

# THE FRENCH ALPS

A GUIDE FOR YOALIN TRAVELERS

## GET TO KNOW THE FRENCH ALPS

Discover the diversity of  
the French Alps

## HIKING AND TREKKING

Find and plan your hike:  
itineraries, tips, safety

## TRAVELING WITHOUT A CAR

Everything you need to  
know to get around



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Traveling around the French Alps can be an incredible and rewarding experience for nature lovers and adventurers. This guide aims to provide you with all the information you need to explore the French Alps by train and other means of transportation in the summer, so you can your trip to the full.

As a former Yoalin traveler and a French citizen, I wrote this guide to assist and inspire fellow sustainable travelers on their journey through the Alps. Drawing from my experiences, I have compiled tips and suggestions to make your journey more enjoyable and effortless.


I sincerely hope that this guide will be of great help to you. If you need any additional information, don't hesitate to contact the Yoalin community. There is always someone happy to help. Besides, if you come across any errors or feel that something is missing, please do not hesitate to let me know, so we can work together to improve this guide.

Whether you are a seasoned hiker or a first-time visitor to the region, I hope this guide will inspire you to explore the natural wonders, cultural heritage, and rich history of the French Alps. So, pack your bags and get ready for an unforgettable adventure!

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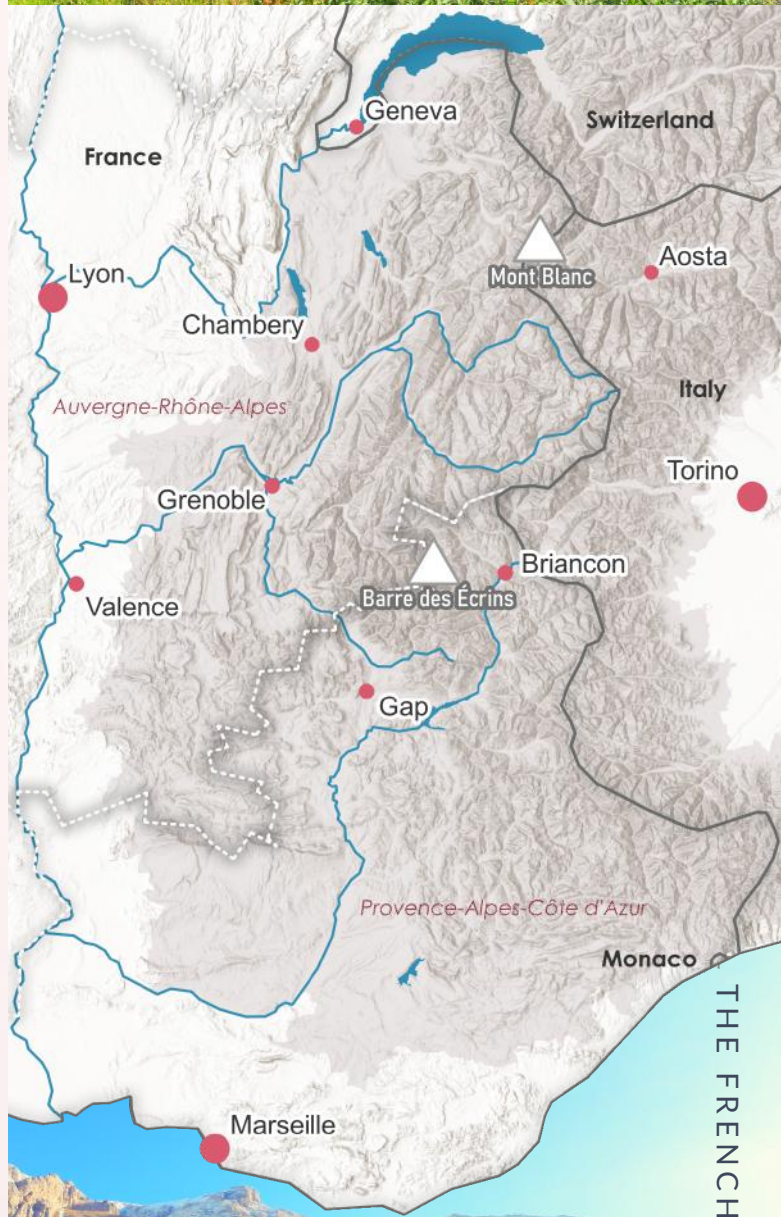
# GET TO KNOW THE FRENCH ALPS

The French Alps is the largest of the six mountain ranges in France. There rises the highest peak in Western Europe at 4,807 meters: **the Mont Blanc**.

The French Alps extends over two French administrative regions (*Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes* and *Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur*). The administrative border between these two regions symbolizes the **limit between the South and the North of the French Alps**. Yet, this limit is not only administrative. The climate is different since the Southern Alps have more of a Mediterranean influence and are sunnier.

This difference has an impact on flora and fauna. Thus, **the Northern Alps might seem greener and the Southern ones dryer and rockier**. Therefore, the rich pastures in the Northern Alps are more suitable for cows, while the dryer grasslands in the South are more suitable for grazing sheep. In the Southern Alps, you'll find fewer Spruce trees and more Larch trees, which take a beautiful orange color during fall. There are also some geological differences. The elevation of the Southern Alps is lower, even if there are some high ranges and peaks like the *Barre des Écrins* rising at 4,102 meters.

The Northern Alps are the most popular for tourism and especially winter sports. Overall, they are more populated and urban, which also goes with better train transportation. However, the Southern Alps are worth visiting as well. Don't skip them out. **They are full of surprises!**



# ALPINE FARMING

The Alps have a long and rich history of alpine farming, with pastoralism being one of its key-practice. It involves **breeding animals, such as cows and sheep, on natural pastures and allowing them to graze on the spontaneous fodder resources available.** The animals are moved seasonally to different grazing areas. With the grass growth being delayed in altitude, the farmers can follow an *eternal spring* with their herds. The cattle are usually driven up to the pastures around May or June and down in September or October. **This practice shaped the landscape, culture, and economy of the alpine regions.**

## Common breeds in the French Alps:

- Cows: Tarine and Abondance,
- Sheeps: Préalpes and Merinos.



## **The great *Transhumance* – a bit of History**

The great *Transhumance*, also known as the livestock migration between summer and winter pastures, has a long history in France. For centuries, **farmers from the Mediterranean plains would lead their flocks of sheep** on journeys that could span hundreds of kilometers **to reach the lush alpine meadows** in the summer. This journey could take anywhere from two weeks to a month. The practice of *transhumance* became increasingly popular in the 15th century and reached its peak in the 19th century. Today, while *transhumance* still occurs, it is mainly facilitated by trucks. Despite the changes, the legacy of *transhumance* lives on, as it remains an important cultural tradition in many parts of France. Traditionally, sheep were bred for their wool, they are nowadays mainly bred for their meat.

# BIODIVERSITY

*"In the end, we will conserve only what we love, and we will love only what we know."*

That is why it is valuable to understand the biodiversity of the Alps, which are home to **several endemic and emblematic species**, as well as **common ones that are just as important** in maintaining the balance of ecosystems.

