

PRODUCED BY



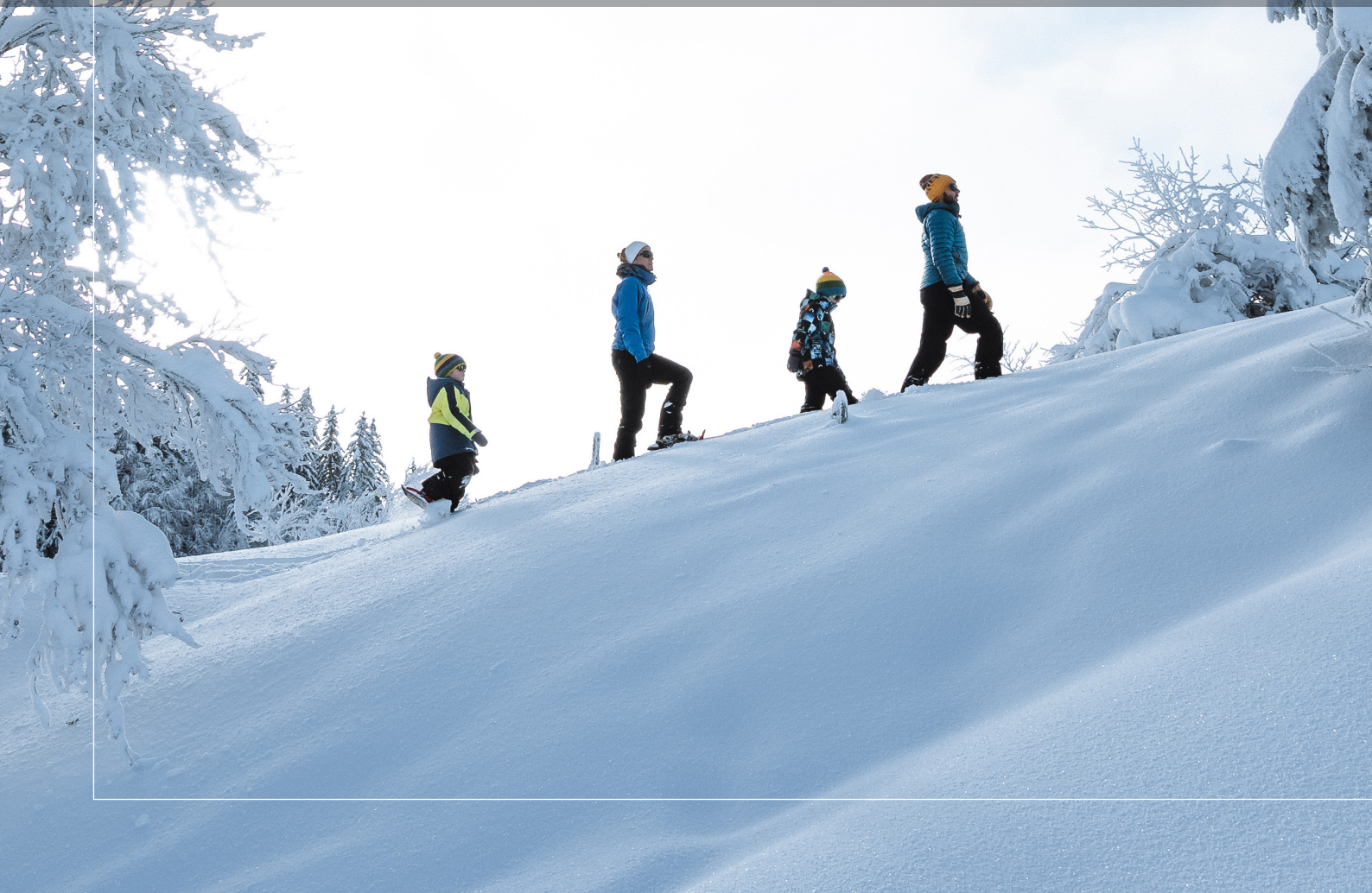
TRAVELLER

PAID CONTENT FOR
SAVOIE MONT BLANC

SAVOIE MONT BLANC
FRENCH ALPS

RE-DISCOVER THE FRENCH ALPS IN

Savoie Mont Blanc





Le Villaron, Bessans
RIGHT: A cheese trolley,
 Le Moulin de Léré
PREVIOUS PAGE: A
 family snowshoeing

