

UPPER RHINE valley

ALSACE () REGION BASEL + BLACK FOREST () PALATINATE



The Alsace: The French Touch on the Rhine

The landscape of the Alsace evokes images of paradise. For nature lovers and outdoor activists there can be no greater pleasure than exploring this varied stretch of land which lies between the Rhine and the Vosges Mountains. Thankfully the boundaries once separating the countries are nowadays completely abolished. The eventful history of the region has, however, considerably contributed to shaping the cultural diversity of this lovely part of the *Upper Rhine Valley*. The art of living and the tradition are expressed in two languages - or, to be precise, three, as the Alsatians have developed their own language, a motley dialect consisting of French and German expressions. It is the smallest of the many French regions and inhabited by some 1.8 million people in an area stretching from Germany's southern Palatinate in the north to Switzerland in the south. Everything is small, diverse and close together in the Alsace - it doesn't get more European than this.



Wine Valley and treats for gourmets

This "beautiful garden", as the French Sun King Louis XIV once called the Alsace, is blessed with fertile soil and a mild, sunny climate - the best prerequisites for the world-famous Alsatian wine which so characterises the landscape of the valley - and which by rights should therefore be known as the Upper Wine Valley.



The *Alsatian Wine Route*, which will celebrate its sixtieth anniversary in 2013, is 170 kilometres long and leads from Marlenheim in the north to Thann in the south, crossing green landscapes, passing castles, palaces and picturesque villages. Colmar is recognised as the capital of the Alsatian wines, other popular wine villages are Guebwiller, Riquewihr, Kaysersberg, Ribeauvillé and Eguisheim. Each and every village has at least one Winstub and you can try the wines almost anywhere. Be it Riesling, Pinot, Sylvaner or Gewurztraminer, everyone is certain to find his or her favourite wine among the typical varieties. Most of them are dry wines with an aromatic and intense

character. And the finest foods to complement these wines can be found here as well. The Alsatian cuisine is known as a more hearty version of the French cuisine - one immediately thinks of *choucroute*, *flammekueche* or *baeckoffe* - but connoisseurs of fine cuisine will easily discover a paradise not only in one of the many award-winning restaurants. Opportunities to peek under the pot lids of the chefs are often offered in cooking courses for those wanting to know more.

The Alsations don't miss a chance to celebrate their wine. The houses and courtyards are imaginatively and richly decorated during the wine festivals. Traditional costumes are donned and customs carefully maintained. A lot of information on the Alsatian peasant culture can be found in the *Ecomusée*, the largest open air museum in France. The *Maison du Fromage* in Gunsbach offers wonderful - and tasty - insights into the making of the local speciality Munster cheese.



A nature paradise

The Alsations have worked out a number of other thematic routes for their guests beside the Wine Route: gourmet trails such as the *Route de la Choucroute* (Sauerkraut Route), the *Routes de la Carpe Frite* (Fried Carp Routes) or the *Route du Fromage* (Cheese Route). The *Flower Route* and the *Route of the Picturesque Villages* are ideal for excursions. New sights are waiting to be discovered behind every corner. Almost all of the villages impress through their well-preserved centres, the timber-frame houses with colourful tiled roofs and fountains, and from springtime to autumn with at least one stork - the true symbol of the Alsace - perched high up on a roof in its nest. The *Route Verte* (Green Route) leads all the way across the Rhine to the Black Forest. More than 50 years ago it was the first recognisable manifestation of the attempt to connect the regions of the Upper Rhine Valley - in the mean time an established fact that is nowadays taken for granted.



But why go everywhere just by car? The region is criss-crossed with bicycle and hiking trails, horse riding or even boat excursions offer a wide variety of possibilities ranging from a stroll among the vineyards to exploring the jungle-like alluvial forests of the Rhine with its *Rhinau Island* or the *Petite Camargue*. The foothills of the Vosges Mountains are covered in enchanted forests. The *Mont St. Odile* with its remains of Gallo-Roman fortifications is indeed considered by some to be a magical place. All kinds of challenges for cyclists and winter sports enthusiasts can be found in the high-altitude regions of the Vosges such as the *Grand Ballon*, the plains of the *Champ du Feu* or the mountain pass *Colle de la Schlucht*.



Romantic castles and modernism

If so much nature should rekindle the desire for some culture the traveller can make his or her way into bustling cities such as Strasbourg, Colmar or Mulhouse. There are more than 250 museums in the Alsace. An absolute must for art enthusiasts: the Musée d'Unterlinden in Colmar with its Isenheim Altarpiece and the Museum for Modern and Contemporary Art in Strasbourg. Close by the little town of Erstein the great names in classic modernist art can be found hanging in the Musée Würth France Erstein: Picasso, Magritte, Mirò...



The Alsace is the region with the highest density of castles and palaces in all of Europe - which comes as no wonder if one considers its eventful history. The most famous castle and one of the most visited monuments in France is the Haut-Koenigsborug, from which one has a spectacular view over the entire Rhine Valley to the Black Forest on the other side. In the seventeenth century King Louis XIV ordered his master builder Vauban to secure the newly won territories with fortified towns. One such ideal town can be seen by visiting the completely preserved UNESCO World Heritage Site of *Neuf-Brisach*. The bloody side of European history can still be recognised in the battlefields of World War I and the fortifications of the *Maginot Line* dating from World War II. The many Romanesque churches and monasteries, the Gothic cathedrals and magnificent Renaissance and Baroque houses on the other hand offer insights into European (art) history. Here one can experience Europe in a nutshell.

Today the Alsace is anything but isolated: it is easily accessible through the EuroAirport Basel-Mulhouse-Freiburg, which lies close to the Swiss border, or by TGV bullet train via Paris or the south of France. The times of bitter territorial battles are long a thing of the past, with Strasbourg as the "Capital of Europe" the Alsace has in the meantime become a true symbol of European unity.





The Upper Rhine Valley

The beautiful Upper Rhine Valley is located in the heart of Europe, where the Rhine connects France, Germany and Switzerland. With an area of more than 21.000 km² the region is almost as large as Tuscany, and has the same centuries-old tradition of attracting tourists who love art, culture and fine cuisine. The Upper Rhine Valley is a compact region of versatile scenery and culturally of extraordinary diversity with many charming towns and villages on both sides of the Rhine. The economically prosperous region with its six million inhabitants is within easy reach and offers its visitors a lot of everything.

It never takes more than ten minutes to get from one highlight to another. Famous for its short and mild winters and pleasing summer temperatures from April to October, the region is one of the most beautiful and fertile landscapes in Europe: The markets, vineyards and sophisticated restaurants as good as gold for gourmets; the Gothic cathedrals in Freiburg, Basel and Strasbourg, medieval castles and the countless museums with art collections ranging through history make it a MUST for art connoisseurs; the unique landscape is a paradise for golfers, hikers and ramblers, swimmers, bikers and outdoor fans. Some eighteen million overnight stays each year - of which many guests are returning visitors - confirm the region's outstanding appeal to tourism.

For further detailed information:

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