



Maritime Alps Inn to Inn

A Trek from the Mountains to the Sea

September 9-17, 2010

Plan your arrival in Nice, France for September 8

Plan your departure from Nice, France for September 18

Hike across the Alps on this "inn-to-inn" trek starting in the Alpi Marittime Nature Reserve in Italy and finishing at the Mediterranean Sea near the lovely town of Menton on the French Riviera. On your way from the mountains to the sea (on the long distance route known in France as the *Route du Sel* or the *Panoramique du Mercantour*), you'll explore classic, high alpine landscapes, Bronze Age petroglyphs, and the lovely villages and hamlets of the Roya Valley many boasting exquisite painted chapels--hidden gems of the "Azure Alps," a largely unknown and beautiful mountain region.

Arrival Day

Overnight in Vernante

Dinner included

Arrive in Nice, France and travel via the Roya Valley to the small Italian town of Vernante at the foot of the Alps where you'll overnight in a family-run hotel. Vernante was the home of Attilio Mussino, the original illustrator of Pinocchio. Hence, Pinocchio murals based on Mussino's illustrations decorate the walls of many buildings in Vernante.

Day 1

Overnight in Vernante

Breakfast, lunch & dinner included

Recover from jet lag and test your skills on a hike in the high Alps from the tiny town of Palanfre to the base of Monte Frisson, nicknamed Piccolo Cervino (the "little Matterhorn"). A more difficult route climbs to the high pass Passo della Mena overlooking the remote frontier area between Italy and France

Day 2

Overnight in Casterino

Breakfast, lunch & dinner included

Begin your "mountains to the sea" trek by hiking from Italy across the Alps to France via the Colle di Sabbione. Today's hike is rugged and challenging but the reward for the effort is some of the wildest scenery the Alps have to offer. Herds of chamois and ibex are often encountered on this hike. To top things off, you'll also enjoy an excellent measure of solitude which is often hard to come by in Europe's mountains. End the day at a mountain inn in the small French mountain settlement of Casterino.

Day 3

Overnight in Casterino

Breakfast, lunch & dinner included

Continue your journey by trekking through the high valleys surrounding Mont Bego. This remote corner of the Alps is renowned for its innumerable Bronze Age petroglyphs, one of the largest concentrations of rock art anywhere in the Alps. Ascend into the picturesque alpine basin of Fontanalbe studded with tarns and groves of larch trees, as well as flowers, larch trees, and lakes. Because of the geography of this area, you'll be able to return to Casterino for a second night after completing today's trek.

Day 4

Overnight in La Brigue

Breakfast & dinner included

From Les Mesches, descend on foot along the Torrent de Bieugne to the village of St. Dalmas de Tende and continue further to the village of La Brigue in the Roya Valley. Alternatively, you can shuttle by vehicle to La

Brigue. The rest of the day is at your leisure. Immerse yourself in the local "scene" of this small, medieval village enjoying its painted chapels, decorative door lintels and wall niches, small shops, and cafés. The entire village of La Brigue has been classified as an historic monument. Overnight at an auberge in La Brigue.

Day 5

Overnight in Saorge

Breakfast, lunch & dinner included

Continue your trek, walking from the high Alps to the historic and picturesque village of Saorge, a classic *village empilé* ("stacked village") whose tiers of houses appear stacked one on top of the other. Along the way, hike past mountain hamlets like Granile and Bergue. Here, clusters of centuries-old stone buildings are perched on steep slopes overlooking the Roya valley. Descend to the Roya River before making a final ascent to Saorge and the end of this day's trek.

Day 6

Overnight in Breil-sur-Roya

Breakfast & lunch included

Trek to from Saorge to Breil-sur-Roya following the path called the "Sentier Valléen." Today, you'll note a subtle shift in the character of the vegetation indicating that you are leaving the high Alps and progressing toward the sea. Walk along fragrant, herb lined paths (rosemary and sage) past olive groves to arrive at your stopping point in the historic riverside village of Breil sur Roya ("Breil on the Roya River"). Dinner is on your own at one of the restaurants in the village.

Day 7

Overnight in Breil-sur-Roya

Breakfast included

Enjoy this rest day at Breil. Linger at a local café, and absorb the ambience of small town France. Or, enjoy an optional loop hike past abandoned farms and terraces in the picturesque Vallon de Carleva. Lunch and dinner are on your own today.

Day 8

Overnight in Sospel

Breakfast & lunch included

Resume your trek to the sea by departing Breil-sur-Roya and climbing once again into the mountains to reach spectacularly-sited Piène Haute, a charming stone village perched on a rocky spine overhanging the Roya Valley. Continue to Sospel, a medieval French town where you'll overnight. Dinner is on your own at your choice of restaurants in Sospel.

Day 9

Overnight in Menton

Breakfast, lunch & dinner included

Begin the final leg of your trek to the sea! This grand finale hike will lead you through a fairly remote and scenic section of the *arrière pays* (the hilly country behind the French Riviera). Your trek ends at the beach in Menton where you can dip your boots in the salty sea and celebrate your accomplishment. Overnight in Menton and enjoy a fine multi-course farewell dinner. Your breakfast tomorrow morning as well as a transfer from Menton to the Nice Airport is included in the trip price.

Other Details about this Trip

Trip Dates: September 9-17, 2010

Price: \$3,150 (minimum 7 persons); \$3,595 (minimum 4 persons)

Single Room for entire trip: \$230. Single accommodations are subject to availability and may be limited.

Meeting Point: Nice, France on September 8. Please plan your arrival in Nice for no later than 3:00 PM on September 8.

Departure Point: Nice, France. Please plan your departure from Nice for no earlier than 10:30 AM on September 18.

Accommodations: Ten nights in small hotels/inns. Ten breakfasts, seven lunches, and eight dinners are included. Vehicle support is provided throughout the trip for luggage (and passenger) transfers, as needed. One or two guides accompany the group on each day's trek depending on daily circumstances.