IMAGES: MORGAN BODET; ALBAN PERNET; VIOLENE GOUILLOUX

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC
TRAVELLER

National Geographic Traveller (UK)

Editorial Director: Maria Pieri
Editor: Pat Riddell
Deputy Editor: Amelia Duggan
Commissioning Editor: Connor McGovern
Senior Editor: Sarah Barrell
Executive Editor: Glen Mutel
Associate Editor: Nicola Trup
Digital Editor: Josephine Price
Deputy Digital Editor: Nora Wallaya
Content Editor: Charlotte Wigram-Evans
Assistant Content Editor: Angela Locatelli
Project Editors: Jo Fletcher-Cross, Zane Henry, Farida Zeynalova
Project Assistant: Sacha Scoging
Editorial Admin Assistant: Tabitha Grainge
Head of Sub Editors: Hannah Doherty (maternity leave)
Sub Editors: Chris Horton, Ben Murray, Karen Yates
Operations Manager: Seamus McDermott
Digital Marketing Manager: Prabbie Kaur
Head of Events: Sabera Sattar
Marketing Manager — Events: Angelique Mannan

Art Director: Becky Redman
Art Editors: Lauren Atkinson-Smith, Lauren Gamp
Senior Designers: Liz Owens, Dean Reynolds, Kelly McKenna (maternity leave)
Designer: Rosie Klein
Picture Editor: Olly Puglisi
Production Manager: Daniel Gregory
Production Controller: Joe Mendonca

Commercial Director: Matthew Midworth
Head of Campaigns: William Allen
Campaigns Team: James Bendien, Jonathan Carrillo Saez, Bob Jalaf, Kevin Killen, Gabriela Milkova (maternity leave), Mark Salmon, Oscar Williams
Head of National Geographic Traveller — The Collection: Danny Pegg

National Geographic Traveller (UK) is published by APL Media Limited, Unit 310, Highgate Studios, 53-79 Highgate Road, London NW5 1TL nationalgeographic.co.uk/travel
Editorial T: 020 7253 9906. editorial@natgeotraveller.co.uk
Sales/Admin T: 020 7253 9909. F: 020 7253 9907. sales@natgeotraveller.co.uk
Subscriptions T: 01293 312 166. natgeotraveller@subscriptionhelpline.co.uk

Copyright © 2021 National Geographic Partners, LLC. All Rights Reserved. National Geographic Traveller and the Yellow Border Design are registered trademarks of National Geographic Society and used under license. Printed in the UK.



Contents

Beyond its renowned flagship destinations, the southern French region of Savoie Mont Blanc is dotted with natural wonders, storied towns, culinary hotspots and winter playgrounds far from the tourist trail.

6 FLYING OVER LAKE ANNECY
 Take off on an adrenaline-fuelled paragliding experience to see the lake from a new perspective

8 EXPLORE CLUSE DE CHAMBÉRY BY BIKE
 Learn about the turbulent history of this wine area and sample some of its most famous grape varieties

10 FOUR LESSER-KNOWN SKI AREAS
 Find inspiration for your next winter trip — from traditional Savoyard hamlets to modern ski in, ski out resorts

A NEW LOOK AT

The French Alps

Located in south-eastern France, right in the heart of the Alps, the region of Savoie Mont Blanc is home to many much-loved destinations. Around its lakes, verdant wine valleys and world-famous peaks, a host of unsung gems deserves just as much attention

IMAGE: GETTY

Things in Chambéry aren't always what they seem. Walking around its streets, you might notice ornate window frames or a recessed balcony drawn on the side of a building; step inside its cathedral, and the intricate carvings on the ceiling turn out to be optical illusions. This compact, lively city has always found ways to stand out: Chambéry has historically served as the capital of Savoy, a region that straddled France's south-eastern border with Italy and included cities such as Turin. This shared history with its southern neighbour inspired a love of colourful facades, cobbled squares and Piedmontese-style galleries — as well as clever, eye-grabbing decorative deceptions.

