

**HIDDEN FRANCE ACTIVE TOUR.  
GEMS OF THE HIGHER SOUTHERN FRENCH ALPS.  
30 MAY – 9 JUNE 2024 & 29 MAY – 8 JUNE 2025 (11 DAYS)**



**TOUR PRICE: £3,350**

**Single Supplement: £410**

**Maximum 12 members per tour**

**NO PRICE  
INCREASE  
FOR 2025**

**TOUR PRICE INCLUDES:**

**TRANSPORT**

FLIGHTS from and to the UK.  
MINI BUS TRAVEL for the whole tour,  
pick up from and to Lyon airport.  
Plus GRATUITIES to Driver/Guide.

**EN-SUITE ACCOMMODATION**

2 nights at Hotel Terminus.  
2 nights at Hotel Edelweiss.  
1 night at Hotel de la Mairie.  
3 nights at Hotel Refuge des Sources.  
2 nights at Hotel Carnot.

**FULL BOARD**

Lunch Day 1 to Breakfast on Day 11.  
2 course lunches or gourmet picnic with tea/  
coffee, includes wine, beer or soft drink.  
3 course dinners with tea/coffee, including wine,  
beer or soft drink.

**ALL EXCURSIONS AND ENTRANCE FEES**

Day 1 - Arrival at Lyon Airport Transfer to Grenoble,  
optional visits and excursions depending on arrival  
time.  
Day 2 - Grenoble city tour, plus Bastille aerial cable  
cars. Visit to Dauphiné Museum.  
Day 3 - Entrance to Château de Vizille and French  
Revolution Museum.  
Day 4 - Tour of Briançon town and UNESCO  
Vauban fortifications.  
Day 5 - Drive to Izoard Mountain Pass, visit Village  
of Saint Véran, and Mont Dauphin UNESCO Vauban  
fortification.  
Day 6 - Excursion around the lake of Serre Ponçon,  
Ubaye Valley and  
Visit Boscodon Abbey.  
Day 7 - Excursion around the Verdon Canyon.  
Moustier-Sainte-Marie and its pottery workshops..  
Day 8 - Visit to an Olive Oil Mill, and the Lavender  
Heritage Centre.  
Day 9 - The Durance Valley, Citadelle and Museum.  
Day 10 - Drive to Roanne Valley, wine tasting in  
Saillans Cave, Raspail.  
Day 11 - Subject to flight times, you have several  
options: Scenic drive across the Vercors and the  
Bourne Canyon with additional visits.



*Jóna Tours*



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Jóna Sparey has been organising and personally conducting tours to Iceland and around the world for 39 years, with every aspect of each holiday carefully planned. 57% of members now return for more adventures.

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30 MAY – 9 JUNE 2024 & 29 MAY – 8 JUNE 2025 (11 DAYS)**



Be prepared to be captivated by the grand scale of the High Alps, with their rugged and awe-inspiring mountain chains, sheer slopes covered with deep pine forests, glacier-covered peaks, creating majestic waterfalls and lively streams. This programme invites you to discover a lesser-known part of the French Alps, half-ways between the Mont Blanc and the Mediterranean Sea, starting from Grenoble, largest city of the alpine chain, and travelling on steep roads to Briançon, one of the highest towns in Europe, on the border with Italy. Traversing renowned mountain passes like the Izoard, our itinerary will venture into secluded valleys high in the sky, reaching up to the highest alpine village of Saint Véran, situated at just under 7000 feet altitude.. From there into the mountainous parts of Provence, travelling along the Verdon, the deepest and longest canyon in Europe; a truly humbling experience.

The tour also includes many cultural visits, including the castle of Vizille, birthplace of the French Revolution, the Vauban Citadels listed as World Heritage Sites, and the Geopark of Digne. Enjoy visits of lavender distilleries and traditional olive oil mills, in the very heart of the historical Provence, around the turquoise waters of Lac Sainte Croix. The tour finishes in the Diois and Baronnies, two remote and very authentic parts of the outer mountain chains known as the pre-Alps. This is a tour of discovery which involves full days on the road, but also some amount of walking, on short paths and around scenic villages and towns. Be prepared for an active and dynamic tour!

or the Castle built by the former barons of Mévouillon. Upon entering the Diois region, you will have the opportunity to see the Claps de la Drôme, a monumental landslide that cascaded down an entire mountainside. Your hotel this evening is in the small town of Die, at the foothill of the Vercors Mountain by the Drôme River.