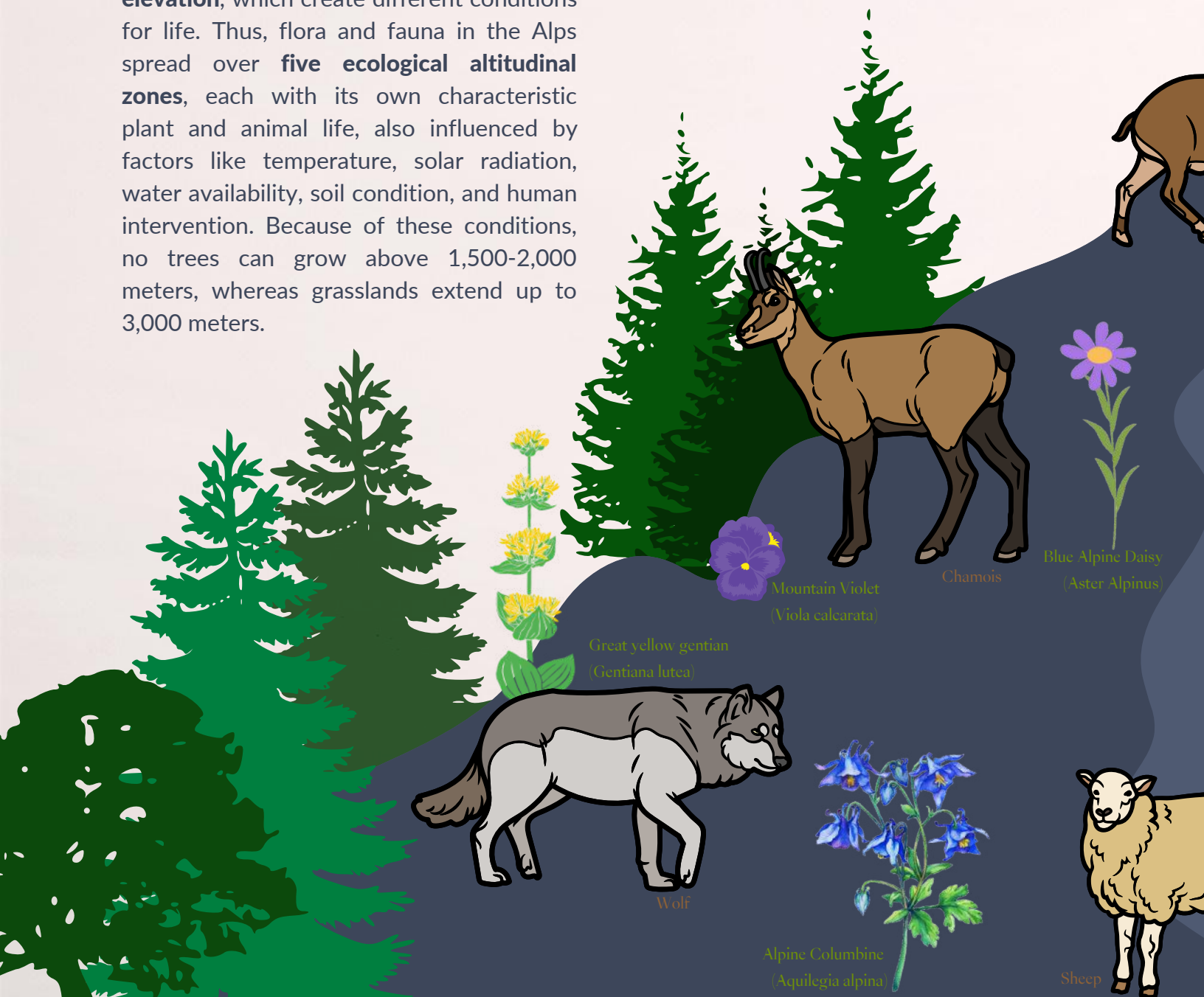
Mountains are **incredibly rich in biodiversity** due to the changes in **elevation**, which create different conditions for life. Thus, flora and fauna in the Alps spread over **five ecological altitudinal zones**, each with its own characteristic plant and animal life, also influenced by factors like temperature, solar radiation, water availability, soil condition, and human intervention. Because of these conditions, no trees can grow above 1,500-2,000 meters, whereas grasslands extend up to 3,000 meters.

## Most common trees in the French Alps:

- Scots pine (*pinus sylvestris*),
- Larch (*larix decidua*),
- Spruce (*picea abies*),
- Silver fir (*abies alba*),
- Beech (*fagus sylvatica*)



Bearded vulture



Great yellow gentian (*Gentiana lutea*)



Mountain violet (*Viola calcarata*)



Blue Alpine Daisy (*Aster alpinus*)



Alpine Columbine (*Aquilegia alpina*)



Wolf



Chamois



Sheep



However, with **climate change and rising temperatures**, the tree line is also advancing, which pushes non-forested ecosystems higher up where space is limited, risking them to disappear. The pressure is even stronger that mountains become a refuge for species from the surroundings that have difficulty adapting to the warmer temperatures in their original habitat.

The abandonment of traditional practices like pastoralism also threatens non-forested ecosystems since they sustain them, leading to the rich meadows we know. However, **human activities are now the main threat** to this same biodiversity, and as pastoralism disappears, the forest takes over pastures.

Historically, the French Alps were heavily deforested from the 13th century to the 19th century, leading to increased natural risks like flooding. Reforestation of the Alps was necessary to limit these events. As a result, you can now find tree species in the French Alps that are not endemic, like the Austrian black pine (*pinus nigra*). As a matter of fact, **the French Alps have never been that wooded** since the Middle Ages.



Please don't touch or feed wild and grazing animals ; observe them from a distance.  
Please don't pick plants.



# NATURAL PARKS

The first French national park (PN) was created in the Alps in 1963. The creation of other national parks and a new protection regime followed: regional natural parks (PNR). In 2023 in France, there are 11 national parks and 58 regional natural parks.

The Alps are home to 3 national parks:

- *la Vanoise,*
- *les Écrins,*
- *le Mercantour.*

And 9 regional parks: *Baronnies provençales, Bauges, Chartreuse, Luberon, Mont-Ventoux, Préalpes d'Azur, Queyras, Vercors, Verdon.*

They all make fantastic destinations to explore. Each one of them has a unique identity and specificities. Natural parks can be rather overcrowded; **be extra mindful when visiting them!**

## What is the difference between regional and national parks?



**National parks** are large-scale protected areas managed by the State and dedicated primarily to preserving natural sites of exceptional value. Within their perimeters, economic activities are limited, and regulations are stricter.



**Regional natural parks** are smaller protected areas managed by local authorities. They seek to reconcile local economic development with environmental preservation by promoting local natural, cultural, and historical heritage. Economic activities are, therefore, more numerous and varied than in national parks.



©PN Vanoise - Folliet Patrick



©E Bouhélier



©PN Mercantour



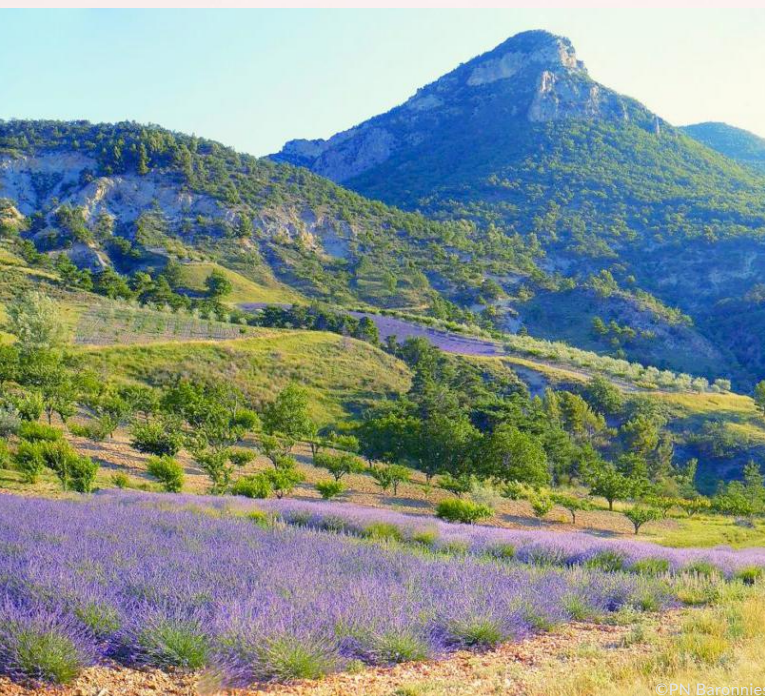
# WHICH PARK IS FOR YOU?



