



Sapphire Mirrors of the French Riviera



An all inclusive hike : 8 days 7 nights



Itinérance-Trekking

"I.TREK"

Villeplane

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Sapphire Mirrors of the French Riviera

Self guided tour

High mountain altitudes ranging from 1200 - 3000m

Duration: 8 days, 7 nights

Lodging: Auberge, gites, & a mountain refuge.

Luggage Transportation: by your own personal donkey

Family friendly with children aged 7 and above

We had recently
several feature
articles

[http://
www.irishtimes.co
m/newspaper/
travel/
2009/0711/122425
0443632.html](http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/travel/2009/0711/1224250443632.html)

[http://
www.irishtimes.co
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travel/
2010/0102/122426
1510646.html](http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/travel/2010/0102/1224261510646.html)

[http://
www.guardian.co.u
k/travel/2007/sep/
01/saturday.green](http://www.guardian.co.uk/travel/2007/sep/01/saturday.green)

The Guardian
Saturday 1st
September 2007

How to tread lightly
What has
impeccable eco
credentials, four
legs and can
alleviate tiredness
in children on long
walks? Kevin
Rushby finds out in
the Alpes

Prices for 2013:

∞ Adult (option gîte) : 664 € Children aged 7 – 12 : 563 €
∞ (sup 65 € option individual rooms)

∞ **Included in the price:** The advice of a local guide who will welcome you in English: On the morning of your arrival, we will assess the various possibilities together, taking into consideration the weather forecast and your physical abilities.

✿ Full board accommodation : At guest houses, 1 in an hotel or in a mongol yurt and 2 nights in a mountain refuge. Each lodging is comfortable and clean, and will provide your breakfast, picnic lunch and a well-deserved dinner. The rooms consist of shared rooms of 4-5, and showers are available throughout.

✿ Transportation of luggage: Your own personal donkey to carry your bags.

✿ A road book; an IGN map of the paths (25/000); a leafy booklet on the valley, its fauna and flora, and a leaflet published by the *Mercantour National Park*.

✿ The transfer from Estenc-Villeplane at the end of your trek.

Not included in the price: (for those who do not come by car):

✿ The air fare

✿ The return fare from the airport up to the mountains. EITHER :

- by bus *Nice-Guillaumes* (once daily: 2 € per person return journey.) OR
- by the small mountain train *Nice-Entrevaux* (4/5 times daily: 25€ per person return journey)

✿ The transfer from and to the train/bus station at the beginning and end of your journey. EITHER:

- Guillaumes: 40 € per group return journey OR
- Entrevaux: 80 €/per group return journey.

✿ Drinks and personal expenditures

Wolf are you there?



This journey is full of variety. Through the foot-hills and the fragrance of Provence and up to the alpine panoramas of the Mercantour National Park. From the oak to the larch; from the wheat fields to the gentian lawns; from a man-made landscape to a sweeping scenery of wilderness.

The last two days are a grandiose conclusion to the trip - with a good general idea of high mountain conditions and Europe's largest glacial lake.

Marmots, chamois and golden eagles will be there to meet you! A wolf may observe you from afar, too fearful to draw near.

A triumph for nature

In 1993, the Alpi Marittime Park and the Mercantour National Park were awarded the European Environment Diploma.

This diploma is awarded to internationally recognised natural areas in which nature conservation is particularly important due to their scientific, cultural or recreational value and their natural beauty.



A flora unique in Europe

This is the only French national park containing all levels of vegetation : from



Mediterranean vegetation (holm oak, olive tree, hop-hornbeam) to rhododendron moors and up to alpine meadows at more than 2500 meters, whilst passing through fir, spruce, mountain pine, arolla pine and in particular larch forests. Of the 4200 plant species which exist in France, more than 2000 of them are present in the Mercantour National Park, including around 40 endemic species (found nowhere else). The springtime is a veritable symphony of colour.

The outstanding features of the Mercantour National Park

A special but fragile area

The Mercantour National Park was established in 1979 in this long-recognised area of precious natural habitat.

As an alpine park close to the Mediterranean, this surprisingly original geographical location gives rise to an immensely varied landscape : rocky areas, glacial cirques and valleys strewn with deep blue and brilliant green lakes, vast high alpine pastures, thick forests, narrow valleys, picturesque gorges and crystal clear rapids.



The Mercantour Alps: Sunshine and blue skies

Because of the nearby sea, alpine and Mediterranean influences converge to produce a mild and sunny climate, ideal for hiking in the height of summer.



Protected mountains.

At altitudes ranging from 1200m to 3000m, chamois, marmots, eagles and wolves live undisturbed inside the boundaries of the Mercantour National Park.

Diverse and contrasted landscapes.

- 🌸 Lakes of turquoise nesting in lush alpine meadows scattered with gentian.
- 🌸 Breathtaking passages through a canyon with rocks the colour of red wine.
- 🌸 Woods of stern larch trees and stark mineral peaks.



Don't trek with your head in the clouds!

The three don'ts of mountain trekking

You gain so much more from a trek when your eyes and ears are tuned into the music of the trail. We propose unseen, unprecedented circuits, created by our guides who are specialised in the conception of mountain trekking itineraries. They are rich with knowledge of the area they have doted on for 20 years and impatient to pass on the experience.

Don't be an ass, just because nature sounds like culture!

It is easy on a trek to be so caught up with the nature surrounding us, that we miss the historic culture right before our eyes. You will set off on your trek with a detailed IGN map, leaflets edited by the Mercantour National Park, and a leafy booklet of information we have created, to pass on our vast experience of the nature, history and wonders of the region. Here's a glimpse of what is awaiting you...

The **flora** is rich with Orchids, and endemics (species found nowhere else)

The **fauna**: The region is home to specific mountain animals, from the wolf to the marmot, and encounters with ibex, chamois and the magnificent golden eagle.

The **geology** is spectacular in this area: from the deep red pélites dating back to the end of the primary period to the sandstone of Annot from the tertiary period, and numerous intriguing fossil sites in between.

