



CLASSIC
EDELWEISS TOURS

BEST OF SOUTHERN FRANCE

Motorcycling in the Provence and Côte d'Azur is absolutely seductive.



BEST OF SOUTHERN FRANCE

RIDING DAY 1 : VENCE - FORCALQUIER

Standard Route (262 km / 163 miles)

Provence - what a name! It makes you think of the beaches of St. Tropez, the red carpet of Cannes, of superyachts and the old town of Nice. But the Provence has another face, perhaps a more authentic one - one we will discover today, riding through the backcountry of the famous region.

Explore uncountable amazing villages, each of them enchant you with their medieval atmosphere. Take your time in Moustiers-Ste-Marie and stroll around the narrow streets or look at the famous local pottery.

For some time of the day, you will ride the famous Route Napoleon following an epic march of France's emperor. Rivers have cut deep gorges into the mountains, the roads with endless curves typically follow the itinerary of the meandering rivers, a fact that will put a smile on your face almost all day long. The most impressive of these gorges undoubtedly represents the Verdon Gorge. The narrow limestone cliffs cradling the waters of the gorge open out at the end into the deep artificial turquoise-blue lake of Sainte Croix du Verdon.

Highlights:

#1: Route Napoleon



The Route Napoleon is the route taken by Napoleon in 1815 on his return from his exile in Elba. It is now concurrent with sections of routes N85, D1085, D4085 and D6085. The route begins at Golfe-Juan, where Napoleon disembarked on March 01 1815, beginning a forced march of seven days all the way to Grenoble. The road was inaugurated in 1932 and meanders from the French Riviera northwest along the foothills of the Alps. It is marked along the way by statues

of the French Imperial Eagle.

#2: Gorges du Verdon (Verdon Gorge)



The Gorge du Verdon is considered to be Europe's most beautiful canyon. It is about 15.5 miles long and up to 3,000 feet deep. It was formed by the Verdon River, which is named after its startling turquoise-green color, one of the canyon's most distinguishing characteristics. The most impressive stretch lies between the towns of Castellane and Moustiers-Sainte-Marie, where the river has cut a ravine through the limestone mass. At the end of the canyon, the

Verdon river flows into the reservoir of Sainte-Croix-du-Verdon. The limestone walls, which are several hundred feet high, attract many rock climbers. It is considered to be an outstanding destination for multi-pitch climbing. There are routes encompassing cracks, pillars, and seemingly endless walls. The climbing is generally of a technical nature, and there are over 1,500 routes, ranging from 65 to 1,300 ft.

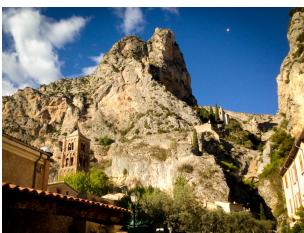
#3: Route des Crêtes (Vosges Crest Road)



The Vosges Crest Road, also called "Route des Crêtes", stretches 77 km from Sainte-Marie-aux-Mines in the north to Cernay in the south. The route passes Col du Bonhomme in the north, Col de la Schlucht, Hohneck, Markstein, Grand Ballon, and ends in Cernay.

The Vosges Ridge Road is one of the most beautiful high roads in Europe. Hikers love the attractive trails, and motorcyclists and car drivers appreciate the well-maintained road. The view is unique. From the Grand Ballon you can see the Alsatian Rhine Plain and the Black Forest. On a clear day, the view reaches as far as Austria, Lichtenstein, and even Mont Blanc.

#4: Moustiers-Ste-Marie



Moustiers is considered to be one of the most beautiful villages of the Provence, indeed even of the whole of France. The village sits astride a rushing mountain stream that divides the two halves with a narrow rocky canyon. The view of this mini-gorge with small waterfalls and the medieval houses above is beautiful. Moustiers has narrow streets and vaulted passages and becomes more charming the higher you walk up. The center piece of the village is

the 12th-century Notre-Dame church. Moustiers is renowned for its Faïence pottery, a very high quality earthenware typically incorporating fine floral decoration.