Today, Chambéry remains one of the main hubs of Savoie Mont Blanc, a region that includes all the resorts, towns and villages of the country's Savoie and Haute-Savoie departments. Covering two-thirds of the French Alps, it's a territory where nature packs a varied, powerful punch: there's the expansive Vanoise National Park (France's first national park, established in 1963), two regional parks, 18 nature reserves and four lakes — and they're, collectively, home to 112 ski resorts, 85 supervised beaches and in excess of 7,600 miles of hiking tracks.

It's hardly surprising, then, that the region is home to some of European travel's biggest hitters. In the warm months, the clear water of Lake Geneva and old-time charm of Annecy town attract visitors from far and wide. At higher altitudes, cycling enthusiasts can brave over 40 passes featured in the Tour de France, such as Col des Aravis, accessible from the resort of La Clusaz. Come the first snow, skiers head to winter hubs like Courchevel and Chamonix, framed by the unmistakable Mont Blanc.

But just like the *trompe l'oeil* art in Chambéry, this region asks travellers to take a longer, closer look, and be intrepid. Do that, and you'll be rewarded with stories of heritage and innovation, resilience and reinvention. If it's solitude you're after, valleys like Col des Annes, a short distance from Le Grand-Bornand resort, are defined by a silence so absolute cowbells can be heard from miles away. What's more, a series of sustainable initiatives, from the hospitality sector to public transport, means visitors are encouraged to tread lightly.

Things in Savoie Mont Blanc aren't always what they seem; they may be even better.

EXPLORE

The great lakes

A flight from Col de La Forclaz gives travellers bird's-eye views of Lake Annecy, one of Europe's purest bodies of water, including the wildlife haven of Bout du Lac. Words: Angela Locatelli

Walk, run then stay upright: these are the only instructions I receive at the take-off platform, which looks like a high-altitude football field, only titled, and ending down a ravine. I stare at the few feet separating me from the mountainside. Jeremy, my instructor for the flight, is behind me, strapped to my indecisiveness by a two-person body harness. Now or never, I think as I start marching. Then, it all happens at once — air fills our large canopy, a gust lifts us up and the ground is no more. I feel a rush, a drop in the pit of my stomach, a disorientating feeling of being at the mercy of the elements. My feet wriggle, reaching for gravity.

At 3,800ft, Col de la Forclaz, from where we've just departed, is Europe's most popular free-flight take-off point. It must, I think, also be one of the most scenic: not only does this Alpine mountain pass overlook the claw-like Dents de Lanfon mountain and towering La Tournette peak, but it also presides over the entirety of Lake Annecy.

Within seconds of launching, the people on the platform are as undefinable as ants, scurrying dozens of feet below. In front of us, Lake Annecy unravels like a giant turquoise snake. I take it in, one bend at a time: first, on the left shore, the Château de Duingt; then, on the opposite bank, the dense canopy of the Roc de Chère Nature Reserve; on the horizon, too far away to make out in any detail, is Annecy. Visitors to the area tend to make a beeline for this pretty lakeside

“It all happens at once. The air fills our canopy, a gust lifts us up and the ground is no more. I feel a rush, a drop in the pit of my stomach, a disorientating feeling of being at the mercy of the elements. My feet wriggle, reaching for gravity.”

FROM LEFT: Paragliders take flight above Lake Annecy; stand-up paddling on Lake Aiguebelette at sunset; Yvoire, a Medieval village on the southern shores of Lake Geneva

PREVIOUS PAGE: Cows grazing on an Alpine meadow above Le Grand-Bornand, near the Aravis mountain range



town, or enjoy the sites and activities around it, such as the greenway, a leisurely cycling path that runs along the shore for nearly 20 miles.

