



HEDONISTIC HIKING

France and the Maritime Alps - 9 days Over the Alps from Provence to Piedmont

This fabulous itinerary takes us from the South of France to the North of Italy. The tour starts with a visit to the opulent Belle Epoque Villa Ephrussi de Rothschild and its magnificent gardens. We then head inland to explore the stunning Mercantour National Park, a short distance from Nice on the Cote d'Azur. We cross the border between France and Italy to hike in the Maritime Alps, and we stay in the beautiful Stura Valley. We finish in the elegant Piedmontese city of Cuneo, where we try our hand at cooking local specialities. The mountain hiking has dramatic and spectacular views of snow-capped peaks, lakes and streams. There are carpets of wild flowers in June, and we encounter many animals along the way from ibex to marmots, chamois to golden eagles. We discover the rich history of this region on foot, with its remote churches, imposing castles and attractive historic villages.

What's Included?

- **8 nights accommodation** in three different hotels
- **2 experienced and knowledgeable guides** who will look after your every need and bring this stunning area to life
- **All meals** with wines, with the exception of dinner of Night 6 which is at your leisure
- **Cooking class** in the regional capital of **Cuneo**
- **Gourmet picnics** each day with snacks en route
- **Support vehicle**, so you can walk as much or as little of the trail as you please
- **Transport** in two air-conditioned minibuses
- Comprehensive **pre-trip information**
- **Museum visits and tastings** as per the itinerary

Tour Highlights

Fascinating cross-border culture of France and Italy
Visit Villa Ephrussi de Rothschild and Vicoforte, both architectural masterpieces
Fun hands-on cooking class in Cuneo

Accommodation

[La Bonne Auberge](#): A charming hotel, recently renovated, in a lively village in the Mercantour National Park

[Hotel Ligue](#): A welcoming family-run hotel with a wonderful restaurant in a small town in the Val Stura

[Palazzo Lovera](#): A four-star Renaissance palazzo in the historic centre of Cuneo

Itinerary

DAY 1

We meet in the centre of **Nice** at **9.30am** at the Hotel NH Nice, 2-4 Parvis de L'Europe. A short drive takes us to Cap Ferrat where we enjoy a guided visit of the stunning Belle Epoque palace and gardens of [Villa Ephrussi de Rothschild](#). After a leisurely lunch, overlooking the sea, we drive about 1 hr 30 mins north into the Mercantour National Park. We stay in the charming Hotel La Bonne Auberge in the centre of the lively town of **Saint Martin Vesubie**, which will be our base for the next three nights. Dinner in the hotel restaurant.



DAY 2



We drive to the Sanctuary of **La Madone de Fenestre** at 1904m in the Mercantour National Park where our hike starts. We follow a trail walked through the centuries by traders, pilgrims, soldiers and migrants as they crossed from the French coast over to the Po Valley. It climbs up past a beautiful mountain lake before reaching a high pass leading into Italy. We descend by

a different trail via a mountain pass, used by smugglers, affording magnificent views of the Boreon Valley, to return to the Sanctuary. Dinner in a local restaurant. **(10km/6.2miles)**

DAY 3

We drive up a wide valley, carved by glaciers, passing a pretty village to the starting point of our walk. We hike up the Gordolasque valley, following a path alongside the banks of a cascading river. We cross the water a couple of times on wooden bridges and have spectacular views of a small waterfall. We picnic by the edge of Lac de Fous, dwarfed by the surrounding mountain ridges at 3000m, before descending back to the start. **(11km/6.8miles)**



DAY 4



We depart Saint Martin Vesubie after breakfast and drive over the mountains into Italy via the Col de la Lombarde at 2350m. We start our hike mid-morning, departing from Santa Anna di Vinadio, the highest sanctuary in Europe situated just over 2000m. A circular trail climbs on small tracks and former military roads to a mountain pass at 2460m. We pass several pristine alpine lakes before descending to arrive back at the sanctuary. There is no road access today so we picnic en

route. From here a short drive brings us to the Val Stura where we stay in a delightful family-run hotel in the village of Vinadio for two nights. Dinner in the hotel this evening. **(12km/8 miles)**