If you are looking for wilderness, remoteness, preserved alpine villages, and ecosystems: you might want to wander in the **Queyras Regional Park**.



If you are looking for a Mediterranean feeling and to take your time between mountains and lavender fields: you might enjoy a stay in the **Baronnies provençales Regional Park**.



If you are looking for hikes in pastures full of cows, great cheeses, a lake to dive in, and have an interest in geology: you might like to discover the **Bauges Regional Park**, which is also a Geopark.



## Further Information

→ You can find **more information online at:**

- <http://www.parcsnationaux.fr/> for the national parks.
- <https://www.parcs-naturels-regionaux.fr/> for the regional parks.

→ Once on-site, look for the **Houses of the Park** or *Maisons du Parc*. They have all the documentation you might need and always have interesting exhibitions. They also hold events throughout the year.

# BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE FOR THE FRENCH ALPS

The protection of the Alps and its biodiversity is a crucial issue in today's world. Fortunately, **many organizations are actively working towards making the French Alps more sustainable and preserving their natural beauty.** Here are some organizations that you can support or volunteer with during your visit to the French Alps.



## **CIPRA (International Commission for the Protection of the Alps) - France**

The national chapter of the NGO Cipro has been committing to the protection and sustainable development of the Alps since 1952 and is the initiator of Yoalin.



## **Mountain Riders**

An environmental education association founded in 2001 that aims to inform and raise awareness on environmental issues for everyone involved in mountain activities.



## **Mountain Wilderness - France**

The national chapter of the NGO Mountain Wilderness, which has been dedicated to preserving mountain areas in their natural and cultural aspects since 1987.



## **Protect Our Winters - France**

The national chapter of the NGO Protect Our Winters, which has been uniting the winter sports community to fight climate change and advocate for sustainable solutions since 2007.



## **France Nature Environnement**

A federation of local environmental associations working towards the protection and conservation of nature and biodiversity.

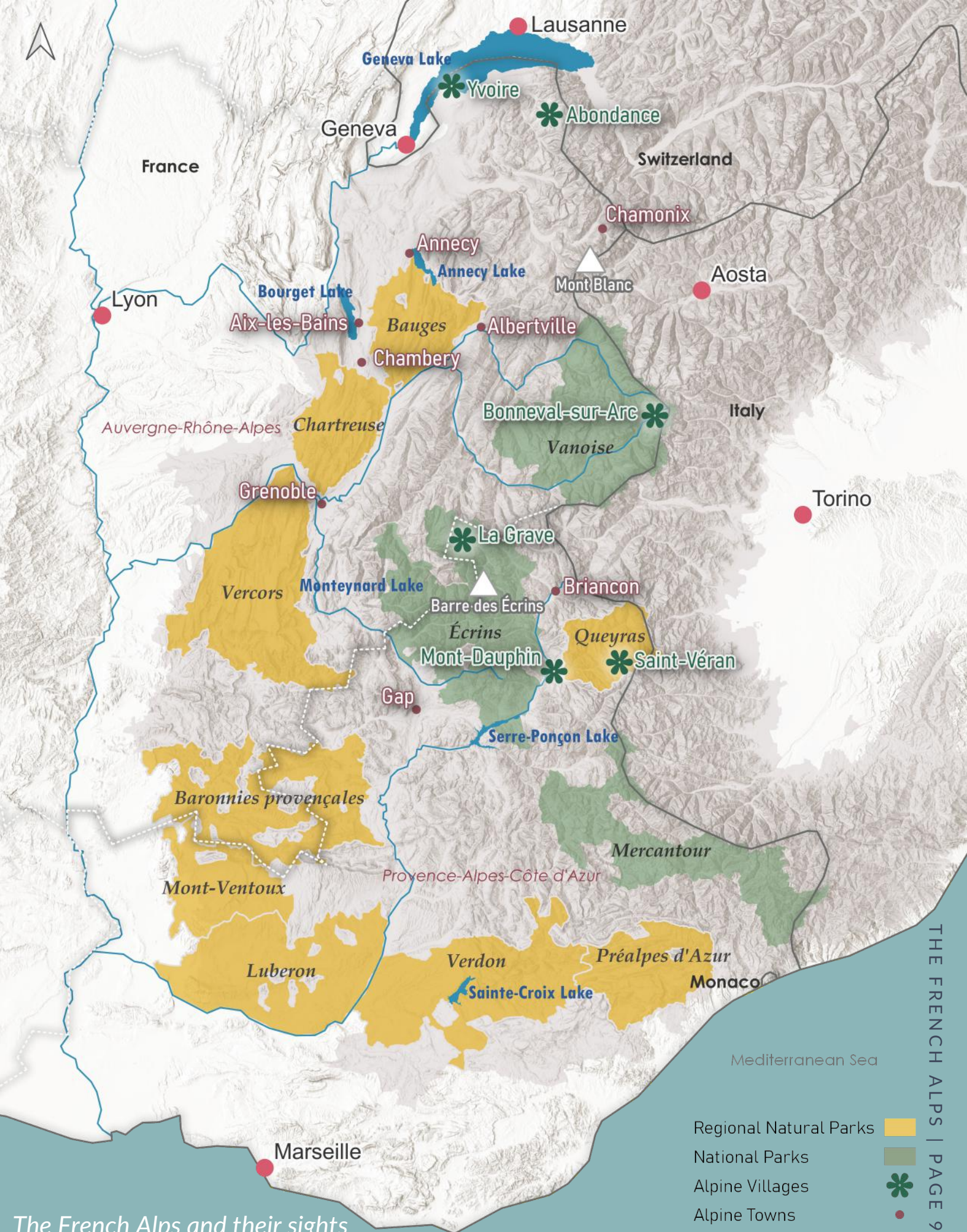


## **Educ'Alpes**

An association aiming at the networking of actors from the French Alps for the development and promotion of mountain education in all its diversity, with a view to sustainable development.

### **Other organizations:**

- [FFCAM \(French Federation of Alpine Clubs\)](#): Promoting mountain sports and safety,
- [La Chamoniarde](#): Promoting safety and responsible behavior in the mountains,
- [Tous à Poêle](#): Renovating and preserving unguarded mountain huts.



The French Alps and their sights

- Regional Natural Parks
- National Parks
- Alpine Villages \*
- Alpine Towns

# ALPINE TOWNS

If you are looking to do a city trip or only a city break, here are the not to be missed cities of the French Alps.



## AIX-LES-BAINS

30,000 inhab. - 320 m

A lovely town located on the shore of Lake Bourget, known for its **thermal baths and spas**.