“Try manoeuvring,” Jeremy says, bringing me back to my senses. Clenching the handles, I find myself whisking above the reed beds of the Bout du Lac Nature Reserve. Few travellers venture to this wetland, but it was here that, earlier today, at ground level (and a slower speed), I'd learned about the importance of preserving the last wild corners of the lake.

The Bout du Lac Nature Reserve was created in 1974 to protect around 200 acres of land from development. Today, it's home to boars, deer and beavers, as well as enough avian life to keep birdwatchers busy for days. During a guided visit, following a signposted educational trail, I'd wandered through a meadow abloom with 20 varieties of orchid; strolled along the River Ire, one of the tributaries that feeds Lake Annecy; and passed through a thicket of willows and alders, cool and shady even on a hot summer day.

I think back to Isabelle, my wetland guide, placing her palms on my eyelids: “Now, close your eyes,” she'd said. When she let go, we were by the edge of the lake, and the suddenness of its clarity made me squint. Above, the sky was speckled with tiny flecks of yellow, orange and blue — the canopies of paragliders performing feats of aerobatic derring-do, spinning on themselves, turning upside down.

And as hard as it might have been to believe back then, I'm now one of them. The wind drops, and as I adjust to the stillness, I notice how serene it is up here. I say this to Jeremy. “Does this mean you're ready for some stunts?” he asks. He pulls the handles, and suddenly we pivot to the left, swivel to the right, draw large circles in the air and end up with our legs facing the sky, stopping just short of doing a complete 180.

Then, with barely enough time to catch my breath, stay upright, run and walk: my feet touch the grass and I land easily, lightly, among the green fields of the Doussard valley. We drive away, following the road by the lake, and decide to join a group of locals by the shore for a spontaneous dip. Everything in this landscape goes back to water, I think, as I float facing the sky — and whether above it or in it, the best way to enjoy it might just be taking the plunge.

Espace 3d Parapente offers tandem flights over Lake Annecy as well as paragliding lessons for enthusiasts. No visit to the area is complete without dining at La Cuillère à Omble, known for its fish specialities.



THREE MORE Lake experiences

1 STEP BACK IN TIME

A medieval hamlet on Lake Geneva, Yvoire is a microcosm of cobbled streets and stone houses. It's known for its floral decorations and the Garden of Five Senses, a maze lined with over 1,500 plants (think cheese-tasting herbs and gum-smelling leaves). Make time to join a solar-powered lake cruise on Le Foué boat, too.

2 UNWIND AND ADMIRE

The soothing properties of Aix-Les-Bain's thermal waters have been known for centuries. From this shoreside town, a ferry trip over Lake Bourget takes you to Hautecombe Abbey, the former burial place of Savoy princes. Grab a bite at DéhooKé brasserie before heading to La Turquoise Egarée B&B.

3 GET ACTIVE

Try stand-up paddling at Lake Aiguebelette, with green-blue waters and a ban on motor boats. If you're in the area for a longer stay, eco-campsite Huttopia has pitches for tents and caravans, plus permanent chalets and facilities. For dinner, opt for the terrace of Auberge du Sougey.



TASTE

The wines

On a cycling tour of Chambéry Cluse, visitors can discover some of Savoie Mont Blanc's unique wine appellations — as well as the area's fascinating history. Words: Angela Locatelli

The northern face of Mont Granier drops abruptly. From the flat summit, the precipice simply falls away, its sheerness dizzying to behold. Its outline, at the northern end of the Chartreuse Regional Nature Park, looks like an unfinished sketch, as if the artist had been interrupted, forced to wrap things up, move on to a more pressing landmark. The story of this mountain is a tale of cruefter upheaval: in 1248, relentless rain caused a landslide of biblical proportions, which destroyed five villages in the valley below. When the dust settled, a changed landscape was left to bear testimony to the disaster.