Don't return home without having met the mountain folk

You will be in an undiscovered land, which remains a little secret for the tourist industry, where you will spend an entire day walking without meeting a single person. The welcome you will receive each evening from the old and new people of the valley will therefore add to the pleasure of trekking, one of the discovery of strong characters and genuine encounters with the inhabitants of our mountains. Guides, hosts, farmers, all those who are part of our web, do not live here by chance, nor by resignation. For each one of us, this is a choice of living free in an unspoilt nature. Leisurely afoot, or with the donkeys we nurture, its part of the soul of our land that you will share, and a large breath of freedom that you will take back home with you.

Don't come expecting jacuzzi, breakfast in bed & automated toilet seats

The places you will refuel and rest your head at night offer a taste for diversity, from being welcomed as homestay guests, to farms, rest houses, forester's shelters and small hotels. Don't come expecting the norms of a cold, sterilised hotel with all your basic needs. Often, it is simplistic comfort which fulfils the very image of astounding wilderness and creates the charm and adventure of your stay. If, for a week of alternative vacationing, you are able to adapt and to keep an open spirit, you will share heart-warming moments with real, *full-of-life* people around a well-garnished table.

Check-List

- ✿ Flask/bottle : 2 litres per person (We provide the lunch boxes)
- ✿ Thermos Flask (Optional)
- ✿ Penknife
- ✿ Rain cape (A windbreaker is not sufficient) A thunderstorm in the mountains is but a fleeting adventure if you are well-equipped
- ✿ Shorts, trousers and T-shirts
- ✿ Hat (vital) and sun lotion: Maximum UV protection
- ✿ Warm woollens or the equivalent for two days at high altitude (2000 + m)
- ✿ Bin-bags, in which you will put your clothes and belongings (protection from rain)
- ✿ Strong mountain boots/shoes. N.B.! Walking sandals are not enough.
- ✿ Comfortable trainers or sandals for in the evening (optional)
- ✿ A sheet sleeping bag (!Sleeping bags and duvets are too voluminous!)
- ✿ Towel (for use in each lodging)
- ✿ Personal first-aid kit
- ✿ Travelling bags rather than suitcases (9kg)
- ✿ Plastic card pouch: For keeping your daily itinerary protected and easy to read, around your neck (optional, but advisable)

Equipment supplied by us

- ✿ Plastic boxes for midday meals
- ✿ IGN maps
- ✿ Road book

Equipment supplied with a donkey

- ✿ Military bags for loading on the donkey into which you will put your clothes and belongings (2 per donkey)
- ✿ Veterinary pharmacy including anti-inflammatory, antiseptic and fly repellent
- ✿ Packsaddle, halter, rope, tether
- ✿ A manual for looking after your donkey

Limit your belongings to 40 Kg!



A final note from Eeyore

It is important for you to know that all our donkeys work 2 months in the year, and for the rest of the time they are on holiday! Roaming free in 400 hectares, where we pamper them from autumn to summer. The donkey is on the road to disappearance; using a donkey to carry your bags on your trek gives them a role and fights against the extinction of the race. He would much rather be carrying your bags and providing comedy for your children, than be on your dinner plate! A donkey can carry a child aged 5 and above under supervision from the parents and not on precarious mountain trails.

Donkey and You

What is the secret to making unexplored hidden mountains accessible to a family? ... a **Donkey!**

These affectionate animals have been part of our family for as long as we can remember. Each one of them has their own individual personality, their own life, their own specific tastes (some are happy with a chunk of bread, whilst others have more acquired tastes, saucisson being a favourite!)

They love the company of humans, especially that of children, who they will encourage to keep on walking without sulking.



Trained masters in the art of comedy, they will suddenly become all downcast and upset, merely for attention and cuddles. They are even capable of faking a limp in an attempt to earn some tabacco (gourmet donkey treat) and after they've got what they want, they will set off, fit as a fiddle, ready to tackle the tricky paths awaiting them!

Bambou, Pépino, Ouzo, Lola, Lilou, Gédéon, Isidore, Nestor, Kif-kif, Lupin, Mytho, Iznogud and their 40 odd friends fascinate children and adults alike.

Warning! You will be dealing with a skilled psychologist, an expert in the complexities of man, ready to take advantage of your weaknesses! *Donkey* is an experienced drama-queen, quite capable of collapsing Cinderella-style if he sees you are devastated with remorse at the amount of clothing and cereal bars piled on his back, when in truth he's really not too bothered.

Some helpful tips :

- ✂ Watch out for your picnic! *Donkey* loves bread which is poking out of a bag.
- ✂ It is important to be firm : One of you leading your donkey with the rope, the other closing the way behind him, with a little persuasive stick if he starts to play up. (Leave a metre in between you and the donkey's behind, so as not to risk an unwanted kick aimed at an irritating fly.)
- ✂ Do not let your donkey graze or collect grass whilst walking, or he will think he's boss and stop at every possible opportunity.
- ✂ On a perched mountain trail, make sure you always stay on the side of the rock face, keeping your donkey on the side of the void.

Itinerance-trekking is a membership organisation which promotes independent walking tours in the Southern French Alps, run in a way that increases the positive impacts on our mountainous and remote valley and on our environment.

We are all guides who work in partnership with the Mercantour National Park.

We have been awarded this label for the high quality service we provide .

We encourage environmentally-friendly tourism and our succes is proving that there is a real consumer demand for more responsible tourism.

Donkey hirers all, on the plains,
in the hills and mountains,
are calling you to new encounters...
Come and meet men and women
Come and meet their donkeys
Come and meet their world.

Countrymen, guides, gardeners and poets;
One in their passion for the donkeys
One in their enthusiasm for the region
The finest in the world, of course,
That's why they've chosen to live there!

They'll tell you of all the treasures
You'll be coming cross on your ramble:
The best cheese in the valley,
That little bubbling stream,
Just the place for a picnic,
And that great stopping place for the night.

