



TREKKING IN THE PROVENCE - 9 Nights

Where the Alps rise out of the Mediterranean

Description

Provence is a region of south-eastern France on the Mediterranean Sea adjacent to Italy. Its topographical features range from fertile plains in the Rhône valley, marshlands in the Camargue and high mountains in the Haute Provence.

The Maritime Alps mountain range located in the south-western part of the Alps are shared by France and Italy. The foothills of the range stretch all the way down to the Mediterranean Sea, and the highest mountain is Punta Argentera at 10,900 feet. Large parts of the range belong to the Mercantour National Park in France and the Maritime Nature Park in Italy.

The Mercantour Nationalpark created in 1979 is one of seven national parks of France. It consists of a central uninhabited zone and a peripheral zone comprising 28 villages. The typical Mediterranean flora includes oaks, pines, larches and more than 2,000 flowering plants among them an endemic species of the saxifrage. Wildlife is abundant in the park: chamois, marmots, red deer, wild boar, ibex, mouflon (sheep), eagles and buzzards just to name a few.

Itinerary

Day 1 Arrival in Entrevaux D

Upon arrival in Nice take the local train "chemin de fer de Provence" to Entrevaux, a charming fortified town straight out of an old impression. It has hardly changed since Louis XIV had his star architect, Sebastien de Vauban, built it. The train station is only five minutes on foot from the hotel. The group will converge for dinner at 7:00 pm at the hotel.

Train transfer time: 1.5 hours.

Day 2 Entrevaux - Villeplane (4000 feet) B/P/D

After breakfast transfer by minibus to the starting point of today's trek next to the impressive Dalius Gorge, famous for its red stone resulting from the oxidation of iron. Walk on a gentle trail high above the gorge to a vantage point which offers breathtaking views of the canyon hemmed in by sheer walls and the Var River. Keep these unique shapes of nature in mind while continuing on through woods and meadows, to the first destination, "the hamlet of Villeplane". Dinner at the hut.

Transfer time: 1 hour. Walking time: 4 hours. Elevation change: uphill 1400feet.

Day 3 Villeplane - Sauze (4500 feet) B/P/D

Today's trek leads along the foot of Mt. St. Honorat with panoramic views of the Var Valley and the hills and mountains of the Haute Provence in the distance. Trek back in time while passing hamlets with abandoned fields, once the bread basket of a whole region. End the day's trek downhill through a forest ending at the village of Sauze, located on a high plateau with splendid views of the Var Valley and across to the mountain tops. Dinner at the auberge (inn).

Walking time: 5 hours. Elevation change: uphill 2000 feet / downhill 1700 feet.

Day 4 Sauze - Bouchanières (4600 feet) B/P/D

After breakfast start trekking through magnificent larch and oak woods to the valley floor and cross the bridge over the river Var before climbing on a barren ridge up to the century old hamlet of Chateauneuf, and only inhabited by 25 people all year round. In the afternoon follow a winding trail down to a mountain stream and up again to Bouchanière. Our gîte d'étape (mountain inn) is wonderfully located at the top of the tiny village with marvelous views of rounded hills of the Haute Provence. Dinner at the gîte.

Walking time: 6 hours. Elevation change: uphill 2700 feet / downhill 2200 feet.

Day 5 Circular hike to Col de Barels (6000 feet) B/P/D

Again today the trail leads through typical Mediterranean forest before gradually giving way to open terrain. Pass several hamlets with houses mostly in decay and finally reach the Col de Barels. Today's picnic is on a nearby peak with grand views of the Maritime Alps. Descend on a circular path high above a ravine back to Bouchanières. Should you feel too tired after yesterday's long trek, take a day off or just go for a walk in the neighborhood. Dinner at the gîte.

Walking time: 5-6 hours.

Elevation change: 1400 feet.

Day 6 Bouchanières - Péone (4000 feet) B/P/D

Today's goal and certainly one of the absolute highlights of this trek is the "Tête de Méric" (6800 feet). Steadily uphill, first through woods, later in open and rocky terrain, it takes approximately 3 hours to conquer this peak. Savor the extensive sweeping views while eating picnicking. Only 800 feet higher than yesterday, but the surrounding peaks seem to have doubled, as if risen from the Mediterranean Sea overnight. In the afternoon descend on a different trail to the charming village of Péone protected by "the ladies of Péone", a group of rugged needle shaped Dolomite rock. Room and board in the nearby auberge.

