



# France

**Planning an adventurous trip to France? Then you should talk to us...** We offer independent expert advice and the ability to deliver top quality itineraries with the best tour operators that are exceptional value for money. Arranging your travel through The Specialist Travel Consultancy also reduces the time you have to spend researching and planning your trip. And our service is completely free!

Contact us to discuss your travel requirements on **0845 838 7667** or for more information on the service we offer please visit our website: [www.thestc.co.uk](http://www.thestc.co.uk)

**We can arrange:**

- Walking & trekking
- Multi-activity holidays
- Cultural tours
- Ski Touring & Off-piste courses
- Canoe and Kayak trips
- Cycling tours
- Culinary tours

## Facts & Highlights

**Country Name:** The French Republic.

**Area:** 547,030 sq km.

**Population:** 61.2 million.

**Capital:** Paris.

**Language(s):** French.

**Religion(s):** Roman Catholic 90%, Protestants 2%, Jewish 1%, Muslim (primarily North African) 3%, Unaffiliated 4% .

**Currency:** Euro.

**Government:** Parliamentary Republic with directly elected President.

**Electricity:** 220 volts AC, 50Hz.

**Time:** GMT + 1 hours.



**Summit Mount Blanc:** Hone your alpine skills before attempting Western Europe's highest peak.

**Cycling in Provence:** Appreciate this classic French region at its best from a two wheeled vantage point.

**The Tour de Mont Blanc:** This classic long distance foot path is without doubt one of the great walks of Europe.

**Go remote on Corsica's GR20:** One of the roughest and most remote long distance footpaths in Europe, the GR20 is a challenging but highly rewarding undertaking.

**In the footsteps of the Cathars:** Discover the castles and mysterious history of the Cathars on a walking itinerary through southern France.

**Snow-shoeing in the Pyrenees:** Experience the serenity of the mountains on a remote mountain hut based expedition in the French Pyrenees.

There are few schools these days that do not have at least some programme running in France. Whilst the majority of visits can easily be arranged in house, France has a wealth of adventure possibilities that are well within the reach of school parties, but which require a little more expertise and logistical planning. For the purposes of this dossier, we will concentrate on the wilder and more challenging options available to schools, and also some alternative trips that will enable the true France to shine through.

In terms of mountain environs, France has an incredibly diverse array of options to choose from. The Alps are an obvious choice and have options to suit all abilities from gentle day walks to serious trekking and alpine ascents of 4,000m mountains. Alpine climbing courses are also available perhaps prior to a summit attempt on Mont Blanc itself, a tough (due to the altitude), but technically fairly straight forward peak.

In winter many schools automatically head for the pistes, but it's also a time when the mountain areas away from the downhill resorts are quiet and perhaps at their most beautiful. Snow-shoes are the perfect means of transport for those looking for an active alternative to skis. Modern snowshoes are lightweight and it takes just a few minutes to become comfortable in their use. Itineraries are graded much like those for trekking with

easy day walks and tougher longer itineraries for those who want them.

The Alps and also the French Pyrenees offer some of the world's best ski mountaineering. This, also known as ski-touring, combines the thrill of downhill skiing with the remoteness and sense of achievement gained from mountain walking and trekking. It is one of the best ways to appreciate the mountains in winter and makes for a more active alternative to traditional downhill skiing.

While some of the more extreme activities require the skills and expertise of qualified instructors and guides, many options do not. We appreciate many teachers want to lead their own group but would like the necessary route, accommodation and equipment pre planned and arranged for them. This is not a problem and we have a wide range of itineraries from which to choose in this respect including self-guided walks, cycle rides and canoe trips.



On the Tour de Mont Blanc



## Suggested Itineraries

### 7 Days: Ardeche Canoe Expedition

This is an ideal trip for Prep schools looking for a great introduction to development expeditions. A 3 day descent of the spectacular Ardèche gorges is not technically difficult but offers a real sense of adventure and achievement.

At night, the group will camp at the edge of the river in woodland or on beaches. There will be a "camp master" who will be on hand to oversee these arrangements, but the children will be encouraged and expected to take an active role in organising the camp and preparing and cooking the food.

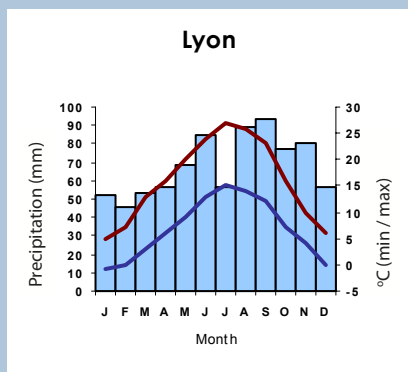
This a longer, more "involved" trip than the usual school camps which occur in the Ardèche and is a truly great adventure.