Donkey, the gentle voyaging companion,
Carrier of dreams and of luggage
Open the doors and let language flow
In the hamlets brimming with tales of adventure.

Technical Information

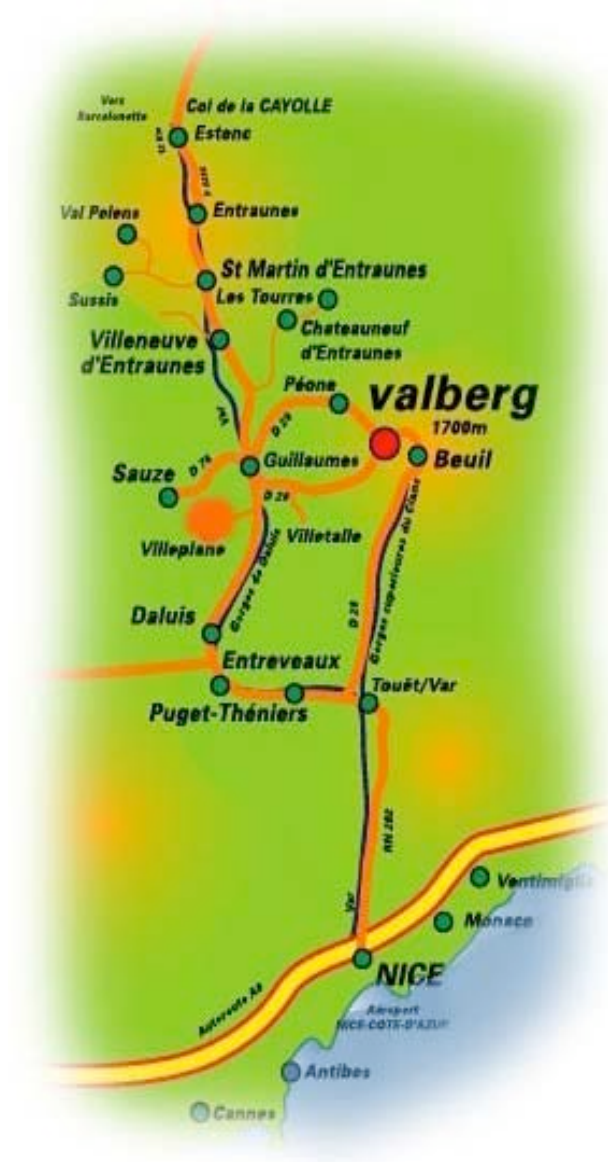
Trek departure: *Villeplane*. Every day according to availability from 1/6/13 to 23/09/13

Trek arrival: *Estenc* (50km / one hour by car from Villeplane, where we will pick you up.)

On the morning of your departure, we will go over your week's itinerary with you in detail, and discuss any

outstanding queries you may have.

We will provide you with a detailed handbook on the valley, its geological particularities, its fauna and flora, and some information published by the Mercantour Park authorities.



S.O.S. Mishaps

You can telephone us or leave a message at any time during your trek and we will come to your assistance the same day if urgent, or the following morning.

Do not attempt itineraries which are not on our circuits without consulting us first!

We are neither responsible for the deterioration of the paths we recommend due to continuous mountain erosion, nor for thunderstorms should they occur. When they do, it's usually in the afternoon, so one can set off early and arrive before the storm breaks.

Technical advice

There are certain rules concerning itineraries in national parks, forbidding dogs, picking flowers, lighting fires etc. All of these are outlined in the information we will provide you.

Path conditions

Very well signposted and marked with easily distinguishable yellow rectangles. They do, however, remain mountain paths.

An unusually good signalisation

Initiated by the *Conseil Général* (County Council) our signalisation consists of numerous strategically placed signposts. Each of them has a number which one also finds on the corresponding map and detailed in the itinerary.

Accommodation

This includes full board in guest houses, 1 in an hotel and 2 nights in a mountain refuge. You only need to bring sheet sleeping bags (less bulky than duvets or sleeping bags), as warm blankets are provided throughout the trek. Equally, there are showers in each lodging (bring your own towel).

As you need a park for your donkey at each lodging, you will be accommodated on the basis '*option gîte*' where you will usually sleep in shared dormitories of 4 – 5 (8 in the mountain refuge).

Cartographic reference

IGN Top 25, 3540 ET, Haute vallée du Var, Parc du Mercantour.

Supplies

There are small groceries in *St. Martin* and in *Entraunes*, other than this, there are no shops. Make sure therefore to bring enough medical supplies with you. You are provided with a generous picnic.

Minimum knowledge

The basic ability to read a map is mandatory, so as to avoid difficult detours which the donkeys may have trouble negotiating, as is some experience in mountain hiking a large bonus.

Family friendly Trek

The easy options throughout this trek enable you to enjoy a week of relaxed walking where the children can be involved; the itinerary has been planned for families with children aged 5 and up. The walking time per day varies between 3 - 6 hours, and the ascent levels between 350 m - 600 m.

You don't even need to walk under the weight of your bags, our donkeys are here to carry



your heavy loads. A donkey is docile and easy to lead, but is not a mountain bike! Each one has different reactions according to their personality: cuddly, curious, gourmand, drama queen, endearing... he knows how to get your child to keep going! With a donkey however, you will be restricted to taking the easy option each day. As an alternative on the last two days, if you have older/capable children, you have the option of saying goodbye to your donkey and choosing the 'High-Mountain and summits accessible to all', and we will arrange for your bags to be taken to your lodgings by car.



Looking for a more challenging adventure ?

The *Mercantour National Park* is ideal for trekking; the number of variants mean there are so many new paths to explore. You can opt to have your luggage transported by car, and set off with nothing but yourselves and your picnic. Each day on this circuit consists of alternative routes, which allow you to see more remote features and more rugged and austere scenery, leading to the same lodgings each evening. The walking time per day varies between 6 - 8 hours, and the ascent levels between 800 m - 1200 m.



How to reach us



By Plane: To *Nice* airport.