Half board in Die 2\* Hôtel Le Carnot (subject to availability when you confirm) for 1/2 nights.

## DAY 10 - THE DIOIS AND ITS WINES

After breakfast we will explore the ancient city of Die, formerly the capital of the Voconces, a Gaulish Confederation that maintained control over their territory within the Roman Empire. Later it became the capital of the influential Count-Bishops during the Middle-Ages. The itinerary includes the Gallo-Roman Ramparts, built in the 3rd century, the Cathedral, the medieval Gates of Saint Marcel, and the listed mosaic of the Four Rivers. After your tour, you will take to the surrounding hills by scenic roads up to the Roanne Country, and have lunch in the village of Pennes-le-Sec. This valley is one of the most isolated valleys in the region, an area rich in wildlife, from delicate orchids to many aromatic herbs, like thyme, honeysuckle, rosemary, savory and clematis. It's also the habitat of wolf packs and various species of vultures. As you drive down into the gorges, the road becomes increasingly spectacular passing by the hilltop village of Saint Benoit. As you reenter the main Drôme River Valley you will come across numerous vineyards, planted with Clairette and Muscat grapes destined for the production of AOC Clairette de Die: a naturally fruity and sparkling white wine. Close to the village of Saillans you will have the opportunity to visit the Cave Raspail, a local wine producer enthusiastic about sharing his knowledge and passion, complete with a tasting! Back to your hotel for the last night of the tour.

Half board in Die 2\* Hôtel Le Carnot (subject to availability when you confirm) for 2/2 nights.

## DAY 11 - THE VERCORS - GRENOBLE - LYON AIRPORT

On your last day, after breakfast and check-out, the programme will be tailored to your flight times. Your tour guide David will ensure you make the most of your last hours in the Southern Alps, offering additional visits and optional scenic routes. If time permits, a journey over the Vercors Mountain and its Nature Reserve, will include stops at various viewpoints, concluding with a return to Grenoble and Lyon Airport.

At the airport, David will assist you with your luggage check-in before bidding you farewell.



# Hidden France Active Tour Gems of the Higher Southern French Alps Itinerary 30 May - 9 June 2024 & 29 May - 8 June 2025



## DAY 1 - LYON AIRPORT - GRENOBLE, CAPITAL OF THE FRENCH ALPS

David, your host and tour guide will welcome everyone on their arrival at Lyon Airport.

Depending on your arrival time you will have several options: a direct transfer to your hotel or the opportunity for a few extra visits with detours along the way. Your final destination today is Grenoble, the capital city of the Alps. Your centrally located hotel for the night provides easy access for you to step out and experience the vibrant atmosphere of this renowned university city, nestled amid the mountain ranges of the Chartreuse, the Vercors and the Belledonne. Dinner at the hotel.

Half board in the 3\* Hôtel Terminus (subject to availability when you confirm) for 1/2 nights

## DAY 2 - GRENOBLE AND SURROUNDING AREA

After a continental breakfast, your tour guide will invite you on a walking tour of Grenoble city centre. Along the banks of the River Isère, you'll have the opportunity to explore Grenoble's oldest district around the former Parliament Buildings, harking back to the time when Grenoble served as the capital of the Dauphiné, a kingdom that extended from the Rhône Valley to the High Alps. From there you will board the city's most renowned feature, a cable car, soaring high above the river to reach the summit of a rock promontory and its Citadelle fort. The views extend over the entire Grenoble region and its mountain peaks. After enjoying the scenery, you will take a stroll to a panoramic restaurant for your lunch. After lunch a visit to the nearby Dauphiné Museum and a better understanding of the history, geography and traditions of this mountainous country. The rest of the afternoon is up to you: free time in the city until dinner time, or an excursion on the steep and winding road to Fort Saint Eynard,

majestically sitting on the Chartreuse Mountain. The fort is a reminder that the Alpine passes and valleys have always been highly disputed between France and its neighbours: Savoy, Italy, Switzerland and Austria.

Half board in the 3\* Hôtel Terminus (subject to availability when you confirm) for 2/2 nights.