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RIDING DAY 2 : FORCALQUIER - AVIGNON

Standard Route (252 km / 157 miles)

The region of Vaucluse, a department of Provence, is waiting for you today. Not sure what to expect? Expect a lot! Whether you are interested in visiting some of the most charming French villages, the day has them. You care about historical sites and interesting architecture and you love riding through a diversified nature, then you will get all of that as well today. And yes - the day will be stuffed with amazing roads and countless curves. But what might strike you most today, is the variety and impressiveness of colors that encompass your itinerary and almost seem to overload your eyes with sensation!

Starting off towards the northwest we quickly make our way towards the area of the Vaucluse mountains, not high, but dissected by numerous canyons and gorges. Soon enough the warm yellow and red tones of the rocks around Rustrel and Roussillon will be the first highlight of the day. Just a short ride further, Gordes, doubtlessly one of the most beautiful villages of the Provence will enchant you. Another short distance further, new colors draw your attention: the warm sandstone walls of the famous Romanesque S enanque Abbey contrast with purple rows of lavender, a sight you will never forget! River Nesque cuts itself through the limestone rocks of the area, thereby producing one of the most impressive canyons in France. And man cut a balcony road into the rocks alongside the canyon, hereby producing a fantastic playground for riders. By now, the lush green of the forest contrasting with the blue waters deep down in the gorge literally set the tone. White has not played a role yet, but here we go: the almost blindingly bright top of bold-headed Mont-Ventoux mountain can be conquered via a stunning pass road. The view from up there is amazing.

Arriving in Avignon, today's overnight location, you may feel that your eyes have suffered a sensational overdose - be sure there will be a lot to remember and talk about in the evening, perhaps during a stroll in this historical town which was the seat of the Papacy during the 14th century.

Highlights:

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#1: Lavender fields



The colour, the texture and the scent of a lavender field encapsulate for many the essence of the Provence. Riding a motorcycle through this kind of landscape is truly a multi-sensual experience at its best. Endless fields with rows of the so-called blue gold characterize the region like nothing else. For centuries the plant has been used to make soap and cosmetics. It is one of the key ingredients of the

perfumes produced in the region. It is also part of the Provençal cuisine and lavender honey and lavender sorbets are worth a taste!

#2: Roussillon



Its location at the top of a steep hill, its charming streets and colourful houses, as well as the proximity of outstanding landscape make Roussillon one of the most beautiful villages in Provence. The nearby ochre quarries are made of fantastic pigments ranging from yellow and orange to red. The mining of ochre has left its mark on the facades of Roussillon's houses. A path takes you through an amazing landscape, that was formed both by natural

erosion and human impact.

#3: Sénanque Abbey (Abbaye de Sénanque)



Notre-Dame de Sénanque is a Cistercian abbey founded in 1148. It impresses visitors both with its picturesque location as well as its stunning late Romanesque to early Gothic architecture. In the course of the centuries, the monastery was partly destroyed and the Sénanque Abbey was ransacked by protestant Hungenots. With the exception of only some decades, monks have always lived

at this extraordinary location. Today, they grow lavender and tend honey bees for their livelihood. The abbey is open for tours, you can visit the abbey church, cloisters, the monks' cells, the chapter house, the calefactory and more.

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#4: Gorges de la Nesque



After the Verdon canyon, the one of the Nesque is considered the most spectacular of the Provence. This wild and magnificent gorge can be discovered from a breathtaking balcony road, that will certainly give you a great riding experience. The road provides stunning panoramic views, plenty of tunnels, a scenery with fantastic rocks and - above all - numerous curves. A must-see for a

rider discovering the Provence.

#5: Mont Ventoux



At a height of 6273 ft, Mont Ventoux is the tallest mountain in the region and has been nicknamed the "Giant of Provence". It has gained fame through its use in the Tour de France cycling race. As the name might suggest (Ventoux means windy in French), it can get very windy at the summit, especially with the mistral; wind speeds as high as 320 km/h (200 mph) have been recorded. The road over

the mountain is often closed due to high winds. Mont Ventoux, although geologically part of the Alps, is often considered to be separate from them, due to the lack of mountains of a similar height nearby. The top of the mountain is bare limestone without vegetation or trees, which makes the mountain's barren peak appear to be snow-capped from a distance all year round (its snow cover actually lasts from December to April). Its isolated position ensures that it dominates the entire region and can be seen from many miles away on a clear day.