## ALBERTVILLE

20,000 inhab. - 352 m

Located in the heart of the Alps, at the door of the Vanoise National Park.

**Host of the 1992 Winter Olympics.**



## ANECY

130,000 inhab. - 448 m

A picturesque town located by a beautiful lake and surrounded by the Alps.

Also called **the Venice of the French Alps**.



## BRIANCON

10,000 inhab. - 1,326 m

The highest town in Europe, offering stunning views, **overlooked by a Vauban fort**, a UNESCO World Heritage site.

### CHAMBERY

60,000 inhab. - 270 m

A charming historic town, nestled between **mountains, lakes, and vineyards.**



### CHAMONIX

8,500 inhab. - 1,035 m

**At the foot of the Mont Blanc**, an active and touristic town with stunning alpine sceneries, the capital of mountaineering.

### GAP

40,000 inhab. - 745 m

**The sweet capital of the Southern French Alps**, rich cultural and natural heritage, lively, colorful, and historic city center.



### GRENOBLE

160,000 inhab. - 212 m

A large city located at the foot of mountains, offering a unique **combination of urban and outdoor activities** as well as many historical and cultural sites.

By the Alps, are also two of the largest French cities: **Lyon and Marseille.**

# ALPINE VILLAGES

The French Alps are dotted with villages that have a rich history and preserved heritage. You might want to take a look!



## Abondance

1,450 inhab. - 1,020 m

A charming village, famous for its **namesake cheese** and its rich heritage, especially its beautiful abbey, which dates back to the 12th century.



## Bonneval-sur-Arc

255 inhab. - 1,800 m

An authentic mountain village located in the Vanoise National Park, offering a **testimony to traditional architecture** and life in the mountains.



## Mont Dauphin

146 inhab. - 1,050 m

A village **within a UNESCO fortress** designed by Vauban, steeped in history. Explore its fortifications and enjoy the stunning panorama.



## La Grave

487 inhab. - 1,520 m

A rustic village where simplicity is key and nature king. Through its narrow streets, take in the **incredible views of the iconic peak of La Meije**, which stands at 3,983 m.



## Saint-Véran

171 inhab. - 2,042 m

**One of the highest villages in Europe**, known for its authentic architecture, heritage, as well as its observatory. A perfect spot for stargazing!



## Yvoire

1,084 inhab. - 374 m

An **enchanting medieval village** on the shores of Lake Geneva, with narrow streets, flower-filled gardens, and a picturesque harbor.

# ALPINE LAKES

Seeking an alpine lake that offers the perfect combination of leisure and outdoor activities to beat the heat this summer? Look no further!



**Lake Annecy**  
27.6 km<sup>2</sup> - 447 m

Breathtaking mountain views, **sandy beaches, and leisurely bike rides** await at this picturesque lake.



**Lake Serre-Ponçon**  
28 km<sup>2</sup> - 780 m

The **largest artificial lake** in Western Europe, rich of history and hidden corners. Swim in its clear waters and enjoy the sun.



**Lake Monteynard**  
6.6 km<sup>2</sup> - 500 m

**Thrilling Himalayan bridges** go over this artificial lake, which is a popular destination for sailing and kite-surfing.



**Lake Lemman / Lake Geneva**  
580 km<sup>2</sup> - 372 m

This shared destination **between Switzerland and France** offers charming lakeside towns and incredible panoramas and cruises.



**Lake Bourget**  
44,5 km<sup>2</sup> - 232 m

The **largest natural lake** in France is perfect for water sports or simply relaxing amidst stunning surroundings.



**Lake Sainte Croix**  
22 km<sup>2</sup> - 477 m

Located **at the entrance of the Verdon Gorges**, this artificial lake and its region make a great destination to discover by bike.

# FLAVORS OF THE FRENCH ALPS

As you visit the French Alps, don't forget to try some delicious (cheesy) dishes and other delicacies!

My favorites are the *Tartiflette* and *Croziflette*, which are similar recipes, but the main ingredient differs. They are popular in all the Alps now, but they are even more in Savoie, the region where the **Reblochon** cheese used in them is produced.

- **Tartiflette** is made from potatoes, bacon bits, onions, and some tasty *Reblochon*.
- **Croziflette** is made from pasta, bacon bits, onions, and some tasty *Reblochon*. The type of pasta used in this dish are *Crozets*, square-shaped pasta made in Savoie, unique to the area.

If you have already wandered in the Swiss Alps, you'll also find some **Raclette** and **Fondues** in the French ones.

As you will soon realize, each region, if not valley, has its own cheeses. Some famous cheeses are the **Beaufort**, **Abondance**, the diverse **tome** or **tomme**, as well as goat cheeses or blue cheeses.

In the Southern Alps, you will find some typical dishes such as:

- **Tourtons**: Little pillows made of thin fried pastry, usually stuffed with mashed potatoes and/or cheese. They also exist in a sweet version.
- **Oreilles d'Ânes** or Donkey's ears: in which you won't find any donkey! It's a lasagne/gratin combo made with wild spinach, cream, and cheese.

*Bon appétit !*



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And for all the amateurs of alcohol, you'll also find a diversity of them.

Some of the most famous ones are strong alcohols like the **Genepi** or the **Chartreuse**.

You'll also find local beers as well as some wine produced in the Alps.

The most famous beer is the Mont Blanc one, but you'll find local brewers wherever you are, who are worth trying.

*Santé ! Cheers!*

*As always, please drink responsibly. Alcohol abuse is bad for your health. Alcohol is more enjoyable if consumed in moderation.*



©Brasserie Mont Blanc

### Local Food Tips

→ Going to a local market is always a good way to discover the flavors of a region. If you don't wonder upon one by chance, look for the timetables online (*Horaires du marché*) or ask the tourist office.

→ Look for IGP/PGI (Protected Geographical Indication) and AOP/PDO (Protected Designation of Origin) signs or local labels to savor authentic products.



→ Keep an eye out for signs of organic agriculture, as these products provide a more sustainable option.



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# HOW TO GET AROUND

Transportation is a significant contributor to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions when it comes to traveling. As a result, adopting sustainable mobility practices can play a crucial role in reducing our carbon footprint. However, it may seem challenging to explore new places without a car or plane. Fortunately, Yoalin offers an eco-friendly and fun way to travel sustainably! Nevertheless, it might still come with some challenges. So, here are some **tips to help you get to and navigate the French Alps sustainably, making your trip both hassle-free and eco-friendly.**

## THE MAIN TRAIN LINES TO REACH THE FRENCH ALPS

You can reach the French Alps by train from different locations. Here are the main lines and the main cities they stop in.

### From Switzerland:

- You can reach different destinations from Geneva:



- Lyon
- Grenoble
- Chambéry
- Annecy
- St Gervais-les-Bains

### From Italy:

- You can reach different destinations from Milano or Torino:



- Lyon
- Grenoble
- Chambéry

### From other parts of France:



- There is a night train from Paris to Briançon
- The main train stations to then reach the Alps are Lyon, Grenoble, and Marseille
- You can reach the Southern Alps (Gap, Briançon) from Grenoble, Valence, or Marseille



The main railroad company in France is the SNCF. You can find its website at [www.sncf-connect.com](http://www.sncf-connect.com)

### Useful links

The map of all the French train lines:

[www.sncf-reseau.com/fr/carte/](http://www.sncf-reseau.com/fr/carte/)

A map showing you how far you can travel by train in less than 5 hours: [www.chronotrains.com](http://www.chronotrains.com)



Train lines and stations of the French Alps

# RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL

Climate change is happening, and we have already seen its disastrous effects. However, the good news is that **we still have the power to act and make a difference!** And we need to start right away, reducing our carbon emissions! It's up to all of us to do our part and make individual as well as collective efforts toward achieving carbon neutrality.