From the airport, take a taxi or the airport bus service to either the train station or the coach station and continue your journey as detailed below.*

Airport Bus Services: (depart from terminal 1)

For the Train station 'Gare SNCF' : **Bus no. 23** - 30 mins journey

(N.B.! You need to get off at the train station 'Gare SNCF' and walk 10 mins -or take the tramway- to the mountain train station 'Gare des chemins de fer de Provence')

For the Bus station 'Gare Routière' : **Bus no. 98** - 30 mins

journey

***By Mountain Train:** *Nice - Entrevaux*

From the mountain train station 'Gare des chemins de fer de Provence' (not the 'Gare SNCF')

There are 2 appropriate Micheline trains a day:

Times: Leaving Nice at: Monday – Sunday @ 12:55 OR 17:17

Duration: 1.5 hrs

Price: 12€ one-way trip

Please notify us if you are arriving at *Entrevaux* by the mountain train and we will arrange your 45 mins transfer to *Villeplane* (80€ per group)

***By Coach:** *Nice - Guillaumes*

From the 'Gare Routiere' (Bus station) in *Nice* centre. (N.B.! There is one bus a day). The bus station is not at the same place . You must check :http://www.lignesdazur.com/evenement/?rub_code=3&evn_id=95

Times: Leaving Nice at: Monday – Sunday @ 16:15

Saturday @ 13:15

Duration: 2 hrs

Price: 1€ one-way trip

Please notify us if you are arriving at *Guillaumes* by coach, and we will arrange your 30 mins transfer to

By Car:

From Nice: Less than 2 hrs drive following directions for 'Digne' up the N202 along the river Var following it west past *Villars*, *Touet*, *Puget-Théniers* and *Entrevaux*. 6 km after *Entrevaux*, turn north (right) up through the stunning *Gorges de Daluis*.

From Digne-les-bains: 95 km drive, heading southeast to *Barreme*, then east to *St.André les Alpes* and *Les Scafarels*. 7 km east of *Annot*, head north again up the *Gorges de Daluis*.

From Barcelonnette: Come over *Col de Cayolle* (2326 m) and down past *Entraunes*; 66 km of beautiful scenery along mountain road (2 hours).

Return:

If you have not come by car, you have the choice at the end of your week between staying an **extra night in Villeplane** or returning to *Nice* by the mountain train which leaves *Entrevaux* at 19:17, arriving in *Nice* at 20:45. ! Please specify your choice when booking

Itinerary

The spirit of the hike

We have planned this hike so as to offer, each day, a choice of several routes each leading to the same lodging place. The options vary from easy to moderate, allowing you to recuperate or to strive for a more challenging adventure. If you are keen on art, you can end the trek on a cultural note, with a visit to the Nicolis museums of *Matisse* and *Chagall*.

Below, we have included a short summary of the week's itinerary, just to give you an idea of what is waiting for you. Only upon arrival, will you receive your complete, detailed itinerary (consisting of 1-2 pages a day and a separate IGN map for each day on which your itinerary is clearly marked). As you will see, each day consists of 1 – 3 options, from easy to more difficult. There are even more options available on our itineraries, but they are reserved for the treks without a donkey, where luggage is transported by car, and for experienced hikers with a sound knowledge of map reading. Do let us know if this interests you, and we will send you more information and do be sure to specify your preference when booking. (Please note that there is also the 'option individual rooms' at a supplement if you choose to travel without a donkey)

On the morning of your arrival, we will go over in detail together the various possibilities, taking into consideration the weather forecast and your physical abilities, and outlining your routes on the map. We will introduce you to your donkey and spend time explaining how best to lead and take care of him or her. The IGN map gives a very good idea of the terrain and your paths, which are extremely well marked with both directional signposts and yellow painted rectangles, and therefore hard to go wrong on! Your itinerary will include an information page with diagrams and details on the signalisation. However, you should never forget that a variety of conditions must be taken into consideration when you are in the mountains. Do not overestimate your capabilities. The circuits are presented in order, from the easier to the more difficult, to help you avoid choosing the wrong option.

If you are lacking in experience, you could always start off by joining an accompanied hike with a guide to teach you all there is to know about our mountains!

Once you contact us to confirm a reservation, we will create a personalised trek with specific accommodation and itineraries in order to suit your profile: family; couple; sporty; meditative; confirmed trekker; novice...

On the day you start trek we will provide you with your complete itinerary folder, in which your week's accommodation will be outlined, and your entire route for each day (various options) detailed and also marked on IGN maps.

Day One: Arrival at Villeplane

Your accommodation: the 'gîte de Villeplane', in Villeplane

Tel: 0044 (0)4 93 05 56 01

Arrival at **Nice** airport. You then have the choice of either the coach to Guillaumes or the mountain train to Entrevaux, from where you will be picked up and driven up to Villeplane. After relaxing in the beautiful mountain setting, you will have your first experience of a French gîte, sharing dinner with other adventurers around a bustling table and settling down for the night, ready and raring for the following morning!



Day Two: Villeplane - Sauze



Your hosts : Chez Bernadette, at the 'Auberge Communale' in Sauze

TEL : 0033 (0)4 93 05 57 70

By the Cante Valley:

Accumulated Ascent : 515 m

Accumulated Descent : 375 m

Distance : 8 km Continuous walking time : 4 hrs

Your trek begins in the 'Redlands', on the southern and northern mountainsides of the Cante Valley. It will introduce you to the distinctive feature which creates the charm of the southern French Alps; The sheer diversity of the landscapes, between the fresh, woody ubac (north-facing slope) typical of the northern French Alps, and the strong Provençal overtone of the adret (southern-facing slope).

Leaving from the small square at the foot of the hamlet of Villeplane, your itinerary will lead you down through lavender fields and pine forests to the Cante valley. Once over the river, you will walk along the banks and snake up through warm, aromatic heaths to the hamlet of Terrassettes. Passing the old village of Sauze, where inhabitants are few, you will shortly arrive at Sauze where you will spend the night at the 'auberge Communale', which is at the foot of the village, down to your right. You will be waited on by Bernadette and her delicious homemade jams of melon, pumpkin, elderberry and the list goes on!