RIDING DAY 3 : AVIGNON - LA MUSE/MOSTUÉJOULS

Standard Route (266 km / 165 miles)

Today will be characterized by the atmosphere of one of France's most extraordinary regions - the Cevennes. Against a stunning background of steep cliffs, extensive forests and open, steppe-like plateaus, you can discover an amazing wealth of flora and fauna. There is a good chance to see vultures for example - they were reintroduced in the region. The villages with their traditional stone houses amidst the mountainous country provide an exceptional impression.

On our way into the heart of the region, we will soon make our first stop to visit an ancient Carthusian monastery. The next highlight is not too far away - the Bamboo Gardens of the Cevennes will enchant you with their tropical flair. The remaining day will thrill you with a mix of unique landscape and great riding fun. The panorama road "Corniche des Cevennes", the ride up Mount Aigoual with its splendid view, the sparse high plains in the center of the region as well as the gorges cutting through them will contribute to making this an exceptional riding day all the way to tonight's hotel, located in the famous Tarn canyon.

Highlights:

#1: Chartreuse de Valbonne



Founded in 1204, the Carthusian monastery of Valbonne is located at the heart of an exceptional forest in the Provence hills. Valbonne was destroyed and rebuilt several times in the course of its long history. Up until 1901 a community of monks lived in this monastery. From the Conventual Church to the Grand Cloister and after a visit to a monk's cell, one can imagine the life of the Carthusian Order within the site, and discover their universe of silence

and solitude.

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#2: Corniche des Cévennes



The scenic road does not lead to a peak, as it is common in mountain passes, but leads the visitor over several passes, hereby offering great views, an amazing landscape and plenty of riding fun.

The Corniche des Cevennes became famous through a poetic travelogue, which the author Robert Louis Stevenson composed after a twelve-day hike through the Cevennes with a donkey called Modestine. This happened four years before he landed his world success "Treasure Island".

#3: Mont Aigoual



At an elevation of 5141 ft, Mont Aigoual is one of the highest peaks in the massif Central region. It forms part of the watershed between the Mediterranean and Atlantic, six rivers originate here. This is for good reason - frequent rainfall has given the mountain its name: originally Latin "Aigualis" ('the watery one'). On clear days, you get an amazing view from the top, as far as to the Mediterranean

sea and the Alps in far distance.

#4: Gorges de la Jonte



Over millions of years, the river Jonte has carved itself through the hard rocks of the Cevennes to form this amazing canyon, less known than the Tarn canyon, yet well worth visiting. The gorges are very scenic with cliffs and steep forested slopes rising dramatically above the road, with the gorges up to 450 meters deep in places. There are several places with unusual rock formations such as stone

arches, making the canyon a popular destination for climbers, too. Enjoy the views, the landscape and an extraordinary ride!

RIDING DAY 4 : LA MUSE/MOSTUÉJOULS

Standard Route (170 km / 106 miles)

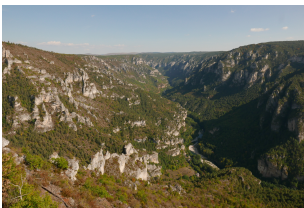
A loop through the Cevennes on your bike - oh rider's heart, what more could you long for?

This region with all its diversity will surely bring us a more than entertaining riding day! Starting off in the heart of the Cevennes, the Tarn canyon, we will follow the natural course of the river for a while and enjoy the curves that imitate its bends and twists, but not for too long though. Across a narrow bridge and up the mountain we head, following a tiny and twisty road with spectacular views down onto the river and the rocks on both sides. Once we have reached the top, a new landscape will unfold in front of us, completely different, sparse and partly steppe-like, yet so impressive. The "Causse", limestone plateaus, are very thinly populated by man, yet display such a rich fauna and flora. Erosion created this unique environment and the water forming the surface also produced a fascinating underground world in the limestone rocks: dripstone caves, the most famous of which we will visit - Aven Armand.