Europeans, on average, have a carbon footprint of **11 tons of CO2 equivalent**, but we would need to bring this down to **2 tons**. Transportation currently accounts for almost 30% of our carbon footprint, making it a crucial area for change, and as you can see the train is one of the best option available.

The CO2 emissions of different means of transportation for 1200 km (the length of the Alps)

*according to the Ademe (French Ecological Transition Agency)*



0 kg CO2e **WALK**



2,8 kg CO2e **TGV** (highspeed train)



35 kg CO2e **COACH**



36 kg CO2e **TER** (regional train)



131 kg CO2e **GAS CAR** (with 1 passenger)



214 kg CO2e **PLANE**



**GAS CAR** 261 kg CO2e



## SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL TIPS

- Buy local delicacies and crafts
- Reduce your meat consumption
- Bring your own reusable bottle and bag
- Learn about local customs and traditions
- Be mindful of your water and energy usage
- Be respectful of nature
- Pick up trash on your way
- Reduce, reuse, recycle your waste
- Follow Leave no trace principles
- Post ethically on social media

# FRENCH TRAINS: TGV VS TER

## What is a TGV?



A TGV is a *Train Grande Vitesse*, which means a high-speed train (that can reach 320 km/h).

In a TGV, there are 2 travel classes. There is also a café-bar, free Wi-Fi, and power outlets.

Your seat is reserved. Look on your ticket for the number of the car and seat. If a TGV is full, it is not possible anymore to book a seat.

## How to board a TGV?

You might have to scan your boarding ticket at the entrance gates of the platform.

Screens in the train station will indicate at which letter each train car will stop. Wait where your letter is, along the platform. Thus, you will already be in front of the right door when the train arrives.

Then look for your seat. If you are not sitting in the right seat, someone might ask you to move. When the train has 2 decks, seats under 60 are usually on the lower deck, and seats over 60 are on the upper deck.

## Traveling by TGV with your bike

Most of the time, you can not take your bike on board, except if you disassemble it and transport it in a zip-up 'bike bag'. In this case, it will be considered luggage, and you can travel with it for free. However, in some TGVs, there is the option to book a space for it and not have to disassemble it, but you will have to pay extra.

## What is a TER?



A TER is a *Train Express Régional*. These regional trains are slower and stop at the smaller train stations.

If the TER is an older train, there won't always be power outlets.

*Unfortunately, all TERs are not electric yet, and some older lines still operate thanks to diesel.*

## How to board a TER?

You can sit wherever you want. There is no seat limit, making you able to buy a ticket at all time.

Tickets are valid for the whole day and are not assigned to one train in particular. If you miss the train, you can take the next one with the same ticket as long as it's a TER and the same route.

## Traveling by TER with your bike

You can usually take your bike on board for free. There are designated areas for them, but always check prior. A logo on the side of the train indicates where the bike area is.

## Other types of trains:

- Intercités: long-distance trains connecting French cities and towns,
- Transilien: commuter service for the Paris region,
- Ouigo: low-cost alternative to TGV.



# ALTERNATIVES TO TRAIN

## COACH ROUTES

As an alternative to rail transport, you can also look for **Flixbus or Blablabus coach rides**. There are some lines, starting from Milano and going through the Aosta Valley in Italy (Aosta-Courmayeur next to the Mont Blanc), crossing by Chamonix and going all the way to Paris / Lyon / Geneva.



## LOCAL PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Each municipality/valley has its own transportation system, to find local buses as well as regional train connections, these two apps can be really handy:

**To travel in the Southern French Alps:**  
[zou.maregionsud.fr](http://zou.maregionsud.fr)

**To travel in the Northern French Alps:** [oura.com](http://oura.com)

**Taking your bike on board** differs for every bus company. Check on the company website beforehand or call them. Tourist offices should also be able to inform you.



On local buses, always have some cash with you. They might not accept card payments. Bus stops are usually indicated on Google Maps. You might have to wave at the driver to make sure he'll stop, and once you're on the bus, press the stop button before your stop to alert the driver.



## Looking for timetables?

If you need help finding timetables or info for a specific place, ask the Yoalin community, we would be happy to help!



During the summer months, some valley offers **shuttle**, especially for hikers, or **hop-on hop-off buses**. Take a look at tourist office websites.

### CARPOOLING

Carpooling is widespread in France and is **rather cheap**: it might be interesting to check it out. Some drivers also share trips going over borders.

The main app is: [blablacar.fr](https://www.blablacar.fr)



### HITCHHIKING

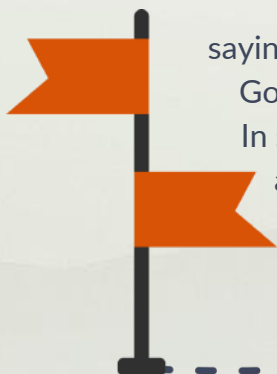
Alpine valleys are also known to be used to hitchhiking. Some of them have dedicated areas at strategic spots where it is safe for drivers to stop and for hitchhikers to be picked up or dropped off.

If you can, **make a sign, it's always helpful**. But remember that even if hitchhiking is usually safe, it is at your own risk.



### RENT A BIKE

You could also rent a bike: look for a sign saying '*location de vélos*' on stores or check on Google. Most tourist offices also rent bikes. In some cases, you can even drop your bike at a different location and do not have to return it to the same place.



# HIKING IN THE FRENCH ALPS

**Are you ready for an adventure in the French Alps?** Lace up your hiking boots and get ready to explore the breathtaking landscapes that await you. But **before you hit the trails, it is important to know the ins and outs of hiking and trekking in this stunning region.** Finding all the information you need can be challenging, but fear not! Here are collected tips and tricks to help you find the best hikes, know where to pitch your tent, navigate the marking system, and handle emergency situations.

## FIND AND PLAN YOUR HIKE

If you already have an idea of the area you want to discover, **browse the tourist office website** or go to the tourist office in person to **get a physical map and advice.**

You can also **use apps like Komoot or Outdooractive**, especially to calculate the distance and elevation of your hike. Do not rely on them once in the mountains. There are areas without phone network coverage. Always have a physical map with you. You can buy it, borrow it, or even print it.



In France, some tours have their own booklets with all the information you need. They are called **topoguide**.

The maps you most commonly find are **IGN maps**. You can browse them online at <https://www.geoportail.gouv.fr/carte>

If you're looking for a multi-day hike, you can look for **GR or GRP**. They are long-distance trails.

GRs are usually really long, but you can also hike along just a few stages. While GRPs are dedicated to the discovery of one specific region (around 7 days long), they are shorter and circular. They are all really well documented.

You can also look for **tours** or **traversées** of mountains or regions.

A *tour* often designates a multi-day hike around a specific feature, like the *Tour du Mont Blanc*, where you don't climb it but hike all around.

A *traversée* refers to a hike or trek that involves crossing a mountain range or area from one point to another.



