

Trekking the GR5 from Geneva to the Mediterranean

Part II: 1–17 September 2017. Trip #1730

Magnifique! Spectacular trans-alpine  
trek through southern France

Revision 5 on 31 May 2016



**ADVENTURE TRAVEL**  
VOLUNTEER-LED EXCURSIONS WORLDWIDE

# Overview

*David May, noted authority on the GR5, describes the trail as “The GR5, also known as a Grand Traverse of the Alps, goes from Lake Geneva to the Mediterranean. The alpine portion of the GR5 long distance European hiking trail is without a doubt one of the most beautiful and personally rewarding multi-day hiking experiences in the world... the sheer beauty of Alpine slopes and pastures, flanked by some snow-covered mountains and glaciers, and punctuated by the the charm of flower-filled French villages, served up with good food of French hotels and inns, and the camaraderie of French communal lodgings—refuges and gîtes d’étape, (and a few Italian and Swiss ones)—all this with the variety that comes from changing elevations and diminishing rainfall as you move from the lush and green north to the sparse and brown south and to the sub-tropical Mediterranean.”*

## Trip in Two Parts Over Two Years

The GR5 is part of the French grand randonnées (GR) network of routes. It actually starts on the North Sea coast at the Hook of Holland and heads southwards through Belgium and France to end in Nice. Our itinerary focuses on the Alpine region of the route which can measure anything from 645–725km (400–450 miles), and depending on how walkers structure their route, in excess of 40,000m (131,235 feet) could be climbed. Within this region, the GR5 sometimes splits, with alternative options such as the GR55, GR52, GR5B, GR5C, & GR5D.

It generally takes 6–8 weeks to cross from Lake Geneva to Nice. To manage the hike within the typically available vacation time of two weeks, we plan to section hike the trail over two years for two weeks each: 2016 from Lake Geneva to Modane, and 2017 from Larche to the Mediterranean.

## Trip Itinerary

Our trek will follow route sections laid out in the guidebook “[The GR5 Trail](#), The French Alps: Geneva to the Mediterranean” by Paddy Dillon, published by the Cicerone Press. We will meet in Nice, take a bus to Larche, start our hiking adventure, split midway from GR5 unto more scenic GR52, & end 14 days later in Menton on the Mediterranean.

GR52 passes through a splendidly rugged part of the Parc National du Mercantour, where steep and rocky mountains are flanked by slopes of huge boulders. Wildlife abounds, and large animals such as bouquetin and chamois will often tolerate close approaches. There are wolves in the area too, though these are seldom seen, being extremely shy of human contact after centuries of persecution. One of the most remarkable places along the GR52 is the Vallée des Merveilles, where Bronze Age artists hammered thousands of rock carvings, or petroglyphs, onto glacially polished rock faces.

To ease our adjustment to European time we will spend the first evening in Nice. Aside from the travel days of arrival & departure, we will hike every day with a typical altitude gain of 900m (3,000 feet) and a distance covered of 16km (10 miles). We will be outdoors 8 hours per day of which 6 hours are hiking & the balance for lunch, taking pictures, & smelling the fresh air.