## Geography & Climate

France is the largest country in Europe and home to some of the continents most spectacular and varied geography, from rolling lush farmlands to vertiginous rock faces and impressive glaciers.

The south east of the country is dominated by the mountains of the western Alps, including Mont Blanc, 4807m, the continents 3rd highest peak (after Mt. Elbrus, 5633m in Georgia and Mt. Ararat, 5165m in Turkey). The country's southern border with Spain offers a different mountain experience with its impressive cirques and high passes; while in the Mediterranean the island of Corsica offers an altogether different experience, with wild and remote trekking that is largely unique to the island.

France can be visited year round, but for adventurous activities such as trekking, mountain biking, climbing and multi-activity trips, summer is the best time to visit. Winter in the Alps provides obvious ski opportunities, but also excellent possibilities for snow-shoeing. Ski-touring on classic routes such as the Haute Route (between Chamonix and Zermatt) is best between March and May when the days are longer.



### 8 Days: The Compostella Trail

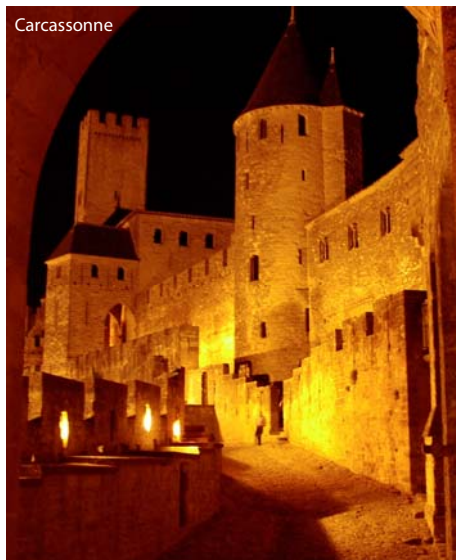
Amongst the foothills of the Pyrenees in medieval times, the locals were well organised in greeting the pilgrims who had made the dangerous crossing from France. Numerous churches and monasteries mark the Compostela Trail and bring to life the unique history of this fascinating route. Explore the sections of the trail between St Jean de Pied de Port (France) and Logroño (Rioja, Spain) and its isolated monasteries and churches that remain inaccessible to the majority of travellers.

### 2 weeks: Tour de Mont Blanc (trekking)

The classic Tour du Mont Blanc links the seven valleys that surround western Europe's highest mountain, offering an unusual variety of spectacular scenery and varied walks in a two-week itinerary. It crosses three borders (from France into Switzerland, then into Italy and back to France), climbs over six passes, traverses beneath huge glaciers, and meanders through beautiful alpine meadows and picture-book villages. Trekkers are rewarded with splendid views of some of the Alps most beautiful peaks; Mont Blanc (4807m), Aiguille Verte (4122m), Les Drus, Grand Jorasses and many more.

### 2 weeks: Corsica's GR20 (trekking)

The famous GR20 traverses the island diagonally following the high granite barrier of mountains that form a natural boundary across Corsica. The trail offers some fantastic scenery, along with an insight into the authentic and traditional working mountain community. You will meet the last of the shepherds that still follow the age-old transhumance lifestyle, where they pass the summer months with their flocks on the high fresh airy pastures and the winter months down by the coast. The trail winds through some incredible mountain terrain, over high ridges, down deep chasms and across granite slopes. This is an exceptional long distance walk, reputed as the best and most challenging in Europe, and an incomparable experience for those who love the outdoors.



## National Holidays

**Jan 1:** New Year's Day.

**Mar / April:** Easter Monday (date varies).

**May 1:** Labour Day.

**May 8:** 1945 Victory Day.

**Spring:** Ascension & Pentecost (dates vary)

**July 14:** Bastille Day.

**Aug 15:** Assumption of Mary.

**Nov 1:** All Saints Day.

**Nov 11:** Remembrance Day.

**Dec 25:** Christmas Day.

## Price Guide

With so many options, prices vary enormously depending on the length and style of trip required, as well as the group size. Week long adventure trips start at around £550 per person including flights, depending on type of activity, accommodation and whether or not an external leader is required.

## Regulations & Red Tape

A full passport or valid photo ID is required for travel to France. British passport holders do not require a visa.

## Useful Addresses

**French Government Tourist Office:**

178 Piccadilly, London W1J 9AL.

Tel: (09068) 244 123 (information line; calls cost 60p per minute)

Web: [www.franceguide.com](http://www.franceguide.com)

## More Information

To discuss the adventure possibilities that France offers in greater detail and receive free independent advice on potential tour operators, please contact:

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