Day Three: Sauze – St. Martin d'Entraunes

Your hosts : ChezJulie St Martin d'Entraunes Le Village. 04 93 05 51 02

By the Lare:

Accumulated Ascent : 340 m Accumulated Descent : 620 m

Distance : 15 km

Continuous walking

time : 5 hrs

The ascent of the valley continues with this beautiful trek, shaded for the first part of your day as you head towards the panoramic plateau de la Lare. The rest of the day takes place in descent or on the flat. You will experience stunning glimpses between the trees, allowing you to discover the unique landscape of the high valley of Var with its striking outcrops of black marl.

Walking up through the village and along a woody ascent, you will arrive at the highland of Lare, where you will be rewarded by a splendid view. After the descent through a sensational path in the trees with enchanted streams, you will come to the river Var, along the banks of which you walk, to reach the hamlets of Filleuls and Philippons.



Day Four: St.Martin d' Entraunes – Val-Pelens

Your hosts :

auberge des aiguilles chez Olivier et Florence

TEL : 0033 (0)4 93 05 52 83

DIRECT: The Postman trail:

Accumulated Ascent :550 m Distance : 7 km

Continuous walking time :3 hrs30

A short, peaceful connecting link to your next destination which will allow you to 'tantalise' the high mountain altitude at your own rhythm. You can then continue with the **Extra option** below, or, if the children are tired, you could split into two groups, one staying at the auberge and the other climbing the beautiful, mineral summit.

This way with its evocative name, recalls the time (not so distant than that) when the public service had to provide good pair of shoes to ensure mail delivery ...

Before beginning to climb, the trail follows an old irrigation channel, to supply water to land or crops and then crosses the rocky Bramus in a spectacular waterfall.

Passing through St Martin d' Entraunes (possibility of supply, grocery, bread), there is also the alternative to visit the small Roman church with its magnificent altarpiece of the fifteenth century. (The key is in the town hall on Tuesday morning to Saturday.)

From “le Prieuré”, return to the bridge over the Var B.26, B.25, cross it and continue on the road to St Martin, until b.227 (St-Martin-d'Entraunes) turn right and then climb to the village, Val Pelens B.226) across the square, follow the road beyond the church and take the small road up to the junction of roads Entraunes and “C ol des champs” b.230 (Val Pelens) . Then a path b.231 (Val Pelens) joins the road and further the Clouvet. ATt“leVillard,” take the path b.232 (Val Pelens) which follows a little water channel, then crosses Bramus rocks, and through the forest B.239 (Val Pelens) arrives to Auberge des aiguilles b.238.

EXTRA OPTION. Le Clot de l'Äi (without donkey):

Accumulated Ascent : 635 m Accumulated Descent : 635 m

Distance : 5 km

Continuous walking time : 4 hrs

This is the perfect occasion to visit the most alpine area of the valley, the circle of the 'Clot de l'Äi' is rich in mineralogy and offers beautiful scenery; a mountain full of life, dominated by the 'Aiguilles of Pelens' whose conquest became a veritable epic.

From the 'auberge des Aiguilles', you will head to the base of a ski slope, which you will walk up, veering round to the right at the top, and heading towards a large opening in the trees. Th rough a woody ascent which transforms into a mineral, rocky climb, you will reach a beautiful crest. Arriving at the summit which overhangs the circle of Äi, you'll be amazed by the magnificent view.



Day five: Val Pelens – Entraunes

Your hosts : Chez Charles, hôtel Roche-Grande in Entraunes: 04 89 77 90 11

OPTION 1. By th Serre d'Au:

Accumulated Ascent : 110 m Descent : 480 m

Distance : 8 km Continuous walking time : 4 hrs

A stunning trek, travelling through ancient country living sites, sparing a thought for these generations of mountain folk who covered the foreground, in order to find the best area. Now that nature has taken over, it is the attentive eye that can detect the traces. You will then be mesmerised by the power of the dense, vertical waterfalls waiting for you towards the end of your day.

Leaving your auberge, you will cross over the brook of Chastelonette and walk through the homonym sheepfolds to reach the green woods. After crossing the stream of Rinières, you will follow a long woody path to the Belvédère ('panoramic viewpoint') of Serre d'Au. Descending through the woods and passing the barns of Bourguet, you will come to the village of Entraunes (grocery with ice-creams and cold drinks).



OPTION 2. By the Col des Champs 2045m:

Accumulated Ascent : 920 m Accumulated Descent : 850 m

Distance : 17km Continuous walking time : 7-8 hrs

A remarkable trek towards the vast alpine landscapes of the mountain pass of Champs, meeting marmots along your way and what is more, an open panorama over the hautes vallées. You will be stunned by the power of the dense, vertical waterfalls awaiting you towards the end of your day.

From your auberge, the itinerary takes you over the Luna ravine and up through a shoulder to arrive at a large open space, from where you will take the old path, rimmed with stones. Here you have the chance of a return trip to an outstanding geographical mountain pass. Descend past a shepherd's cabin to Entraunes by a magnificent path which in times past was the principal link between the high valleys of Var and Verdon.

Day Six: Entraunes-Estenc

Your hosts : Chez ALex et Pierre
refuge de la Cantonnière 04 93 05 56 31

By the waterfalls: Walking up through the village, you will follow a pretty path along the bed of the impressive Var river, between towering cliffs, and across the footbridges over the torrents of Garréton, Aiglière and the Var, with their impressive vertical falls! Passing the chapel of St. Sauveur, you will follow the path around a little lake to walk through Pra Long (long meadow) and arrive at your refuge.