As is often the case, upheaval seeded resilience — from locals, and from the land itself. In time, the displaced clay and limestone proved fertile ground for growing vines. So much so, in fact, that the foothills of the mountain — an area known as Cluse de Chambéry, to the south of the city — is now home to the highest concentration of vineyards in Savoie Mont Blanc's 4,942-acre wine region.

To discover this tumultuous landscape I'm up early this morning, with experienced local guide Randa. Hiring e-bikes in Chambéry, we head out on one of three Savoie Wine Route itineraries, trails designed to help visitors discover the region's vinicultural scene. Green fields roll out to the horizon, backdropped by the Bauges Regional Nature Park, until small patches of vines start lining the path. We take a pause: Randa points to the Belledonne mountain range looming in front of us, their peaks still white in early summer; on our right, I catch my first glimpse of Mont Granier. After the landslide, its height was reduced by over a half, but its north face remains one of France's highest cliffs.

Our destination is Apremont, meaning 'bitter mountain', one of two white wine appellations sited at the bottom of Mont Granier's slopes. Abymes, to its south, is no less evocative, loosely translating to 'chasms'. Vineyard after vineyard now unfurl around us as we head for a wine-



BEYOND THE VINEYARDS

There are over 30 microbreweries in the region. Brasserie des Cimes, a brewery in Aix-les-Bains, welcomes visitors for tours and tastings. Alternatively, head to Archimait, a cheerful pub in Saint-Alban-Leyssie that serves its house beers on tap.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Vineyards around Château de Bourdeau, near Lake Bourget; wine at Le Moulin de Léré; chef Frédéric Molina; cyclists at the Col du Galibier mountain pass



tasting at Maison Philippe Viallet. A certified 'Savoie Mont Blanc Excellence' company (a title that celebrates 'the best' of the region), it's making strides towards more energy-efficient methods of production, with solar-powered storage buildings and water-management systems.

I try the sparkling Crémant de Savoie, floral and fruity; a smooth Monterminod; a Chignin-Bergeron of golden hues, which foreshadows its richness in flavour; and a Mondeuse Arbin. But the star is the Chateau d'Apremont Savoie, made from Jacquère, the most widely planted of Savoie's 23 wine varieties and one of seven unique to the region. It's fresh and lightly lemony, with just a hint of flint: this white is made with grapes that thrive on the debris of the landslide.

Back on the road, we pedal on south, reaching the hummocky Abymes countryside. The path winds through more vineyards, ivy-adorned stone farmhouses and *sartos* (traditional winegrower's huts). Then, Randa points out a boulder among the vines. Mont Granier is so far in the distance, it's incredible to think parts of it could have reached these fields, but from that point on I notice them in every other backyard — reminders of the uniqueness of these vineyards, the heritage behind the bottles they produce.

After two steep climbs, we stop at the top of a hill, panting, almost at the end of our tour. Below us is the tiny Lake Saint André, another feature of this landscape formed during the landslide. I try to imagine what that night must have been like — a chilling rumble, a cascade of rocks. Then, the effort and patience of the winemakers, who tended to every patch of soil. Today, the lake is still, the trees around it mirrored on its surface. I catch my breath; this view, like everything else here, has been hard-earned, and it's all the better for it.

To explore Cluse de Chambéry, rent e-bikes at Synchro Vélostation in Chambéry. From there, it takes around one hour and a half to cycle to Lake Saint André. Le Saint André restaurant is a good stop for lunch.

IMAGES: LAC SAVOIE MONT BLANC/MONICA DAL MASSO; SAVOIE MONT BLANC-ALBAN PERNET; VIOLAINE GOUILLOUX



FRÉDÉRIC MOLINA
Chef at Le Moulin de Léré

Just like its wines, the region has an enviable natural larder, where chefs like Frédéric Molina use seasonal, local ingredients in creative dishes. In addition to a Michelin star, his countryside inn in Vailly holds a Michelin Green Star for its sustainable efforts. He tells us more

YOU CREATE NEW MENUS EVERY DAY. HOW DOES THAT WORK?