Down we ride from the high plain again and through valleys and gorges on beautiful backcountry roads, at all times being able to admire the small villages with their traditional stone houses. We pass the city of Millau and one more highlight is waiting, and what a highlight it is: The huge bridge "Viaduc de Millau" is certainly one of the most outstanding pieces of road architecture in Europe and the whole world, and yes, we will ride across it!

Highlights:

#1: Gorges du Tarn



The River Tarn emerges at Mont Lozère and runs down the slopes of the Cévennes before crossing 53 kilometers of spectacular canyon landscapes dotted with remarkable sites and amazing views! Dizzying limestone cliffs as tall as 500 meters, the course of the Tarn with its alternating calm waters and rapids and boulders, as well as castles, Romanesque churches and typical villages are all among the

wonderful sights that have made this unspoilt area famous.

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#2: Causse Méjean



stone-house architecture.

The french word "Causse" is used for the limestone plateaus in the massif Central region. These high plains have been inhabited by humans for thousands of years. Erosion has produced an unique landscape, but the sparce soil as well as harsh winters only allowed certain types of agriculture, predomantly a very traditional approach to sheep farming. This cultural tradition is reflected in the structure of the landscape and the very few settlements in

#3: Aven Armand



"Aven" means limestone cave, and Aven Armand was named after Louis Armand, who discovered one of the largest and most impressive limestone cave systems in Europe in 1897. Amongst its highlights is a forest with more than 400 stalagmites, the largest stalagmite known to date in the world as well as a hall big enough to hold Paris' Notre-Dame cathedral.

#4: Viaduc de Millau



monument is something we do not want to miss!

Inaugurated on December 14th, 2004, at a height of 343 m the highest building in France and taller than the Eiffel Tower, slung across the valley of the river Tarn, the Millau Viaduct is currently the longest cable-stayed bridge in the world. Its completion was a technical challenge that required 13 years of planning and preparation and 3 years of construction. Of course riding across this exceptional

RIDING DAY 5 : LA MUSE/MOSTUÉJOULS - CHABRILLAN

Standard Route (296 km / 184 miles)

Today's itinerary will be predominantly formed by three rivers that have shaped and influenced their respective environments. Our morning ride will follow the scenic river Tarn almost all the way to its source on the slopes of Mont Lozère, the highest peak in the Cévennes. The Southern foothills of this mountain will be our playground for a good while on our way east, gifting us with lush green forests, gentle valleys, meandering rivers and plenty of curves, before we enter the realm of the next iconic river - Ardèche. This one gave name to a whole region and formed a canyon, that with its beauty, spectacular limestone formations and splendid viewpoints has made the region a first-class tourist attraction in France. The curves and views alongside the gorge are pure bliss!

River Rhône is waiting for us - the third river shaping our day is much larger and will bring along a different landscape, more open and strongly stamped by the cultivation of wine. On our way North and near the western shores of the Rhône we will ride through the famous "Côtes du Rhône"-wine region before we finish our three-river-ride in the evening.

Highlights:

#1: Caverne du Pont-d'Arc



In 1994, cavers discovered a series of sealed chambers above the river Ardèche, the Chauvet-Pont-d'Arc cave, filled with hundreds of paintings and handprints dating back a brain-scrambling 36,000 years. For millennia, prehistoric people stayed here to hunt and fish. In the cave, they recorded more than 425 Picasso-like renderings of the animals they feared and fed on, from bears to mammoths.

The cave has never been open to public, this was to protect the art from mold on the walls. However, "Caverne du Pont-d'Arc", was opened in 2015. It is the largest cave replica ever built worldwide, presenting information and details taking visitors back to a long gone past.