Day Seven: Estenc – Col de la Cayolle

Your hosts : Chez Francoise & Robert at the 'Refuge de la Cayolle', at La Cayolle

TEL : 0033 (0)4 92 81 24 25

OPTION 1. By the woods of Garret:

Accumulated Ascent : 590 m Accumulated Descent : 0 m

Distance : 7 km Continuous walking time : 3.5 hrs



An ascent which progresses in altitude up a beautiful path through a centennial larch tree forest to the timberline (edge of inhospitable climate), where you emerge to find high mountain pastures and the charming mountain range of Sanguinière with its wild scenery, typical of the contrast and diverse southern Alps.

From your auberge, you will head towards the **core of the Mercantour national park**. Ascending through a beautiful larch tree forest, you will arrive at high mountain

pastures, where you will join up with the Lausson path. From here, you will continue up to the mountain pass under the curious gaze of mountain animals.

Afternoon Stroll: The opportunity of a return trip up to the Tête de la Gipièrre (2626m) **without donkeys** by the ancient col de la Cayolle. Don't be surprised if marmots and even a few chamois are awaiting you!

OPTION 2. Col de la Boucharde (without donkey):

FOR FAMILIES WITH CAPABLE CHILDREN

Accumulated Ascent : 990 m

Accumulated Descent : 440

Distance : 13 km

Continuous walking time : 6 hrs



If you are looking for an adventure for your last two days, you have the option here of leaving your donkey with your hosts and setting off hands free! (your luggage will be transported by car to your destinations). Typically alpine, deep into the Mercantour park, this itinerary combines all the attractive elements of a high mountain environment: Panoramic mountain passes, barren ravines, gnarled larch and prancing chamois.

Crossing over the Garret torrent, you will head for the **core of the Mercantour national park**. A charming journey through the woods, following the torrent, will bring you to the 'Cabanes de Sanguinière', shortly after which the woods will be replaced by a high mountain pasture and it is from here that you can see the

mountain pass. The last part of the climb takes place in a mineral area: these pileups of large blocks of stones are in fact ancient moraines left by the melting of the last glaciers (about 10,000 years ago). On reaching the Col de la Boucharde (2539m), you have the opportunity to make the return trip up to the Tête de la Boucharde at 2639 metres high.

Walking back down on the other side, the Ubaye valley, to the Bachelard, in the Alps of the Haute Provence, you will join up with the path and follow it to the 'Refuge de la Cayolle'.

Day eight: Col de la Cayolle - Estenc

TEL : 0033 (0)4 93 05 56 01

OPTION 1. The breathtaking tour of the lakes:

Accumulated Ascent : 410 m

Accumulated Descent : 970 m

Distance : 13 km

Continuous walking time : 5.5 hrs

Your weeks trek rounds off in a climax with an enchanted tour around the glacial lakes of Allos, Garrets and la petite Cayolle. You will lose yourself on this journey through nature, where the blue sky is reflected in the clear waters of the lakes and the endemic flora strewn with alpine pastures: Alonie bluebell, woolly Berardie, Koch gentians, acaulescent catchflies, vanilla orchids, pansies ...

In this geological battleground, where the emerging Alps have pushed back the sea, stone glacials and high altitude waters bring your journey to an end amidst the glittering blue expanse of the lake of Allos.

After joining up with the mountain pass of Cayolle, your path will take you up past intense turquoise or sapphire lakes to the pass of La Petite Cayolle at 2639m. Passing the basin where the Garrets Lake is nested, you will ascend to 2676m (the highest point of the trek) before walking down along a panoramic crest. Shortly, you will witness the magnificent view of the Allos lake, 200m towards the west – Europe's largest natural lake at high altitude! (60 hectares)

Through High Mountain pastures and the woods of Garret, you will walk down to Estenc where you will be picked up and driven back to Villeplane.

OPTION 2. Highest summit: The Mont Pelat at 3050m (without donkey):

Accumulated Ascent : 1260 m

Accumulated Descent : 1820

Distance : 20 km

Continuous walking time : 8 hrs

If you are a keen mountain-goer, you will not be able to leave the region without climbing the Mont Pelat (3050m), the highest local summit. A mountaintop whose name is etymologically transparent, it's flanks of barren rockslides cut across the blue sky. The tradition is to reach the summit at the rising of the sun and, on a clear day, enjoy this majestic 360° view: To the south, Corsica; a faint shadow on the liquid horizon, to the north, the distant Mont Blanc glistening white, and to the east, the Italian and Swiss Alps.

Passing the sapphire lakes of the **Mercantour national park**, you will follow a beautiful path to the summit. Your itinerary then takes you to the edge of the stunning Allos Lake, before climbing up to the Pas du Lausson and walking down to Estenc where you will be picked up and driven back to Villeplane.



Your accomodation

Day 1: écolodge **de Villeplane: Chez Jérémie et Anais
or mongol yurt 00 33 (04) 93 02 37 89

Day 2: Villeplane- Sauze :

Auberge communale chez Bernadette 04 93 05 57 70

Day 3: Sauze- St Martin d'Entraunes:

Gîte «Chez Julie». Le Village. 04 93 05 51 02

Day 4: St Martin d'Entraunes-Val-Pelens

Auberge des Aiguilles Val Pelens
chez Olivier et Flo :04 93 05 52 83
<http://www.aubergedesaiguilles.com/>

Day 5: Val-Pelens:-Entraunes Hotel Roche-Grande chez
Charles : tél : 04 89 77 90 11
<http://auberge-roche-grande.com/>

Day 6: Entraunes- Estenc

Refuge de la Cantonnière chez Alex
tel 04 93 05 51 36

<http://www.mercantour.eu/index.php/Refuge-de-la-Cantonniere.html>

Day7 :

Refuge de la Cayolle chez Françoise et Robert
<http://www.refugite-mercantour.fr/v1/>

Day 8: At the end of the tour, you can also ask to sleep in
one of our mongol yurt: 04 93 02 37 89



Mountains, 'Gîtes' ... and consumer society.

Once upon a time, there was a society which humoured the demands of its people : Outdoor holidays and all that comes with them - Around the clock programme of activities; 5 star comfort and service, the full trimmings... all this and, of course, total immersion in true, pure nature.