It's very exciting! At the beginning I lacked experience, but over time I started seeing results: you have to believe in yourself and persevere.

When it comes to our menu, we always start with a traditional dish and develop on it. I like the juxtaposition of contemporary cuisine within a traditional space. It also has to be simple, it's all about that.

HOW DID YOU DECIDE TO MAKE MORE ECO-FRIENDLY CHOICES?

It's not something you choose; it's always been part of me, of my education. I grew up in the countryside; we had a garden and animals. We'd only buy a few things and produce the rest ourselves. When I became part of the food industry, I went a lot further with that. I wanted to transform everything, not to go down a path that didn't feel right.

WHAT DOES THE GREEN MICHELIN STAR MEAN TO YOU?

It's not only a recognition of our efforts, but also of our beliefs, of everything we do. Bringing this topic into our job, into our life, was important to us. At the same time, I don't want to preach; we're not part of an industry that's going to save the world. There's still a lot to do, and it's important we remember that.



FIND NEW

Ski areas

Whether you're looking for state-of-the-art infrastructure or quaint, picture-postcard hamlets, Savoie Mont Blanc has it all

Savoie Mont Blanc is known for being home to winter playgrounds like Les Trois Vallées and Portes du Soleil, but with a territory covering more than half of France's ski areas, the region has more to offer. Local resorts range from big to small, from modern to nostalgic, offering a blend of 21st-century comfort and old-time charm to suit every mountain-goer. This winter might be the perfect time to discover them.

RUSTIC GETAWAY: ESPACE DIAMANT

The six villages of Espace Diamant are located not far from Geneva airport, but they're a world away from the glitz of their neighbours. Set among forests and alpine meadows, Crest-Voland Cohennoz, Flumet, Hauteluce, Notre-Dame-de-Bellecombe, Praz-sur-Arly and Les Saisies captivate visitors with the simple appeal of a bygone era. They're surrounded by 119 miles of pistes and offer a host of alternative activities, too, be it husky sledding, hot air ballooning or visiting a local farm to taste delicious cheese. **STAY AT:** Le Toï du Monde, in Flumet. This 1886 inn has been renovated for the 21st century with an aim of being carbon neutral, and its restaurant, with a Michelin Green Star, is working to become self-sufficient. From £74.

OLD MEETS NEW: GALIBIER THABOR

This area on the southern edge of Savoie Mont Blanc links Valloire and Valmeinier in the Maurienne Valley. Little-known on the British ski market, these resorts share a 93-mile ski area and complement each other beautifully: Valmeinier is an easy-on-the-eye, contemporary ski in, ski out resort, built across the hillside from its original rustic heart; Valloire, meanwhile, is a characteristic Savoyard village set around one of the region's most beautiful Baroque churches and a cobbled square that hosts a weekly market. **STAY AT:** Hotel La Setaz, in Valloire. Following renovations to improve energy efficiency, it's become a beautiful four-star hotel with a spa and indoor pool, plus an adjoining 51-apartment residence for self-catering. From £147.



FREE TIME SKI TIME

When it comes to skiing trips, not everyone wants to follow the popular Saturday-to-Saturday template. If you're looking for a more flexible or shorter mountain getaway, even during school holidays, Savoie Mont Blanc's partner tour operators Ski Planet, Travelski and Sunweb can help you create a tailor-made break with the Free Time Ski Time offers. For more information, head to freetimeskitime.com

NEW DISCOVERIES: THE GRAND MASSIF

Some of the resorts in this area need no introduction: old Samoëns and futuristic Flaine have legions of fans. But the 165-mile ski area of Les Carroz, Morillon and Sixt-Fer-à-Cheval is home to other attractive, smaller-scale villages, with easy parking and affordable accommodation. The ski terrain is extensive and varied, and in particular, the 8.7-mile blue run Piste des Cascades, descending from Flaine to Sixt-Fer-à-Cheval past the Sixt-Passy Nature Reserve, is a must. **STAY AT:** RockyPop, in Flaine. This new hotel has fun interiors (think arcade games, table tennis and basketball) that mirror Flaine's family-friendly ethos. Rooms and apartments sleep up to 10 people. From €60 (£50).