### **DAY 3 – GRENOBLE – VIZILLE – ROMANCHE VALLEY – LA GRAVE – BRIANCON**

Hotel breakfast before checking out and heading for the Lautaret Pass and Briançon. Your first visit of the day, just south of Grenoble, will be in Vizille, to admire one of the most historic castles of the Alps and its museum of the French Revolution. The call to overthrow the monarchy and establish a new political order in France was taken here, on the 21 of July 1788, in Vizille Castle. The former Lesdiguières family estate built in 1593, with its gardens and mountain views, is home to a comprehensive exhibition which will deepen your understanding of the French Republic and its fundamentals: freedom, equality and fraternity. Lunch in Vizille before taking to the Romanche Alpine Valley and the Lautaret Pass, surrounded by glacier-covered peaks, such as La Meije above 13 000 feet (3984 metres), high up in the Oisans. Stops along the way will provide opportunities to appreciate the views, such as the Alpine Garden of the Lautaret. Check-in at your hotel located in Briançon, the highest town in the Alps.

Half board in Briançon 3\* Edelweiss (subject to availability when you confirm) for 1/2 nights.

### **DAY 4 – BRIANCON & THE VAUBAN CITY – THE CLAREE VALLEY AND DETOUR BY ITALY**

After your hotel breakfast, your guide will lead you to discover the rich heritage of the old town, sitting on a rocky promontory at an altitude of 4350 feet known as “Cité Vauban” in honour of the renowned military architect of the 17th century. Although a strategic staging point during the Roman Period, it became a frontier town from the 11th century on, within the Dauphiné kingdom. From the 17th century it was designed as a major military town next to the Italian border. Its impressive fortifications are classified by the UNESCO World Heritage Sites as part of the Vauban defence systems. You will have the chance to explore Saint Nicolas’ Church, the 14th century Cordeliers Church, the ancient narrow, steep streets adorned with numerous sundials on old houses, the 1700’s-built Pont d’Asfeld bridge high above the Durance River, and if your feet are up for it the towering Castle Fort. Lunch will be enjoyed in the old town, and the afternoon dedicated to the crossing of the Italian border, at the Montgenèvre Pass. If the weather allows we will return to France via Bardonnechia and scenic Vallée de la Clarée.

Half board in Briançon 3\* Edelweiss (subject to availability when you confirm) for 2/2 nights.

### **DAY 5 – THE QUEYRAS AND SAINT VERAN, HIGHEST VILLAGE IN THE ALPS**

Breakfast in the hotel before checking-out and heading for a day in the Queyras district. Subject to the unpredictable high alpine weather, this morning’s goal is the Col d’Izoard, one of the highest mountain passes in the Southern Alps and regularly included in the Tour de France route. The twisted road was opened in the 1890’s, with a 5% to 8% gradient and climbs to a height of 7743 feet (2360 metres). Needless to say, the panoramas along the way are jaw-dropping, and the mountain wilderness can only be described as captivating. Beyond the Izoard Pass you will enter the Queyras district, a vast expanse of the Southern Alps which is preserved within a Natural Park, with human activity limited to just over 2000 people. The itinerary includes several noteworthy stops, including Château-Queyras with its 13th century castle perched like an eagle’s nest, and the ancient village of Saint Véran dating back to the 6th century. Saint Véran, holds the distinction of being the highest commune in Europe, situated at an altitude of 6700 feet (2050 meters). Lunch will be enjoyed in Saint Véran before descending to the Durance valley, passing through the deep Gorges of the Guil, and making a stop in Mont Dauphin, a historically significant star-shaped fortified village. Upon reaching Embrun, check-in to your hotel and time to walk around the old quarters to admire its many ancient buildings.

Half board in Embrun 3\* Hôtel de la Mairie (subject to availability when you confirm) for 1 night

### **DAY 6 – EMBRUN – LAKE OF SERRE PONÇON – UBAYE – BES VALLEY – DIGNE LES BAINS**

Breakfast and check-out from your hotel in Embrun to explore the shores of Serre Ponçon and the Ubaye District. You will start the day with a visit to one of the most influential monastic sites in the Southern