**Don't forget to check the elevation and not only the distance!**










**And don't forget to check the weather!**

You can find weathers forecasts at: [www.meteofrance.com](http://www.meteofrance.com)



# TRAIL MARKING

When it comes to hiking in the French Alps, finding your way around can be a bit of a challenge. Luckily, the trails are well-marked, allowing you to navigate through the stunning landscapes with ease. However, understanding the marking system can be confusing for those unfamiliar with it. Here is everything you need to know!

Type of trail			
Right direction			
Turn left			
Turn right			
Wrong direction			
Mountainbike trail			
		Horse riding trail	

- A GR means *Grande Randonnée*, a long-distance trail crossing regions.
- A GRP or GRPays means *Grande Randonnée de Pays*, a long-distance trail circling a region. They also have a number to identify them.
- A PR means *Promenade et Randonnée*, shorter trails for day hikes (the marking can be of a different color than yellow).



Please stay on trails, new paths or shortcuts might harm the flora and soils. And remember to leave no trace!

# WHERE TO SPEND THE NIGHT?

There are **refuges** (mountain huts) scattered throughout the region, providing hikers a place to rest, eat, and recharge before continuing their journey. **Bivouacking** (pitching a tent just for the night) is also possible. However, there are regulations that you need to be aware of.

## REFUGES

There are two types of refuges: the guarded ones and the unguarded ones.

An unguarded refuge is a small hut left open to hikers for free. They are basic, with few amenities. They usually offer a table and a sleeping area. It is not possible to reserve them. It is on a first-come-first-served basis. Bring your own food, cooking supplies, and sleeping bag.

A guarded refuge provides more comfort since it is larger and fully equipped, with staff present to provide meals, refreshments, and other amenities. The sleeping arrangements differ a lot from one to another. It can be a dormitory as well as private rooms. They have toilets and may even have showers. Bring only your sleeping bag sheet/liner, not the sleeping bag.

Different options are available, with different prices, depending on if you want to eat dinner, get a picnic for the next day, or only spend the night.

On your way, you will also find **Gîtes d'Étape**, similar to mountain huts but accessible by car and not only on foot.

Book in advance. During the summer, refuges can be quite crowded!

On IGN maps, a pink house pictogram indicates a *refuge* or *gîte d'étape*.



### Looking for a refuge?

This website lists **all the refuges managed by the French alpine club**: [www.ffcam.fr](http://www.ffcam.fr)

This website lists **all the refuges guarded and unguarded**: [www.refuges.info](http://www.refuges.info)

## BIVOUAC

Concerning bivouacking, the rules differ from place to place. **Pitching your tent for the night is commonly allowed between sunset and sunrise, from 7 pm to 9 am.**

But in some cases, there might be regulations, especially in natural parks. Check beforehand on their websites. There can also be temporary regulations.

In case of a critical emergency, bivouacking is always allowed.

Always remember that the most important rules of bivouac are **to be discreet and to leave no trace**. You are pitching your tent in beautiful natural areas that deserve respect.

### Bivouacking rules in the heart of national parks of the French Alps:

- Vanoise: Bivouacking is only permitted from June to September, near 23 refuges (in exchange for a fee).
- Écrins: bivouacking is allowed at least one hour's walk away from roads or the heart boundaries and by some refuges.
- Mercantour: bivouacking is allowed at least one hour's walk away from roads or the heart boundaries.

Less than one hour's walk away from the border of the national park heart, you should pitch your tent outside of it.



Heart of national parks



### BIVOUAC ETIQUETTE



- **Lighting a fire is always prohibited.** Plan to take a stove with you!



- **Do not move natural elements** (rocks or logs). They are the habitat of numerous species.



- **Do not swim (or shower) in the high-altitude lakes.** Their ecosystem is extremely fragile!



- **Do not leave your banana peel or toilet paper in nature,** even if they are biodegradable. They can take months or years to disappear!



- **Properly dispose of human waste by burying them** in a hole.

# TREKKING ROUTES

Looking for an unforgettable **multi-day hiking experience** in the French Alps? Here are presented a few beautiful and rewarding routes, from the classic *Tour du Mont Blanc* to lesser-known gems. **Each trek can be tailored to fit your needs**, whether you're looking for a shorter or longer journey, or want to customize your route to include specific highlights. With endless options for customization, you can **create your own unique adventure** in the stunning French Alps.

However, it's important to **plan in advance and always have a plan B, C, and D**, because a trek never goes exactly according to plan A.

Additionally, please note that **the bivouac information provided is indicative only**, and each location may have specific regulations that can change over time. **It's recommended to obtain more detailed information on your own**, or to reach out to the Yoalin community for assistance in finding the right information.