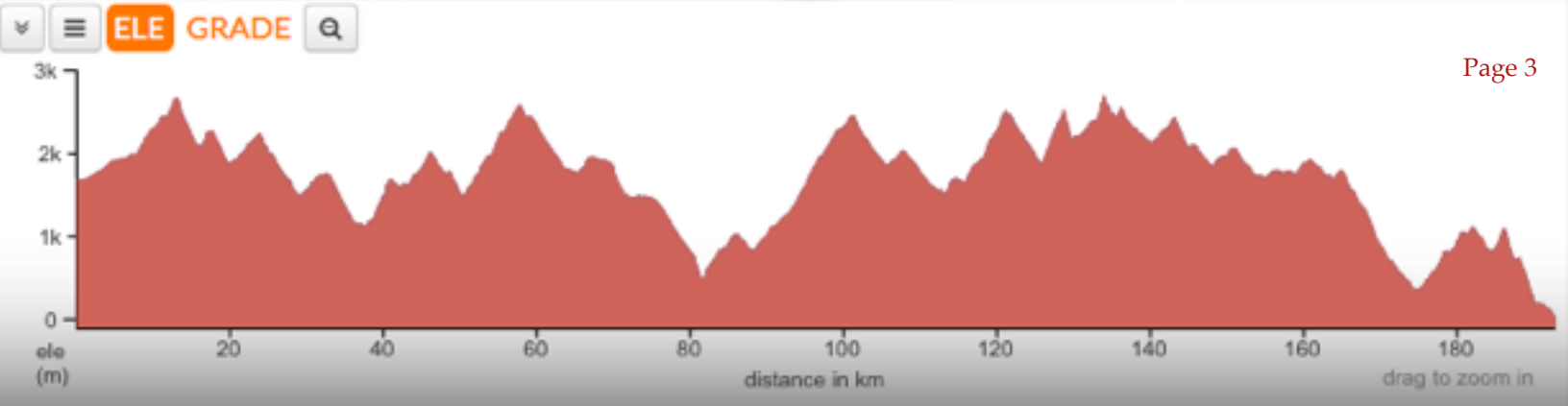
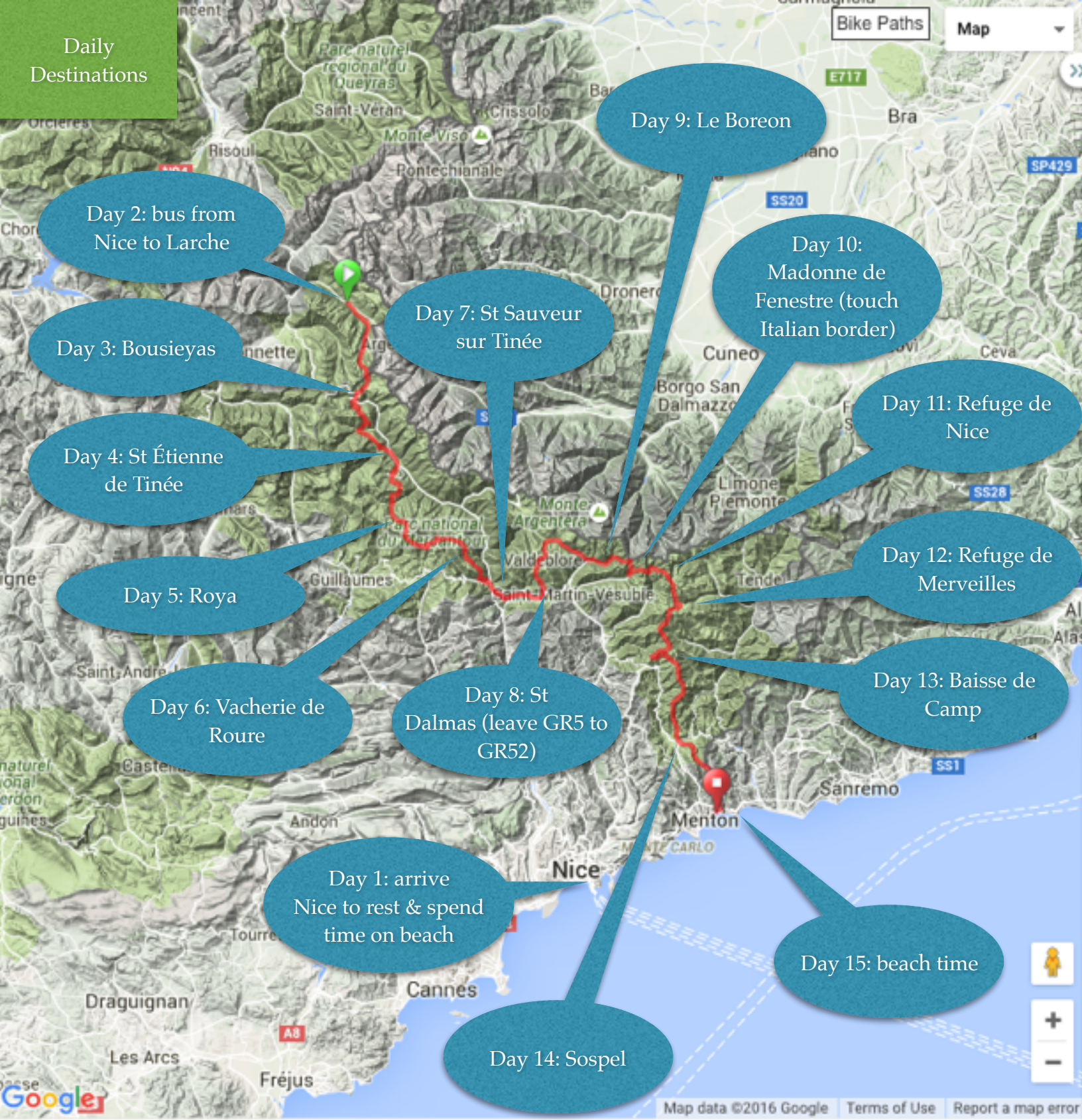
## Lodging

We will spend every night in either hotels or mountain huts. Blankets and pillows will be provided. Participants must bring a sleeping bag liner (sleep sack) to use instead of sheets. Accommodations are typically in a bunk room with 4–12 people of mixed gender.

