

# French Alps & the Jura



Mont Blanc, Grandes Jorasses and Barre des Écrins for mountaineers. Val d'Isère, Chamonix and Les Trois Vallées for adrenalin junkies. Vanoise, Vercors and Jura for great-outdoors fans. So many mythical names, so many expectations, and not a hint of flagging: the Alps' pulling power has never been so strong.

Their magnetic beauty has played no small part in their soaring popularity: people will take four-hour bus trips from the airport, pay an arm and a leg for a lift pass and give up creature comforts for a piece of Alpine wonder. The summit bug is incurable and terribly infectious.

What is so enticing about the Alps and the Jura is their almost beguiling range of qualities: under Mont Blanc's 4810m of raw wilderness lies the most spectacular outdoor playground for activities ranging from skiing to canyoning, but also a vast historical and architectural heritage, a unique place in French cuisine (cheese, more cheese!), and some very happening cities boasting world-class art. So much for the old cliché that you can't have it all.

Celebrity chefs and DJs ride the popularity wave and compete for the best spots, resorts outbid each other in outlandish activities, and spa-chalet hotels rival in obscene luxuries. Get away from the mad, trendy circus deep inside the national parks or the Jura forests.

Summer too provides some respite, a wild-flower infusion of walking, wildlife-spotting and lake swimming. Life on a farm slows the clock and that's where you realise what this is all about: life that little bit closer to nature.

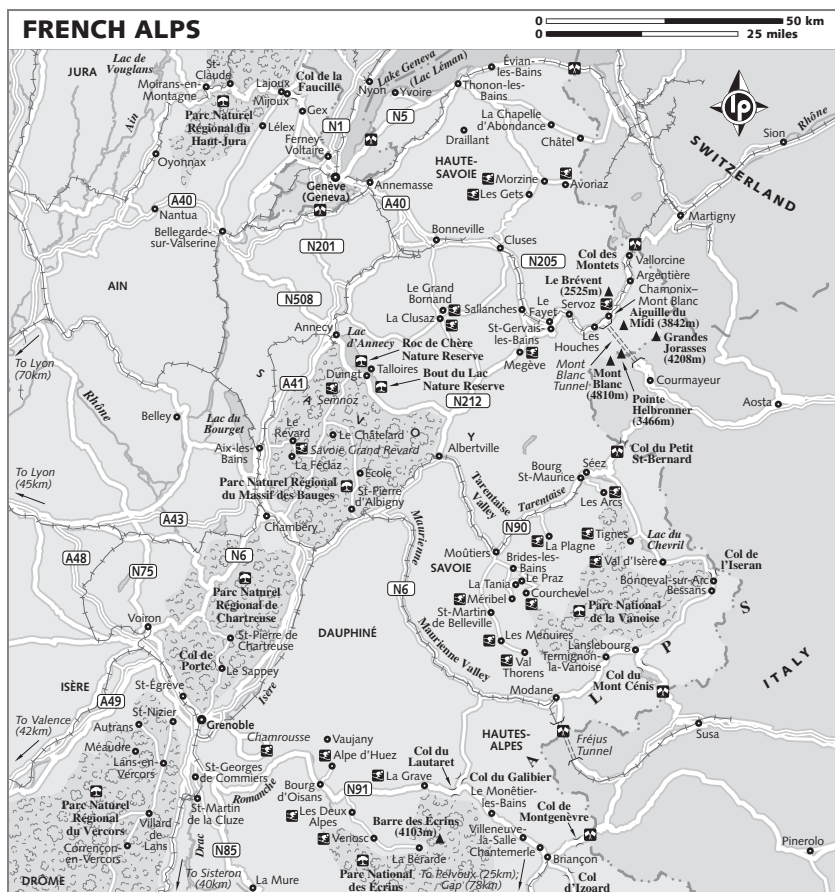
## HIGHLIGHTS

- Go mountaineering or head down the mythical Vallée Blanche in **Chamonix** (p532) before a drink or three at the town's **bars** (p537)
- Swim in beautiful Lac d'Annecy before strolling in its chic lakeside namesake, **Annecy** (p541)
- Experience life (not to mention a feast of a dinner) on a **Jurassien farm** (p574)
- **Trek** in one of the Alps' two national parks and four regional parks (p524)
- Go green and learn the ropes of eco-living and eating at **La Juliane** (p569)
- Make sure you enjoy one of the Alps' supreme cheese **raclettes** or **fondues** (p551)



■ POPULATION: 3,313,000

■ AREA: 210,000 SQ KM



## History

Migrant tribes of Celtic, Gaulish and Teutonic origin arrived in the Alps first, and by the time of Christ, permanent communities were well established, especially around the lakes of Geneva, Bourget and Annecy, and the Tarentaise and Maurienne Valleys.

During the Roman conquest the Alps were a strategic stronghold, falling under Roman control during Augustus' reign. The Frankish kings of the Merovingian and Carolingian empires laid the foundations for the modern Alps with their distinctive dialects, traditions and cultures.

The 13th and 14th centuries saw the feudal houses of Savoy, the Dauphiné and Provence fiercely contesting the Alps. The ensuing cen-

turies were marked by successive wars and occupations, with each side swapping and reoccupying territories. This cycle ended with the union of Savoy with France in 1860. Savoy was split into two *départements*, Savoie (73) and Haute-Savoie (74).

The Industrial Revolution bombarded the region with heavy industry. The first holidaymakers made their way to the area around Chamonix and Mont Blanc in the late 19th century.

German and Italian forces occupied the Alps during WWII, while the mountains became one of the main strongholds for the French resistance. Modern industry, the development of hydroelectric energy, huge urban development and large-scale tourism