## 1 Tour des Fiz

3 to 4 days - bivouac ok

## 2 Tour du Mont Blanc

7 to 10 days - bivouac partly ok

## 3 Tour du Beaufortain

6 to 7 days - bivouac ok

## Traversée de la Chartreuse

3 to 7 days - bivouac partly ok, temporary ban in July

4 and August

## Tour des glaciers de la Vanoise

4 to 7 days - bivouac partly ok, see rules for the Vanoise

5 National Park

## 6 Tour du Taillefer

4 to 6 days - bivouac partly ok, can be temporarily forbidden

## 7 Tour des Écrins

7 to 12 days - bivouac partly ok, see rules for the Écrins National Park

## 8 Tour du Vieux Chaillol

5 to 6 days - bivouac partly ok, see rules for the Écrins National Park

## 9 Tour du Queyras

5 to 7 days - bivouac ok

## 10 Tour de l'Oronaye

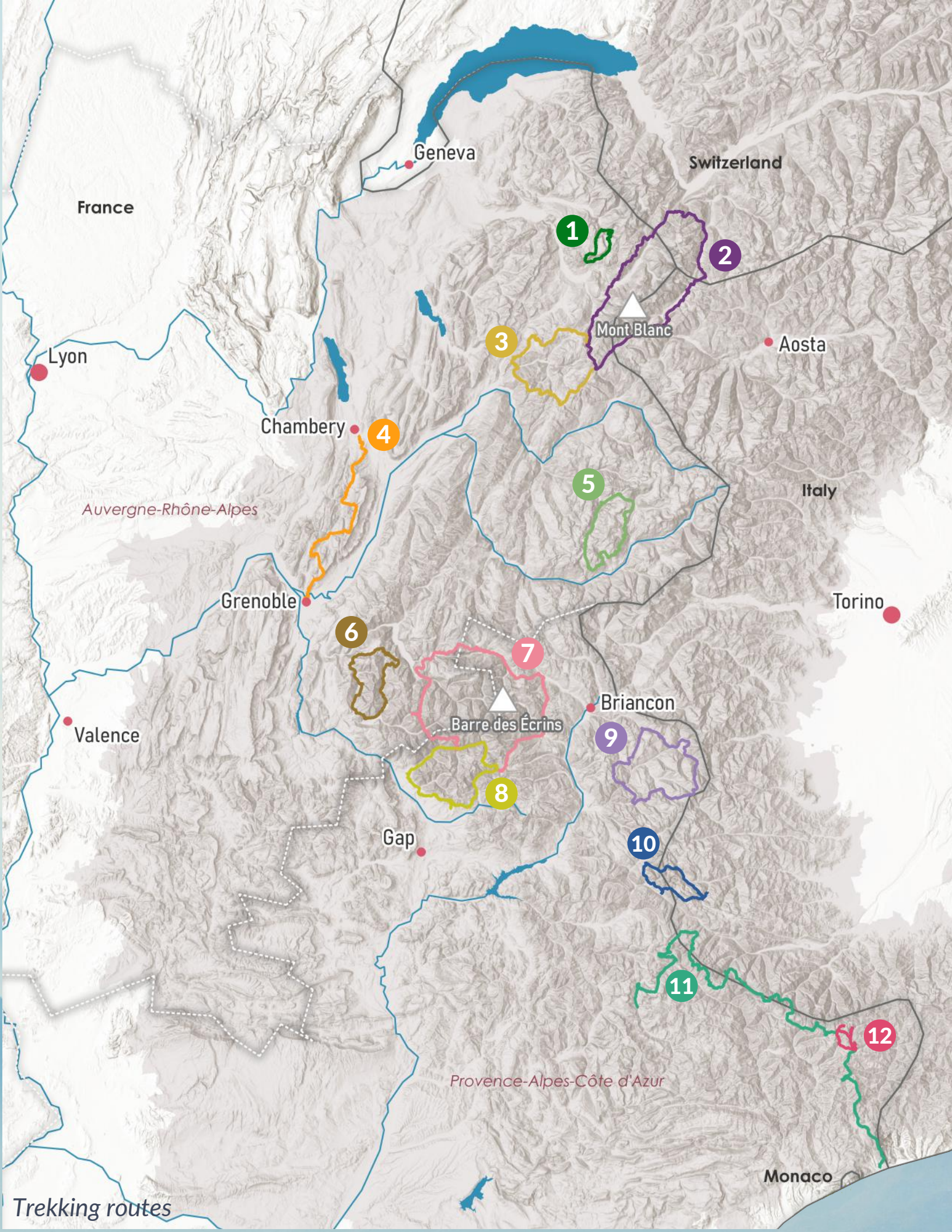
4 to 6 days - bivouac ok

## 11 Grande traversée du Mercantour

16 days - bivouac partly ok, see rules for the Mercantour National Park

## 12 Tour by the Valley of Wonders

3 to 5 days - bivouac partly ok, see rules for the Mercantour National Park



France

Switzerland

Geneva

Lyon

Chambéry

Mont Blanc

Aosta

Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes

Italy

Grenoble

Torino

Valence

Barre des Écrins

Briançon

Gap

Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur

Monaco

Trekking routes

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

# DAY HIKES FROM A CITY



If you are visiting cities and looking for day hikes, here are some **cities where you can start a hike directly from the center or after taking a bus.**

Usually, during the summer months, you should always be able to find a transportation option to go to the start of a hike. When using an app like Komoot or Outdooractive, you can also look for bus stops and see the hikes listed around.

- **Grenoble:**

- La Bastille
- Chamrousse
- Dent de Crolles

- **Anney:**

- Montagne du Taillefer
- Chalet de l'Aulp
- Mont Veyrier

- **Gap:**

- Pic de Charance
- Petite Autane
- Gioberney

- **Briançon:**

- Col des Thures
- Notre Dame des Neiges
- Col du Lautaret
- Grand Lac

# BE PREPARED



In case of an emergency, you can call **112**. If the connection is poor, it might still be enough to **text the emergency number 114** (text your name, if you are victim or witness, the location, and describe the situation). This number is specifically dedicated to people with hearing or speech difficulties, so save it as your default emergency number in France if you fall under this category.

Additionally, always **carry a first aid kit and a survival blanket** with you. It is always better to be prepared in case of an emergency. Also, make sure to **carry enough water**, especially during the summer when streams may dry up.



If you find yourself in a situation where you need **to signal a rescue helicopter** form a "Y" with your arms meaning "Yes, help is needed". Form an "N" with your arms meaning "No, help is not needed".

If you don't have your own camping equipment, don't worry! **Plenty of outdoor stores offer a rental service and have everything from tents and sleeping bags to backpacks and trekking poles**. Some camping places and refuges also rent tents to spend the night on-site.

If you are hiking alone, **let someone know your plan** and when you expect to return. Remember to let them know you are safe when you finish your hike.



During the summer, **rockfalls are common**, so check if your route may be exposed to them. If so, **consider renting a helmet**. If you witness or trigger a rockfall, shout "stone" or "*pierre*" to warn other hikers.



**Be cautious during storms**, even if it is not stormy where you are. The rivers, torrents, and streams around you could swell quickly, causing floods. Avoid riverbeds and narrow valleys during storms.

**Remember, it is better to be safe than sorry, so take all necessary precautions.**

# SHARING THE TRAIL WITH HERDS



Avoid contact with grazing animals, do not feed them and keep a safe distance.



Keep calm and don't frighten grazing animals.



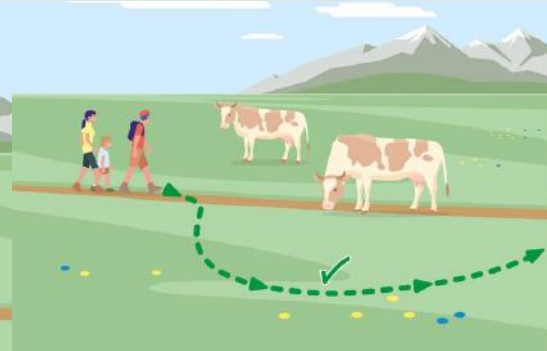
Mother cows protect their calves. Avoid encounters between them, especially if you have a dog.



Keep dogs under control and on a short leash. In case of an attack, let the dog off the leash immediately.



Stay on marked trails while walking in pastures.



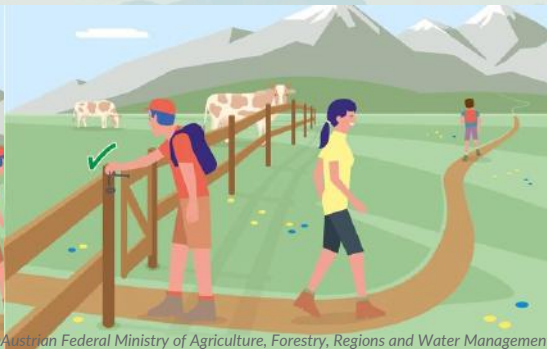
If grazing animals block the way, go around it and maintain the greatest distance possible.



If grazing animals approach you, stay calm, don't turn your back on them, give them space.



At the first sight of animal's anxiety, stay calm and leave the pasture as quickly as possible.



Do not ignore fences! Use a gate if there is one, close it tightly, and cross the pasture quickly.

**Treat with proper respect the people working there, the nature and the animals!**



# HIKING NEAR GUARDING DOGS

## WHO ARE THEY?

Farmers and shepherds use **guarding dogs** to protect their flock against predators. Guarding dogs are mainly Pyrenean Mountain Dogs, Abruzzese Shepherd Dogs, and Anatolian Shepherd Dogs. They are usually called "*patou*". The sheepdog who goes along with the shepherd is not a guarding dog, his job is to lead or gather the flock. **Guarding dogs constantly stay with the flock**, day and night. They are even born inside it, to forge strong bonds with the sheep. **They are not trained to attack, but to deter**: their stoutness and barking keep predators away.



## WHAT TO DO?

If you come across a flock, **make a wide detour around the area where the animals are grazing or resting**. As you approach the flock, a guarding dog might come up and sniff you in order to identify you. After having done so, he generally goes back to his flock. Occasionally, he may also try to intimidate you.

**Beware of acting ways that may seem harmless to you** (trying to feed, pet, or photograph an animal), the dog could misinterpret it as an attack.