Mattresses are either side-by-side or in two-level bunk beds. Alternatively, we may sometimes have two persons (same sex) per room sharing two adjacent mattresses in a single bed frame.



Daily Destinations



# Our itinerary

*All distance & elevation information are approximate based on representative maps.*

*The leaders reserve the right to change the itinerary for reasons such as weather, trail conditions, availability of accommodations, group preference, etc.*

## Daily Schedule

A typical day will have us waking up at 6:30am and on the trail by 8:00am. We may pass other huts along the way and indulge in a slice of tarte d'abricots as a lunchtime snack. We aim to arrive at our destination by 4:30pm each afternoon. Almost all huts & hotels have showers. The meals are hearty French country cuisine. Vegetarian options are limited. All lodges serve beer or wine. Dinner is at 6:30 or 7:00pm. Most people are in bed by 9–10pm.

| Day                        | Destination                      | Trail Notes   | Book Time | Dist [km] | Elev Gain [m] | Elev Loss [m] |
|----------------------------|----------------------------------|---|-----------|-----------|---------------|---------------|
| Friday 1<br>September 2017 | Leave US                         | Overnight flight to <b>Nice Côte d'Azur (NCE) airport.</b>  |           |           |               |               |
| Saturday 2                 | Arrive <b>Nice.</b>              | Check in hostel & meet group. Enjoy the French Riviera.   |           |           |               |               |
| Sunday 3                   | Transport to start <b>Larche</b> | Travel by bus, expected around 4–5 hours. Get ready for hike next day.  |           |           |               |               |
| Monday 4                   | Bousieyas                        | Parc National du Mercantour, charming lakes, old military sites of Franco–Italian frontier.   | 7:00      | 21.6      | 1,285         | 1,053         |
| Tuesday 5                  | St Étienne de Tinée              | Signs of Mediterranean influence: clumps of grass, thorny scrub, slopes grazed by sheep & goats.  | 5:50      | 18.3      | 699           | 1,485         |
| Wednesday 6                | Roya                             | Steep ascents, stony forest paths, & little wayside shrines, mountain biking playground, & big bright-green lizards.  | 4:30      | 15.2      | 1,090         | 697           |
| Thursday 7                 | Vacherie de Roure                | Limestone cliffs, rock formations, towers, scarce grass, sheep, & donkeys.  | 7:00      | 21.1      | 1,432         | 999           |
| Friday 8                   | St Sauveur sur Tinée             | Crossing deep, forested Vallée de la Tinée. Oak, chestnut, & occasional fig trees. Rugged mule path and gentler forest track.   | 4:00      | 13.9      | 53            | 1,592         |
| Saturday 9                 | St Dalmas                        | Views of Vallée de la Tinée. limestone, sandstone and shale beds. Start of alternate route GR52 to finish in Menton instead of Nice.  | 4:00      | 12.2      | 1,073         | 221           |
| Sunday 10                  | Le Boréon                        | Mountains along the Franco– Italian frontier are stunning. Forested valleys. Wolf reserve at Alpha (wolves are present in the wild, but highly unlikely to be spotted).   | 7:30      | 22.6      | 1,467         | 1,217         |
| Monday 11                  | Madonne de Fenestre              | Rough stone steps. Hug Franco-Italian border. More steep paths. Peek into Parco Naturale Alpi Maritime.   | 4:10      | 13.2      | 1,119         | 688           |
| Tuesday 12                 | Refuge de Nice                   | Rugged slopes of Caire de la Madone. Hands-on scramble. <i>Chamois &amp; bouquetin</i> . Lac de la Fous reservoir.  | 3:30      | 6.2       | 740           | 396           |
| Wednesday 13               | Refuge de Merveilles             | Short day. Steep, rocky and bouldery. Scenery is astounding. Small natural lakes & reservoirs. Possible archaeological tour to rock carvings It is forbidden to explore without a guide, as the area is very sensitive. | 5:00      | 10.1      | 596           | 711           |
| Thursday 14                | Baisse de Camp                   | Easier paths cut across smoother slopes. Fort on Pointe des Trois Communes. Ridge and gradual descent from the Parc National du Mercantour.   | 4:30      | 14.6      | 592           | 1,002         |
| Friday 15                  | Sospel                           | Forested descent into historic little town of Sospel  | 6:45      | 23.2      | 435           | 1,964         |
| Saturday 16                | Menton                           | Glimpses of the Mediterranean. Very steep. Dip boot in sea.   | 7:15      | 19.9      | 1,177         | 1,539         |
| Sunday 17                  | Depart for US                    | Trip ends after breakfast.  |           |           |               | Page 4        |