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#2: Gorges de l'Ardèche



The river Ardèche is a 125 km long river in south-central France, originating in the massif Central and flowing into the river Rhône just North of Orange. The valley of the Ardèche is very beautiful, in particular a 30 km long section known as the Ardèche Gorges. The walls of the river there are limestone cliffs, up to 300 m high and highly scenic. This made the canyon very popular amongst climbers, kayak-

tourists and hikers, and the ride on the Northern rim of the gorge is a unique experience for motorcycle enthusiasts. The most famous feature is a natural 60 m stone arch spanning the river known as the Pont d'Arc (arch bridge).

#3: Côtes du Rhône



If you are into wine, then almost certainly you will have heard of Châteauneuf-du-Pape. This very renowned wine-growing region is part of a much larger area. "Côtes du Rhône" covers an area of 40,300 ha from Vienne in the North to Avignon way down South, producing a crop that is 3 times larger than Beaujolais and almost as vast as

Bordeaux. So after today's ride, why not enjoy an excellent glass of wine, while letting the day's impressions pass revue?

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RIDING DAY 6 : CHABRILLAN - CHAMBÉRY

Standard Route (237 km / 147 miles)

We start our riding day in the plains formed by river Rhône, but if you turn East, you will see a range of mountains, that very promisingly entice every rider's heart - the Vercors mountains - motorcycle paradise! This massif, our playground for half of the day, is part of the French Alpine foothills, and yet, several peaks rise to over 7000 ft of elevation. The high plateau in the centre became a Regional Natural Park in 1970, showing very little human settlement, but a very rich fauna and flora. The landscape with its forests, mountain meadows, deep canyons and rugged rocks is nicknamed French Dolomites - today you will understand why. Perhaps even more impressive: the roads taking us through the region. Until around 150 years ago, the jagged terrain was only accessible on donkey trails. Today, we find roads, and what roads these are! We squeeze ourselves into the mountains and enjoy the ride up to "Col de la Bataille" mountain pass, where we enjoy a great view. Once up there, we will not stay aloft for long, since the rivers have cut impressive gorges into the mountains. "Combe Laval" is the name of one of France's balcony roads, and this one will take your breath away on the way down and high above the gorge. More canyon roads, at times down next to the river, at times at dizzying heights, take us all the way through the Vercors, until we finally descend towards the city of Grenoble.

Our afternoon itinerary leads us through the Chartreuse mountains, less rugged perhaps, but offering a beautiful landscape and excellent riding. Right in the center of this region, Carthusian monks built an impressive monastery, completely secluded and beautifully located in a valley - a perfect place to live a life of tranquility and prayer. Mountain and hill roads with plenty of curves will be our companions all the way to tonight's hotel.

Highlights:

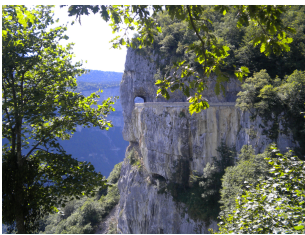
#1: Col de la Bataille (1313m)



The mountain pass "Col de la Bataille", together with neighbouring "Col des Limouches", is one of the few roads enabling access into the Vercors ridge from the West. The origin of its name is doubtful, but one explanation is, that monks from one valley fought those from the other side of the pass (bataille means battle). For us riders, the road up there is not a fight at all, but pure pleasure, with plenty of

sweepers and tighter turns all the way up. Stop and walk up a few meters to the crest above the tunnel at the top, the view from up there onto the surrounding mountains, the Alps in the East and the plains of river Rhône is superb!

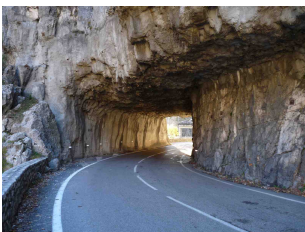
#2: Combe Laval



Undoubtedly France has a large number of balcony roads spectacularly cut into cliffs and running through tunnels at the edge of deep gorges. However, amongst all these, Combe Laval ("Combe" means canyon) is by many considered as one of the most magnificent roads in the French Alps. Constructed between 1861 and 1898, an almost aerial road was built directly onto the cliff, originally serving for transporting timber. Today, it is a first class

point of attraction for cyclists, car tourists, and not to forget, riders.