"What an ideal business" ring the naïve words of the tourism reps.. but little do they know that in the mountains, it's a different story. The inevitable truth cannot be denied by any mountain connoisseur ; "The more beautiful and isolated the mountains, the more basic and rustic the accommodation, and the more complex and lengthy the transport."

Thus the cruel dilemma faced by those who embarked on an adventure into the unknown... complete with power showers and toilet lids: "Comfort or the great outdoors?" But for some, the distance between the bathroom and the bedroom rated higher on their priority list than the distance between one spectacular mountain crest and another. This need for an individual bathroom within minimal proximity to one's bed, posed a problem in our lodges, huts and little hotels. Our rustic ways of living mean communal washing facilities are the norm.

Seemingly, sparkling clean bathroom tiles and mass-produced bidets replaced the breath-taking view of the mountains as part of one's holiday criteria. Would they have preferred 'faulty towers' located just off the motorway with ensuite rooms?

Our favourite proverb, simple but true : "Le Montagne, ça se gagne": "The Mountains, they are worth it" and for many, the magic of the mountains surpasses shared toilets and simple lodging. After all, it is said that all roads lead to self-liberation.

Our lodges and huts are of a comfort without pretension, giving them their simplicity, their charm and their authenticity.

This brings us to the question: What is a gîte?

It is a house in the mountains where those who love the fresh air of the outdoors are welcomed in to rest and recuperate. In this rustic environment, all social and cultural differences are forgotten and there is a familiarity between the people as they share the lodge and their day's highlights. They may lay the table together, serve each other dinner and help out with the washing up, like one big family.

Such is the trust and relaxed way of living in the mountains that there are no keys for the 'gîte' and in 20 years, we have never heard a whisper of theft.

And so is the spirit of the mountaineers over generations throughout 'gîtes' in Europe; one of open-mindedness and fraternity. But for those who do not appreciate this sense of community, a 'gîte' will be no more than a basic, unequipped hotel.

More and more, nowadays, people come to the mountains unaware of the customs of mountain life and they are thus surprised at the accommodation provided.

Have you, like us, been won over by the beauty and the purity of these remote landscapes? If so, a week of forfeiting the luxuries of the modern world is nothing compared to the sensation gained on reaching a difficult summit and losing your breath as you take in the overwhelming view.

Be one of these people; lovers of preserved nature, who jump at the chance to leave comfort behind for a rewarding holiday, free of the hustle and bustle of mass-tourism, deep in the heart of the magnificent mountains of the Mercantour.

Working towards a responsible tourism

Our commitments

To maintain the importance of providing an economic contribution directly to the locals of the valley who live here all year round, favouring a network of 'chez l'habitant' hosts and always choosing local products over their industrialised, cheaper versions. This has led us to create an alternative alimentation; Picnics made up of mixed salads, crops and vegetables from the garden, organic bread, cheeses from the region, etc. With our hosts and clients alike, we are developing an alternative idea of nutrition whereby quality, natural, reasonable price, and specific tastes (especially those of children) are united.

- ✧ To manage a tourism which we control, and not be tempted to delegate or to grow; To maintain the importance of quality and of improving our services.
- ✧ A question of quality in response to your demands: This year, we are proposing for your last day, an alternative trek in contrast to the classic one (lac d'allos) in order to satisfy the desires of those of you who are passionate about secret and wild mountains.
- ✧ To instruct visitors to the region about pastoralism, the roots of our culture, through encounters with shepherds on our guided treks.

Looking after the environment:

- ✧ Minimising the number of plastic disposables in our picnics; we provide you with corn starch disposables without GMO's.
- ✧ Limiting the amount of paper used by providing all information on the internet.
- ✧ Using recycled paper for our booklets and information pages.
- ✧ Respecting the frailty of the mountain milieu and being aware of the impact of our camping circuits at high altitudes; This has led us to limit our guided treks to only 10 per year so as to avoid harming a protected area or weakening the profession of the shepherd by the donkeys' grazing.
- ✧ To provide precise information so as to prevent visitors from being unaware of the traditions and respects of the mountains. Detailed information on our mountains and the lodgings can be found on our internet site

www.itinerance.net

Your Commitments

- ✧ To be a responsible tourist: to be conscientious and chose the right holiday for you and your family. Too often, guests do not read the information provided, and are then surprised that the weather is hot, cold, that the path climbs up, and down, is far, that there are flies, horseflies!
- ✧ Not to be a mere consumerist :
- ✧ The mountains are not a touristic product which can be adapted according to the needs of its visitors. It is up to you to adapt in a mountain milieu which can not be domesticated. Our motto is 'small is beautiful', this also means adapting to the types of lodging and the way of living.
- ✧ To try to keep your ecological footprint on the mountains as light as possible. Pragmatically: make do with the means available, wherever you may be, without forgetting common sense.
- ✧ Not to allow yourself to be alienated by a modern view of comfort which cannot be transported to the mountains.
- ✧ To refrain from throwing orange peel, plastic, cigarette stubs (5 years life-span!) etc...
- ✧ To follow the footsteps of the Indian... no one should see that you have passed here (i.e. don't decorate the mountains with pink toilet paper)
- ✧ When possible, to use the information we provide on the Internet and print only what is necessary.
- ✧ To be open to and respectful of our cultures and traditions :
- Never mind if we are full, you will be on the ball for getting in earlier next year! By limiting ourselves to a certain number of circuits per year, we are contributing towards preserving the nature.
- 'Be cool' with your generous hosts and avoid adding stress to their already busy summer with us! Our network of hosts is made up of locals of the mountains who have oodles of good will and are ready to welcome you with a smile. They will be delighted to honourably share their home, cooking and their passion with you. They are not professionals of the hotel industry, armoured, embittered and cynical: not the owners of a formule 1, then?! Here, human relations are privileged compared with consumerist relations! They deserve your respect, your frank curiosity and your interest. Do not come expecting a traditional hotel service complete with breakfast in bed, but a good aged whisky to wash down your blue cheese and delicious crème caramel, why not?!