# Participants

## Profile

You should enjoy traveling and be comfortable traveling in areas which are unfamiliar to you. You should recognize that you may find yourself in closer quarters or be less comfortable than you are used to at home. You should make it a priority to help others on the trip and contribute to their having a great time. If you do that, we guarantee that you will have a great time.

This is a strenuous hike geared towards the outdoors adventurer. Since breakfast, dinner and lodging are provided we will be traveling light, with backpacks in the range of twenty-five pounds fully loaded. You should have at least intermediate to advanced hiking skills. While no technical climbing is required, there are areas with narrow trails bordered by steep drop-offs: where appropriate there are steel cables for protection. We may use ladders bolted to the mountainside for short ascents of steep terrain.



## Experience & Risks

Climbing high mountain passes is physically very demanding. Most of our travels will be between 1,500 and 9,000 feet. Although these elevations should not be high enough for properly conditioned people to contract acute mountain sickness (AMS), the combination of physical exertion and slightly lower oxygen levels require that we pace ourselves and pay attention to proper nutrition and hydration.

People wishing to participate in this trip must have previous hiking & backpacking experience, at the intermediate level or higher. Several of the days are long and strenuous. You need to be prepared to commit yourself to keeping in shape between the time you sign up for the trip to the time you depart on it.

When you participate in this activity, you should be prepared both physically and mentally, and equipped with the appropriate gear. You should always be aware of the risks involved and conduct yourself accordingly. We are not responsible for your safety—you are. Prior to your being accepted as a participant in this trip, you will be asked to discuss your capabilities and experience with us. Please do not be offended by our questions.

Weather is likely to be temperate and sunny, although there is always a possibility of some precipitation. That said, mountain climate is unpredictable and can range from 30–80°F. Snow can fall in every month of the year.

# Cost

The final trip cost will be adjusted in accordance with the best final arrangements we can make and currency fluctuations. Any savings we achieve, as well as any cost increases, will be passed back to you. Our cost estimates are conservative, and so a refund is considerably more likely than a price increase.

Cost is \$2,400 per person shared occupancy for AMC members. Non-members can join for \$50, and get the same price.

Deposit of \$1,000 is due with application. Balance of \$1,400 is due by 1 April 2017.

## Includes:

- ✓ Fifteen nights of **lodging**.
- ✓ **Breakfast** and **dinner** for the entire trip, starting with dinner on 2 September through breakfast on 17 September 2017.
- ✓ **Bus** transport as scheduled part of the itinerary.
- ✓ **Emergency** medical and evacuation insurance coverage.

## Does not include:

- **Airfare**. The trip leaders will advise you as much as you need and will facilitate group travel. At this time, we estimate that the cost for a round trip ticket between the US East Coast and Europe will be in the range of \$1,000–\$1,500.
- **Lunches, beverages, & incidental expenses**.
- Local **transport** between arrival airport & beginning of trip.
- Local **transport** between end of trip & departure airport.
- **Insurance** for travel delay, interruption, cancellation, or for baggage loss. If the possibility of such problems concerns you, individual travel insurance is suggested. The AMC has a recommended vendor whose material will be sent to you if your application is accepted.

# Registration

We expect a group size of 12 people, including the 2 leaders. This trip is likely to fill quickly. If you are interested, you should apply as soon as possible. When registration is complete, we will send all participants the names, addresses, and phone numbers of all those going on the trip.

To apply, you must [download, complete, and submit](#):

- Application
- Confidential medical form
- Acknowledgement and Assumption of Risk and Release form
- Supplemental Medical Questionnaire (optional)

You will not be accepted and your check will not be deposited until the leaders have determined by telephone conversation with you that you and the trip are a good match. The final balance of \$1,400 is due 1 April 2017. Deposit checks from wait-listed applicants will not be cashed until a spot is available, the applicant is accepted onto the trip, & they confirmed their continued interest.