#3: Gorges de la Bourne



The Vercors Massif is known as "the fortress" or as the "French dolomites" because of its geomorphology. The massif is similar to a plateau: the fall from the massif to its inner valleys is often a few hundred meters high. Rivers cut their way through the limestone and Karst-rocks to create impressive canyons. Man built roads through these canyons, sometimes at the bottom, underneath overhanging rocks and with little daylight, in other places

high up, built into the cliffs and at the edge of the dip. Gorges de la Bourne is one of these marvelous canyons, and the road through it is a marvel, too. It runs as a single track road along the mountainside for some distance with nowhere to pass another vehicle. It is said that here one says a prayer that nobody is coming towards you until the road widens some kilometers further. You on a bike - don't pray - enjoy, it is just spectacular!

#4: Grande Chartreuse



Founded by St Bruno in 1084, Grande Chartreuse monastery is the head monastery of the Carthusian Order. It stands in the heart of the Chartreuse mountains near the village of Saint-Pierre-de-Chartreuse in a magnificent, quiet and unspoiled setting. This haven of peace and tranquillity is accessible on foot, and only the surrounding scenery and the buildings' exterior facades can be admired. Because the monks in the monastery are vowed to silence and prayer, it is not open to the public. However, you can visit the very interesting Grande Chartreuse museum or buy some Chartreuse Liqueur - it is composed of distilled alcohol aged with 130 herbs, plants and flowers. The liqueur, named after the monastery might be a good drink after a good day of riding.



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RIDING DAY 7 : CHAMBÉRY - ARVIEUX

Standard Route (256 km / 159 miles)

Today our bikes and ourselves will be travelling a lot in elevation - the French High Alps are waiting! They form part of Europe's most important mountain ridge - like a huge crescent, the Alps stretch all the way from the Mediterranean, up towards Switzerland alongside the French and Italian border, through Switzerland and Austria to eventually flatten out in the basins near Vienna. The part of this huge mountain chain with the highest peaks and largest glaciers is situated right in the area, where we will be riding today. Although we may only be able to see Mont Blanc - Europe's highest mountain with an elevation of 15,777 ft - from the distance, our itinerary will lead us past other very high peaks, with the road rising up to an altitude of over 8500 ft.

Our starting point is low, however, leaving Chambéry we can already see the peaks in the distance and will set out on our way up. We warm the bikes up on a ride through open valleys and on well-maintained roads, before we tackle our first highlight of the day - Col du Galibier. French word "Col" means mountain pass - and what a pass it is! After countless curves you can enjoy the view on the top - peaks rising to over 13,000 ft, glaciers and high-alpine rock formations will take your breath away. The next col is just around the corner - Col du Lautaret, more curves and more beautiful landscape will be our companions on the way down to Briançon. The mountains are still calling, though, and up we go again - two more spectacular pass roads, Col d'Izoard and Col Agnel will let our hearts beat faster until we reach tonight's destination, Arvieux, a little mountain village, and have a well-earned rest!

Highlights:

#1: Col du Galibier (2642m)



From the vista point of this pass at 2,642 m (8,688 ft.), you have a superb panoramic view of all the peaks reaching up to 3,000 m (13,000 ft) and more. The Col du Galibier was first used in the Tour de France in 1911. The first rider over the summit was Emile Georget, who, together with Paul Duboc and Gustave Garrigou, were the only cyclists not to push their bicycles up the mountain. The original summit was at 2,556 m (8,385 ft) but with the closing of the tunnel in 1976, the tour route now goes over the pass closer to the mountain peak at 2,645 m (8,677 ft). At the south portal of the tunnel, at the edge of the road, there is a memorial to Henri Desgrange, initiator and first director of the Tour de France. Whenever the tour crosses the Col du Galibier, a wreath is laid on the memorial. The "Souvenir Henri Desgrange" is awarded to the first rider, who crosses the summit of the highest mountain in each year's tour. Since 1947, the Col de Galibier has been crossed 31 times by the Tour de France.