Our other Treks

Trotting across the Alps like the Donkey:

- ✿ 7 days, 6 nights
- ✿ Trekking in liberty
- ✿ Transportation of luggage: by donkey
- ✿ Accommodation: *gites*, country hotels and *chez l'habitant*



Trotting across the Alps like the Wolf :

7 days, 6 nights

- ✿ Several options each day
- ✿ Trekking in liberty
- ✿ Transportation of luggage: by car
- ✿ Accommodation: country hotels and *chez l'habitant* (Option individual rooms)



Several options each day on a full board basis.

The trek is a variety (from the gentle walk to the summit adventure) bringing you to the evening. On the morning of your departure, specialised guides will provide information and advice for your trek.

Under the southern alps and the refreshing north-western wind, lives a mountain in Europe. From the secret, deserted hamlets of the Mercantour national park, accessible to all, like *Mont Mounier* (2850m), the *Dôme de Barrot* (2136m) and the *Mont St Honorat* (2550m), you will discover the roots of our mountain civilisation 'l'Alpe'. So remote is the region and non-existent the trace of civilisation, that the wolf and many other wild animals have made it their home.

Mercantour of the Lakes:

- ✿ 7 days, 6 nights
- ✿ Guided tour
- ✿ Transportation of luggage: by donkeys
- ✿ Accommodation: Individual or double igloo tents with air beds (all provided), and 1 night in a *gîte*.



Booking form

Once you have contacted us to check availability, please send your completed form to:

By post: *Itinerance, Villeplane 06740, Guillaumes, FRANCE*

or by email: info@itinerance.net

Please also send a deposit of 350€ by bank transfer to the following bank account in order to confirm your booking:

Account number : 43609037866

Bank code : 19106

Counter code: 00612

Key : RIB 23

Bank address : Crédit Agricole, GUILLAUMES, FRANCE

International account : FR 76 1910 6006 1243 6090 3786 623

Bank Identification code : AGRIFRPP891

Itinerance address : Villeplane, 06470

Guillaumes, France

Tel : 00 33 (0)4 93 05 56 01

Please provide the names of each participant, including ages of children.

Surname: **First Name:** **Age:**

Surname: **First Name:** **Age:**

Surname: **First Name:** **Age:**

Surname: **First Name:** **Age:**

Surname: **First Name:** **Age:**

Address:

.....

Landline: **Mobile:** **Email:**

Chosen trek:

*If you have chosen Hidden Mountains of the French Riviera, please specify between

☐ Option 'gîte' (shared dormitories of 4-6)

☐ Option 'Individual rooms'

Preferred dates: **Number of people:**

From: To: Adults (from 13): Children (7 – 12):

Transport to Villeplane: (Please tick appropriate box)

☐ By car

☐ By plane and coach (return transfer *Guillaumes-Villeplane*: 40€ per group)

☐ By plane and mountain train (return transfer *Entrevaux-Villeplane*: 80€ per group)

We would be grateful to know how you found out about Itinerance:

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Terms and Conditions

Please read the following carefully as it your contract with *Itinerance* and clearly lays out your agreement with us.

General Information Booklet: Prior to booking, it is essential to consult the general information booklet which can be found on our website.

To secure your booking: When booking for one of our holidays or excursions, adherence to our terms and conditions is obligatory. Your reservation is subject to availability and will only be confirmed upon receipt of your completed and signed registration form, together with a 300 Euro deposit towards your holiday.

Full Payment: The balance will be settled on site when you arrive. (N.B. We unfortunately do not have the facilities to accept credit cards)

Cancellation Policy: Should you wish to cancel your booking, cancellation charges will be imposed as following (If the charge is less than that of your deposit, you will be reimbursed the remainder) :

- ☞ 30 days or more before departure - 10% of the total amount.
- ☞ 29 - 21 days before departure - 25% of the total amount.
- ☞ 20 - 8 days before departure - 50% of the total amount.
- ☞ 7 - 2 days before departure - 75% of the total amount.
- ☞ Less than 48 hours notice - 90% of the total amount.

It is strongly recommended that you take out personal travel insurance, which includes cover -in justified cases - against cancellation charges. (excluding a 50 Euro charge per person)

Included in the price:

- ☞ **Full board accommodation.**
- ☞ **The loan of group or individual equipment where necessary.**
- ☞ The transportation of luggage as appropriate: vehicle and driver; or an animal.
- ☞ Organisational costs.
- ☞ Food and beverage costs.
- ☞ A travel pack including a map and a detailed description of the tracks.

Not included in the price:

- ☞ **Cancellation guarantee (optional extra)**
- ☞ **Transportation from your home to Villeplane.**
- ☞ Personal expenses.

Responsibility: The organisers insurance does not cover the individual insurance of each participant, which needs to be taken out separately.

Equally, as trekking organisers, it is their responsibility to find various suppliers. These include gite, hotel and refuge owners, and drivers. The organisers do not hold responsibility for the above; each bear their own responsibility for their accommodation.

Unaccompanied Trekking: This option offers a trekking circuit without the aid of a guide. The price includes a detailed itinerary and a map of the zone. Unaccompanied trekking therefore requires a comprehensive knowledge of map-reading and a good sense of orientation, particularly in the mountains.

Each individual must follow the advice given by the guide booklet. The organisers cannot be held responsible for any accidents occurring as the result of disregard for caution.

The organisers cannot be held responsible for a misinterpretation of the guide book or a map-reading error on the behalf of the participant. In the case of unaccompanied trekking, you must accept the possibility of a risk, even if minimal and unlikely, due to the natural ever-changing state of the environment. (a thunderstorm; heavy rain; rock erosion)

As a result, each participant is therefore responsible for their own safety, accepting this possibility of a risk, and not placing the responsibility of an accident or an incident on an organiser or another supplier. This responsibility also applies to other members of the family.