux Alpes; the catwalk slopes of Courchevel, where you'll need to pout as well as you plough – regardless of which you choose, this is one downhill ride you will never forget.

Pre-planning pays off: sidestep school holidays to stretch your euro further, and book lift passes online to skip past the queues. And with the *crème de la crème* of instructors at the ubiquitous École du Ski Français, you'll go from bending zee knees to freestyle dancing on skis in no time.

Top Five High-Altitude Thrills

- » Off-piste skiing in La Vallée Blanche, 20 mind-blowing kilometres from the spike of the Aiguille du Midi to Chamonix.
- » Making a knuckle-whitening 3300m mountain-bike descent in Morzine, where the scenery becomes a blur of greenery.
- » Skiing breathtakingly sheer La Sarenne – a 16km dive into oblivion on Europe's longest black run.
- » Reaching (phew!) the 4810m summit of Mont Blanc, the rooftop of Europe.
- » Doing a Tour de France in reverse, hurtling around 21 hairpin bends from Alpe d'Huez to Bourg d'Oisans.

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