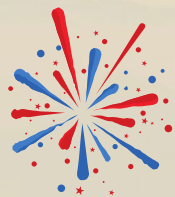
If you come face to face with a guarding dog, **behave calmly and passively** in order to reassure him. Do not threaten the dogs with your hiking poles. You can hold your hat or backpack in front of you or put it between you and the dog, to increase the distance between the both of you. **You can also talk to him or even yawn**.

**In any case, stop until the dog identifies you and never pet them.**

There will usually be a panel informing you that you might encounter a flock with guarding dogs and reminding you what to do.

# HANDY TIPS FOR YOUR TRIP

## PUBLIC HOLIDAYS DURING THE SUMMER



**14th of July:** National Day or Bastille Day

↳ featuring fireworks, parades, fairs, and various entertainment.

**15th of August:** Assumption Day

## OPENING HOURS OF STORES



In France, the traditional **shopping hours** are typically **from 8:00 or 9:00 to 18:00 or 19:00**. However, smaller shops may close for a lunch break between 12:00 and 14:00, while larger stores like supermarkets may close later.



**On Sundays and public holidays, main stores can be open**, particularly in the morning, and smaller shops in tourist areas might remain open all day. However, many shops can be closed on Mondays in small towns and cities.



**Restaurants** usually offer service **between 12:00 and 14:00, and again from 19:00 to 21:30**. It is recommended to arrive before 13:00 or 20:30 to avoid being turned away. In tourist areas, some restaurants may also offer all-day service. **Tap water is free in restaurants**, request a *carafe d'eau* instead of a bottle!

## SAFETY



The French Alps are beautiful, with much to explore, but as with any travel destination, it's important to stay vigilant and aware of potential safety risks.

**Beware of pickpocketing**, which is a common problem in busy tourist areas, such as crowded markets or public transportation.

Don't leave your belongings unattended and **bring a lock** if you're planning to stay in hostels.

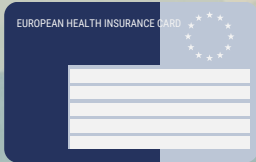


**Keep important documents safe** and carry physical or digital copies of these documents with you, in case of an emergency.

# TRAVELER'S HEALTH



IF YOU NEED EMERGENCY MEDICAL ASSISTANCE, DIAL 112 OR TEXT 114



Make sure to bring your EHIC (**European Health Insurance Card**) with you and check that it is still valid before your trip.



In case you require medical assistance during your trip, there are several options available to you, depending on the severity of the situation.

You can easily locate a **pharmacy** as they are present in most places and are marked with a green neon cross. Pharmacists are qualified to provide immediate medical advice for common diseases. You can find a pharmacy open even outside of regular business hours. Look for the lit green cross to know which ones are open, or check for an info sign indicating which pharmacy is open outside business hours in the area.



To get in touch with a **doctor**, you can **call SOS Médecins at 3624** to have a general practitioner give you advice on the spot or make a house call within a few hours or a teleconsultation. To find appointments, you can also use online platforms such as Doctolib.



If you require immediate medical attention, you can go at any time to an **emergency service** attached to hospitals or **call 112** for an ambulance.

# LEXICON



## THE BASICS

Yes	Oui
No	Non
Hello	Bonjour
Goodbye	Au revoir
Thank you	Merci
Thank you very much	Merci beaucoup
Please	S'il vous plaît
You're welcome	De rien
Nice to meet you!	Enchanté!
Excuse me	Excusez-moi
Sorry	Pardon
Help!	Au secours ! Aidez-moi !
Watch out!	Attention !
Open	Ouvert
Closed	Fermé
Can you help me?	Pouvez-vous m'aider ?
Do you speak English?	Parlez-vous anglais ?
I don't speak French	Je ne parle pas français
I don't understand	Je ne comprends pas
Could you speak more slowly?	Pouvez-vous parler plus lentement ?
Could you repeat that?	Pouvez-vous répéter ?
Could you write that down for me?	Pouvez-vous l'écrire ?
Where is...?	Où est...?
I'm lost	Je suis perdu
I'm looking for...	Je cherche...
I'm going to...	Je vais à ...
I would like...	Je voudrais...
Do you have...?	Avez-vous...?
I'm hungry	J'ai faim
I'm thirsty	J'ai soif
I'm tired	Je suis fatigué
Drinkable / Non-drinkable water	Eau potable / non potable

## MOUNTAINS

Mountain	Montagne
Range	Massif
Summit	Sommet
Ridge	Crête
Cliff	Falaise
Valley	Vallon/ Vallée
Pass	Col
Lake	Lac
Forest	Forêt
Spring	Source
Waterfall	Cascade
River	Rivière
Stream	Ruisseau
Torrent	Torrent
Alpine pasture	Alpage / Estive
Herd / Flock	Troupeau
Shepherd	Berger
Hike	Randonnée / Rando (for short)
Leisure walk	Balade / Promenade
Mountain Hut	Refuge
Trail marking	Balisage
Map	Carte
Path	Chemin / Sentier
Élévation	Dénivelé
Mountain bike	VTT
Climbing	Escalade
Mountaineering	Alpinisme
Paragliding	Parapente
Ski resort	Station de ski
Chairlift	Télésiège
Cablecar	Télécabine

## TRAVEL AND TRANSPORTATION

Pedestrian	Piéton	Train station	Gare ferroviaire
Bike	Vélo	Ticket inspector	Contrôleur
Car	Voiture	Platform	Quai
Train	Train	Bus station	Gare routière
Bus / Coach	Bus / Car	Bus stop	Arrêt de bus
Departure	Départ	Cycling path	Piste cyclable
Arrival	Arrivée	Carpooling	Covoiturage
A round-trip ticket	Un billet aller-retour	Hitchhiking	Autostop
A one-way ticket	Un aller simple	Youth Hostel	Auberge de jeunesse



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*This publication is not intended for commercial purposes and is the result of a personal initiative.*

*The information provided is given as an indication and may be subject to change. Readers are invited to seek information from official organizations to verify the accuracy of the information presented and to comply with the rules in force at the visited sites.*

*Should you notice any inaccuracies or omissions or wish to contribute any additional information, feel free to contact the author.*

# YOALIN IS...



"SEEING JUST HOW FAR YOU CAN GO WITHOUT SACRIFICING NATURE  
ALONG THE WAY" TYLER

"A FULL BREATH TO GRASP THE BEAUTY OF THE ALPINE REGION  
AND TO APPRECIATE THE SLOWNESS OF A TRAIN RIDE" ISOLDE

"ABOVE ALL A GREAT COMMUNITY, THAT SHARES VALUES ON TRAVEL  
AND SUSTAINABILITY IN THE BEST WAY, THAT IS WITH DIRECT  
EXPERIENCE" GAIA

"A FREEING ADVENTURE, SHOWING THAT TRAVELING BY TRAIN IS FUN  
BESIDES BEING ECO-FRIENDLY" ELISE

"A LIFE-CHANGING PROJECT! IT AFFECTED MY WAY OF THINKING ABOUT  
TRAVELING AND GAVE ME MOTIVATION TO RE-THINK MY CHOICES" MAJA

"A NEW WAY OF TRAVELING, A BEAUTIFUL AND DYNAMIC COMMUNITY,  
AN OPPORTUNITY TO GAIN A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE AND TO BE PART  
OF SOMETHING BIGGER THAN JUST AN INDIVIDUAL SUMMER OF  
TRAVELING" NICOLAS

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