Alps: the Abbaye de Boscodon, nestled in a serene meadow at the foot of the Morgon Mountain. Established in the 12th century the abbey still shelters a religious community, dedicated to the care of the well-preserved Romanesque buildings. The itinerary will bring you from there to the shores of Lake Serre Ponçon, created from a dam built in the 1950’s. Covering 580 square miles the lake offers stunning views, especially from the perched village of Sauze-du-Lac (a stop on the tour). A leisurely walk reveals the famous Demoiselles Coiffées, a unique natural feature in the Alps. As you enter the Ubaye Valley, you step into the former Kingdom of Provence, nestled deep in the Southern Alps. Barcelonnette, its small capital town, reveals surprisingly large houses - a testament to the wealth accumulated by mountain farmers who emigrated to Mexico and returned prosperous. Lunch in Barcelonnette, before heading south down the Bès Valley. Stops along the way will include the picturesque Seyne village, the Saut de la Pie waterfall, the quaint canyons of Barles and Perouré, and the fossil-rich slab of the Ammonites. If time permits, a brief visit to the Geopark will show how and why the Digne area is renowned for its rocks and minerals.

Half board in Digne 3\* Hôtel Refuge des Sources (subject to availability) for 1/3 nights.

### **DAY 7 – CANYON OF THE VERDON**

Breakfast in the hotel before a full day exploring the wonders of the Verdon Canyon: the longest and deepest canyon in Europe. Your morning will commence with a scenic drive to the small and colourful town of Castellane, with its striking medieval sites. Among them is the old 15th century bridge that spans the Verdon River, overshadowed by the imposing Serre du Roc. This massive rock once hosted an ancient settlement and temple, later replaced by a Christian church in the 12th century. From there you will be entering the deep Verdon Valley, cutting across wild limestone mountains. Lunch in one of the small villages dotted along the way, before you start the scenic drive of the “Crêtes” or ridges. The landscape will become dramatic as you climb the bends under towering cliffs to the highest point of the road. The canyon runs for more than 15 miles and can be as deep as 2300 feet, so needless to say the viewing points are breathtaking and the scenery truly spectacular. The Verdon River flows out of the canyon and into the Sainte Croix Lake, and the road leads to the charming village of Moustiers-Sainte-Marie. This medieval village is nestled in between great rocks and cliffs making it one of the most picturesque places in the area. A little free time and visit to a ceramic workshop, before heading back for the town of Digne and your hotel.

Half board in Digne 3\* Hôtel Refuge des Sources (subject to availability) for 2/3 nights.

### **DAY 8 – LAC DE SAINTE CROIX – PLATEAU DE VALENSOLE**

After breakfast, this will be a day to enjoy the Valensole area and the turquoise-coloured lake of Sainte Croix, the quintessence of rural Provence landscape. First visit will be in the Durance Valley where olive trees have grown for over two thousand years producing one of the most acclaimed olive oils in Southern France. In the village of Les Mées a working mill demonstrates how the oil is produced. The road ascends to the elevated plateau of Valensole, covered by lavender fields and dotted with traditional Mediterranean-style villages. A stop at Riez to walk its charming streets and learn about its very ancient heritage. Further on you will reach the village of Sainte Croix du Verdon, which offers panoramic views over the great lake of Sainte Croix. Lunch in the village and a visit to the Maison du Lavandin to learn more about the lavender tradition, farming and aromatherapy products. In the afternoon your itinerary will take you to explore more of the natural beauty surrounding the lake, stopping in the village of Aiguines and its castle, a detour to marvel once more at the view over the Verdon Canyon, and back through Moustiers to Digne and your hotel.

Half board in Digne 3\* Hôtel Refuge des Sources (subject to availability) for 3/3 nights.

### **DAY 9 – DURANCE VALLEY – SISTERON – THE BARONNIES – DRÔME VALLEY**

Following breakfast and check-out we leave the Digne area. Today you will travel upstream along the Durance River to visit the picturesque town of Sisteron. Set in a natural and narrow pass between staggering rocky hills, the town has served as a fortified staging post and gateway along this ancient route across the Southern Alps. You will explore the Cathedral, walk around its impressive fortress, and visit the Gallo-Roman Museum. Lunch in Sisteron before we dedicate the afternoon to the rugged landscape of the Baronnies. This area is truly off the beaten track, with its maze of valleys and gorges cutting through jagged mountains, and where the forefathers of the very few inhabitants lived in hilltop villages. The itinerary will slowly make its way along winding roads, stopping in timeless villages such as Orpierre, Rosans, La Charce, and seeing the remains of historical sites, such as the Priory of Saint André