## Participant cancellation policy

Cancellation will not be allowed to raise the cost to the other participants or to the leaders. The minimum cancellation fee is \$200 once the trip has been declared a go. If actual costs (expenses already incurred on your behalf, and any unavoidable future expenses that will be incurred as a result of your registration & cancellation) are higher, they will be assessed instead, unless they can be applied toward another acceptable participant.

## Trip cancellation policy

In the unlikely event that the trip is cancelled, everything you have paid to AMC for this trip will be refunded in full.

Participants are responsible for their own airline tickets & other external expenses. Most airlines no longer give refunds for cancellations; instead, they issue coupons for a future trip with an administrative charge and an expiration date. Trip cancellation insurance is advised—policy information will be supplied to all participants.

## Disclosure

AMC Adventure Travel trips are run on a nonprofit basis. Leaders are not compensated except for their travel and administrative costs associated with the trip. A program fee is assessed toward AMC Adventure Travel Excursion program and administrative expenses.

Trip itinerary is subject to change depending on weather conditions, rider abilities, road suitability, and leaders' judgement of other circumstances.



# Leaders



## Steve Cohen

Steve leads hikes for the Hiking/Backpacking Committee of the AMC Boston Chapter. He has been a participant on many major excursions in the last ten years including trips to Alaska, the Smoky Mountains, Maroon Bells (near Aspen, CO), Grand Tetons/Yellowstone, Tour du Mont Blanc, Escalante Canyons (Utah), and rock climbing in the Dolomites (Italian Alps). In the last few years he led AMC adventure travel expeditions to the Dolomites, the Jungfrau region of Switzerland, Patagonia, the Austrian Alps, the French Pyrénées, Greece, and the Haute Route (Chamonix to Zermatt) among other destinations. He lived in Germany and Switzerland for four years and has a good command of both the French and German languages. Steve can be reached at 617-997-6861 or [scohen1234@gmail.com](mailto:scohen1234@gmail.com).

## Rami Haddad

Rami is an active AMC leader with Adventure Travel, Bicycle, Ski, & Family committees. He travelled throughout the Alps region on several trips for hiking, bicycle touring, sight seeing, & Ironman Switzerland. He has been on extended trekking & bicycle tours through the Pacific Northwest, Pacific Coast, Rocky Mountains, Japan, France, & Germany.

Contact Rami at 425-922-0454 or [mdxix@me.com](mailto:mdxix@me.com).



# Required Packing List

- Passport. Tourist visa not required for US citizens. For other citizens, check with the French embassy.
- Broken-in waterproof hiking boots
- At least 2-3 set of hiking socks with liners
- Non-cotton shorts (or long pants) and shirt for hiking
- Backpack (aim for 30–35 liter)
- Sleeping bag liner (sleep sack)
- Waterproof wind and rain gear (tops and bottoms)
- Wool sweater, or synthetic pile/fleece jacket
- Long underwear top and bottom
- Hat for warmth, & gloves or mittens
- Polypropylene, Coolmax, Bergelene or other synthetic extra layer clothing
- Sunglasses
- Hat or bandanna for sun protection
- Sunscreen
- Sandals to wear in huts, which do NOT permit the wearing of hiking boots outside of the public areas
- Headlamp or flashlight with fresh batteries
- Unbreakable bottles or hydration bladder (at least 3 liters total capacity)
- Waterproof pack liner and/or pack cover
- High-energy trail snacks
- Toiletry kit (many huts do not supply soap or shampoo)
- Camp towel (many, but not all huts supply towels)
- Ear plugs
- Personal first aid kit (leaders will have a group first aid kit)

# Optional Packing List

The following is a long list of optional items to bring. Use it as a reminder of additional items that can make your trip and rides more comfortable.

- Casual clothing for use in a hut
- Gaiters (for rain)
- Hiking poles
- Whistle
- Knife
- Camera
- Batteries/recharger/adaptor plug
- Pillowcase

# SOS Six

The standard Alpine distress signal is six whistles, six calls, six light flashes, six piles of rocks, six smoke puffs—that is six of whatever sign or sound you can make—repeated with one minute pause between them.

In **France**, 112 is the universal emergency number.



# Electricity

The electricity current is 220V, 50Hz.

French sockets are common in most kits that are available in the market for travel to Europe.

