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French Alps & the Jura Mountains Highlights

1. **Portes du Soleil** (p.488) Trying, just trying, to ski all the terrain at this vast, international ski area.

2. **Annecy** (p.490) Exploring the stately city’s medieval lanes, strongholds and crystal-clear waters.

3. **Lac Blanc** (p.482) Hiking up to the turquoise lake for a breathtaking view of the Mont Blanc massif.

4. **Les Trois Vallées** (p.503) Slaloming down legendary slopes, then partying away in après-ski bars.

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 ramparts of the hilltop Vauban citadel.
Itineraries

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.
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**.

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**The Channel to the Med**

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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.

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.
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 Vercingétorix 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.

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.
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 Annecy, 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.

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 alfresco 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.

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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
- Airpot
- 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.anitaisalska.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.
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 Averbuck
*Dordogne, Limousin & the Lot*  Alexis Averbuck 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.alexisaverbuck.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.

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.

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