DAY 5

We head out from the hotel on foot, passing through the formidable fortress walls to climb high up above the town. We pass remote hamlets and enjoy wonderful open views of the Stura valley and the fortified town of Vinadio below. After our picnic we descend back to the town. Later in the day we enjoy a guided visit of the fort which protected the town from the 1800s to the Second World War. Dinner tonight in a local restaurant. **(11.5km/7.2 miles)**



DAY 6



We depart Vinadio after breakfast and a leisurely drive, stopping to visit a couple of important sites, brings us to **Cuneo**, one of the most important regional cities in Piedmont. It enjoys a stunning location in the valley, at the confluence of the Stura di Demonte and Gesso rivers, and has spectacular views to the Alps. We enjoy a fun cooking class of local specialities, followed by a relaxed lunch, where we dine on the fruits of our labour matched to some excellent local wines. After lunch we check in to our

hotel, the Palazzo Lovera, in the centre of the city. There is time in the afternoon for shopping. Later in the day we follow the tradition of an apéritif in an elegant bar with delicious local nibbles, whilst watching the daily *passaggiata*. The rest of the evening is at leisure.

DAY 7

We drive out of the city and head up the Valle Maudagna. Our hike sets out from a charming mountain refuge - to which we return for our lunch. We climb up Monte Mondolè at 2382m. On a clear day the views take in Monviso, the Ligurian coast and even Monte Bianco and Monte Rosa. After lunch we drive to Vicoforte to visit the impressive **Santuario di Vicoforte**, built by Duke Carlo Emanuele of Savoy in the 16th century, which boasts the largest elliptical dome in the world. Dinner in a fabulous restaurant in Cuneo. **(8km/5 miles)**



DAY 8



For our final hike we head to one of the less visited areas of the Maritime Alps National Park, starting out from a quaint village with pretty stone houses. Our trail touches on the **Grande Traversata delle Alpi**, a high mountain trail that unites the whole Alpine arc of Piemonte. We picnic by a beautiful alpine lake and pass by another on our descent. On this day there is no vehicle access at lunch so your guides will hike the picnic in for you. Wonderful final dinner in a renowned restaurant in Cuneo. **(13 km/8 miles)**

DAY 9

We return to central **Turin** for 11am. The drop-off point is Hotel Concord, Via Lagrange, near Porta Nuova train station, and then on to Turin airport for 12 pm.

Walking

Shortest day: **8km/5 miles**

Longest day: **13km/8 miles**

There are 6 days of hiking on this tour. There is a significant amount of ascent and descent on each day's hike (between 500 – 800 metres), so a very good level of fitness is required. These are mountainous regions and on most days we hike at altitudes between 1400m and 2500m. Therefore, it is essential to be prepared for adverse and changeable weather conditions. On five days of this itinerary there is no van access en route at lunchtimes, so both members of staff will accompany the group to provide extra support and to carry the picnic lunch. Sturdy walking boots, with good ankle support, are essential. Walking poles are strongly recommended, especially on steeper sections. We advise you to arrive with all your equipment as opportunities to buy items along the route are limited. To see how we grade the walking we have a [simple comparison](#) of all our tours, taking into account ascents/descents, distances and terrain.

Weather



Although the weather in late spring is generally mild with average temperatures in the low 20s we hike at altitudes between 1400m and 2,500m so it is important to be prepared for sudden changes in temperature and weather conditions.

Useful links to our website

[Nice](#) City Page

[Turin](#) City Page

[Cooking Cuneo](#) Blog Post

[Salt Route](#) Blog Post

[Cuneo](#) Blog Post



See all our [Tour Dates](#) for this and other tours

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