



French Alps & the Jura Mountains

POP 4.8 MILLION

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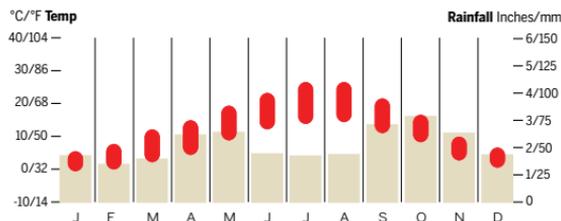
Why Go?

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) – 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, transeiver, 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) 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.