SKI WITH A VIEW: LES ALPES DU LÉMAN

In Les Alpes du Léman, meaning 'Alps of Lake Geneva', snow-laden mountains overlook the splendid lake. Within the area sit nine small villages, each clustered around a church, traditional fountains and an abundance of farms producing meats, wines and cheeses (including Abondance, Beaufort and Reblochon de Savoie), all sold locally. There are two Alpine ski areas — Hirmentaz-Les Habères, with 31 miles of pistes, and Roc d'Enfer, with 17 miles of pistes linked to Portes du Soleil — but Nordic skiing is big here, too, with a cross-country centre at Les Moises and Les Mouilles. **STAY AT:** Hotel de l'Union, in Lullin. It's a charming base to enjoy the Col du Feu, a 23-mile Nordic ski trail from Les Moises to Habère-Poches. From €68 (£57).



ESSENTIALS

HOW TO GET THERE:

The region is accessible via train or airplane. New Jet2 flights will link London, Leeds, Bristol, Manchester and Birmingham to Chambéry from December 2021 to mid-April 2022.

WHERE TO EAT

La Cuillère à Ombre. lacuillereaomble.fr
 La Ferme. lesfermiers.com
 La Cheminée. [6870 route du col des Annes, Col des Annes 74450 Le Grand-Bornand](http://6870route.col.des.annes)
 Le Moulin de Lére. moulindele.com
 Le Saint André. restaurant-lesaintandre.com
 Déhooké. dehooké.com
 Auberge du Sougey. [D921, 73610 Saint-Alban-de-Montbel Pinson. restaurant-pinson.fr](http://D921_73610)

WHERE TO SLEEP

Les Rhodos. rhodos.fr
 La Turquoise Egarée. laturquoise-egaree.fr
 Huttopia. huttopia.com
 Le Toï du Monde. letoidumonde.com
 Hotel La Setaz. lvh-vacances.com
 Hotel de l'Union. hoteldelunion.fr
 RockyPop. rockypop.com

WHERE TO DRINK

Brasserie des Cimes. brasserie-des-cimes.com
 Archimalt. archimalt.fr

ACTIVITY PROVIDERS

Espace 3d Parapente. espace3d.fr
 Vertes Sensations. vertes-sensations.com
 Synchro Vélostation. velostation-chambery.fr
 Le Foué. helionaute.com

PLACES AND EVENTS:

Garden of Five Senses. jardin5sens.net
 Hautecombe Abbey. hautecombe.chemin-neuf
 Alpine World Ski Championships 2023, from 6 to 19 February 2023. courchevelmeribel2023.com

IMAGES: SAVOIE MONT BLANC-MARTELET; SAVOIE MONT BLANC-LANSARD; SAVOIE MONT BLANC-WITT

SAVOIE MONT BLANC
FRENCH ALPS

READ MORE ONLINE AT
SAVOIE-MONT-BLANC.COM

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:

Hiking with dogs in Les Saisies resort; off-piste skiing in Les Contamines-Montjoie, with the Mont Blanc massif in the distance; Berthoud, a hearty Savoie cheese dish



Skiing whenever you want
in Savoie Mont Blanc

©Savoie Mont Blanc - Morgan Bodet

LOOKING FOR A WINTER BREAK OUTSIDE THE STANDARD SATURDAY-TO-SATURDAY FORMULA?

In Savoie Mont Blanc, that's easy, even during the school holidays! Check out all the non-standard possibilities on offer and book your next holiday now.

savoie-mont-blanc.com



SAVOIE MONT BLANC

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH:

Ski Planet • Sunweb • Travelski