Walking time: 6 hours. Elevation change: uphill 2300 feet / downhill 2800 feet.

Day 7 Péone - Estenc (6100 feet) B/P/D

This morning transfer by minibus to the village of Entraunes (4200 feet). A well-kept trail with nice switchbacks ascends to a balcony high above the Var Valley, then follow a gentle path with magnificent views of the surrounding mountains marking the limits of the Mercantour National Park. This is a remote area and is highly unlikely to meet any other trekkers during the day. Cross beautiful larch forests before descending on a winding trail to the hamlet of Estenc, tonight's refuge is located in the upper Var Valley in the midst of lush meadows. Dinner at the refuge.

Walking time: 4.5 hours. Elevation change: uphill 2200 feet / downhill 850 feet.

Day 8 Estenc - Col de la Cayolle (7500 feet) B/P/D

Today's hike combines all the attractive elements of mountain environment, pine and larch forests, barren ravines, high plateaus scattered with huge rocks and mountain peaks. A well-kept trail leads steadily uphill to the Col de la Boucharde (8400 feet). After a picnic continue trekking down the eastern slope on a partly steep trail. The last hour is uphill again to the Refuge de la Cayolle, just below the pass of the same name. Dinner at the refuge.

Walking time: 5 hours. Elevation change: uphill 3300 feet / downhill 1500 feet.

Day 9 Col de la Cayolle - Estenc (6100 feet) B/P/D

The best for last! Once more we trek in this geological battle ground, where the emerging Alps pushed back the sea some 60 million years ago. A winding path leads up to the Cayolle pass (7600 feet). Continue trekking on a high barren plateau past Lake Garrets and along a crest with spectacular views of the Maritime Alps including Mont Pelat, (10,000 feet) the highest of the region. In the afternoon descend from Col de Lausson to Estenc, the same refuge as Day 7.

Walking time: 5-6 hours. Elevation change: uphill 1500 feet / downhill 3300 feet

Day 10: Estenc - Nice B/P

After breakfast follow an undemanding trail along the Var River between towering cliffs and gushing waterfalls to the village of Entraunes. Transfer by minibus to Entrevaux (end of the program). From Entrevaux we suggest you take the afternoon train to Nice and enjoy an evening or two in this lovely city.

Transfer time: 1.5 hours by minibus and 2 hours by train to Nice.

Walking time: 2 hours. Elevation change: downhill 1900 feet.

Inclusive Features:

- 9 nights in selected auberge (inns), hut and refuges
- 9 breakfasts / 9 picnics / 9 dinners
- Welcome and farewell drink
- Extra luggage transportation daily
- Transfers/local transportation per itinerary
- EWT guide throughout
- Local certified trekking guide
- Taxes and service charges

Cost per person based on double occupancy: **USD 2422.00**

No single rooms available throughout program!

Miscellaneous

1. European dates : **1. Group** : Fri June 20 – Sun June 29 2008 (without day of flight back to US) **2. Group** : Fri Sept 5 – Sun Sept 14 2008 (without day of flight back to US)

2. Size of group : 7 – 12 pax
3. Start of program : Entrevaux End of program: Entrevaux
4. Requirements : experienced hiker, used to hike on rocky narrow mountain trails
able to hike between 4 and 6 hours daily (with a daypack)
elevation changes see program
not afraid of heights
5. Luggage : 1) daypack
2) extra luggage will be daily transported to the next destination
3) valuables to be carried during the whole trekking
6. Packing List : including insect repellent, flashlight, towel, linen sleeping bag,
water bottle (up to 2 liters)
7. suggested hotel in Nice : Hotel Durante, www.hotel-durante.fr

8. Individual transfer from the airport in Nice to the starting point of the program f:

- Train from Nice to Entrevaux (“Dignes-les-Bains” is the end of the line)
 departure Nice : 1255 arrival Entrevaux : 1428
 departure Nice : 1715 arrival Entrevaux : 1848

Check timetable : www.trainprovence.com / best is to buy a return ticket (not incl in package price)

Attention : the train from Nice to Dignes is run by “Chemins de Fer de Provence”.
The station in the centre of Nice is appr. 10 min on foot from the “SNCF” train station.

“SNCF” is the national train company.

Instead of catching the train from the centre of Nice :
you can also get by taxi from the airport to the station “**Lingostière** (10 - 15 min)
and from there take the train to Entrevaux.

The train takes about 18 min from the main station in Nice to Lingostière.