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The Best – Year-Round – Hotels To Visit In The French Alps

Because mountains are not just for winter...



By **Cassie Steer** | Published on 7th October 2024 at 11.21am

Sand and sea are all very well and good but there's something inherently soul-stirring about a mountain landscape, namely French Alps. Forget forest-bathing, mountain basking (marvelling at the sheer magnitude of nature's show pieces and the expansive vista they offer) is the perfect antidote to modern stresses. Not convinced? Findings published in Nature Human Behaviour suggest that mountain landscapes may promote openness to new experiences; not that you have to partake in extreme sports (or even marginally exertive hiking for that matter) as there is something for intrepid nature-lovers and languid sun-seekers alike.

What is special about the French Alps?

But whilst parts of the area - which extends all the way from Lake Geneva down to the Mediterranean sea in Nice - share the same topography with its neighbours (Switzerland and Italy border its eastern side), the area feels uniquely French, which means *all* the cheese and wine.

What French city is near the Alps?

Despite the formidable mountain ranges, the area is home to several large cities, notably Grenoble (the capital of the French Alps or Iserre region), famed for its cable car (not for the giddy), imposing Bastille fort and the Dauphinois Museum flanked by magnificent snow-capped peaks. Other eminent French Alpine towns nestled in this 'Alpine Furrow' include Annecy which is connected to Lake Annecy. Known as 'Venice of the Alps' thanks to its myriad of canals it boasts a similar fairytale allure of its Italian counterpart but minus the glut of selfie sticks and colossal cruise ships. In fact, so picturesque is Annecy that Paul Cézanne dismissed it as a landscape for 'travel sketchbooks'. There's also Chambéry - another easy-on-the-eye, lively town boasting a medieval castle and Musée des Beaux-Arts as well as Aix-les-Bains; an idyllic spa town with an illustrious past that was built during La Belle Époque.

What is there to do?

We couldn't mention the French Alps without talking about snowsports as it ranks amongst the largest winter sports areas in the world with top class, famous resorts such as Chamonix, Courchevel and Val-d'Isère. But what about the summer months? This verdant oasis plays backdrop to a whole host of outdoor pursuits for every fitness level and interest. For the more intrepid, there is mountaineering, rafting, caving and an unforgettable (in a good or bad way depending on your head for heights) ride over Mont Blanc; Europe's second-highest mountain.

Outdoorsy types who prefer something a bit less hairy can enjoy mountain biking, canoeing, sailing, horse-riding, angling and walking (perfect for families) or hiking depending on energy-levels. If said energy levels are more sloth-like, you can leave the adrenaline-junkies with their dynamic ropes and spend the day ambling around the many spa towns (Evian being one even we'd heard of) or pack a picnic and have a (lake) beach day.

Whilst the area is more synonymous with snow than water, summer is when the plethora of lakes, waterfalls and rivers really comes into their own. Wild swimmers will drink up the plentiful bathing spots with scenic backdrops such as the waterfalls at Cascade Blanche near Port-en-Royans whilst the lakes (many of which have little beaches) are perfect for families thanks to the pristine turquoise (and wave-free) waters (Lac D'Annecy is considered one of the cleanest lakes in the world). Culture, swimming *and* tanning? Prepare to unleash the smug selfies.





LOCATION: CHATEAU DE CANDIE ©TRISHA WARD

Where to stay?

On a recent trip to shoot several fashion and beauty stories in the area, the Grazia team stayed at Purple Summer's Château de Candie, a four-star hotel perched on a hillside surrounded by ancient forests and, somewhat surprisingly, vineyards which produce 3000 bottles of 'Candie 1891' dry white wine. Nestled in the Chambéry area (easy to get to from either Lyon or Geneva), the Château itself was built in the Middle Ages and is as picture-perfect as they come from the artful climbers that envelop the exterior in a lush cloak which changes colour with the seasons to the oh-so-French Mansard roof (prime Hollywood movie fodder). Authentically French, and refreshingly devoid of any hint of pretention, each of the 26 rooms look and feel totally unique and are peppered with antiques which sit harmoniously with more modern comforts.



CHATEAU DE CANDIE ©CHATEAU DE CANDIE

Breathtaking views of the Chartreuse mountain range, the Dent du Chat and the Col du Granier greet each guest (along with the sound of birdsong) and are equally beguiling in summer as they are enveloped in snow. In fact, the Chateau was positively made for summer with its lush lawns, outdoor swimming pool and the option to dine on the tranquil terrace of the L'Orangerie; the hotel's fine dining restaurant committed to using fresh, local, seasonal produce. Summer in the Alps? It fait beau.



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Cassie Steer is acting beauty director at Grazia with over 25 years' experience on women's glossies.