#2: Col du Lautaret (2058m)



With its elevation of 2,058 m (6,752 ft), Col du Lautaret is frequently neglected and merely seen as the little sister of neighboring Col du Galibier. However, approaching the pass from the North, the road is spectacular and so are the views from the top. The pass was part of the Tour de France several times and it's open all year round.

#3: Col d'Izoard (2360m)



Rising up to 2,360 m (7,743 ft), the Col d'Izoard is only open during the summer months. It is rated as one of the toughest climbs of the famous Tour de France as the rocky mountainsides that surround the pass are almost bare of vegetation, offering no protection from the searing sun that beats down onto the cyclists as they make their way to the top. Good thing we've got a few extra horsepower.

#4: Col Agnel (2744m)



Col Agnel, at an elevation of 2,744 m (9,003 ft), is a mountain pass between France and Italy. It is the third highest paved mountain pass of the Alps, after Passo dello Stelvio and Col de l'Iseran, and the highest pass in the Alps crossing a border. It is only open for 3-4 months during summer. It is one of the many locations suggested as the route taken by Hannibal in his march with elephants, to attack Rome at the start of the Second Punic War. A

memorial tablet, mounted on a rock on the French side, commemorates the event. The road can be narrow in places, but fortunately, usually, there is little traffic since the pass is not important for transit.

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RIDING DAY 8 : ARVIEUX - BARCELONNETTE

Standard Route (222 km / 138 miles)

If you have fun riding high mountain passes, and if you are into collecting these passes, then today is a good day for you. "Col" means pass - so you might become a real "Col-lector"!

We leave tiny Arvieux and ride towards the village of Guillestre. The road on the way there is a first real highlight of the day, leading through a narrow canyon known as the Combe de Queyras, that occasionally narrows to a mere fissure. From Guillestre onward, the day will be a constant up and down, something a motorcycle rider is actually very happy about. So up Col de Vars, down again, then up Col de Larche (or Colle della Maddalena in Italian), where we cross the border to spend a little time in Italy. Not much time to train our Italian language skills, though, since the next mountain pass, Col de la Lombarde takes us back into France. One more is waiting: Col de la Bonette, a more than worthy last highlight of the day. A little side loop at the summit will allow us to ascend to a breathtaking altitude of 9,212 ft (2808 m). Happily one last time we ride down, through countless curves, all the way to Barcelonnette.

Highlights:

#1: Château Queyras (Queyras Castle)



This fortress complex was built in the 14th century. With its strategic location at the entrance to the Durance valley, it offered the inhabitants at the time perfect protection against enemy attacks. In the 17th century, the chateau was expanded and served as a military base until 1967.

#2: Combe du Queyras



Between the villages of Guillestre and Château-Queyras, the river Guil cut a deep canyon into the Queyras mountains. The road leading through the gorge is literally carved into the limestone rocks, high above the river, that shines from tourquis to deep blue way down below. The canyon is very popular amongst canoeists and rafters, too.

#3: Route des Grandes Alpes



The Route des Grandes Alpes (Great Alpine Road) is a 684 km long route through the French Alps. This alpine road trip takes you from lake Geneva to the Mediterranean, including 21 of the most beautiful pass roads and perceived 20,000 curves. The construction of the route started in 1909 in order of the French Touring Club. In that period, the Alps still were an isolated region within France, with poor access possibilities. The construction of the route was not only an opening to the outside world for the mountain people, but also an opportunity for the upcoming tourism to discover this area with great cultural and natural heritage. The construction was finished in 1937, with the opening of the Col de l'Iseran.

#4: Col de Larche / Colle della Maddalena



Col de Larche (Italian: Colle della Maddalena) crosses the border between France and Italy. The pass road has two faces: whereas the Northwestern (i.e. French) ramp shows a fairly open and quick outlay with good tarmac, the Italian part is narrower, more challenging and includes 14 switchbacks. Hence, on this one you can enjoy both the tight curves as well as sweeping sections. Under its earlier name - "Col de l'Argentière" - it historically linked Lyon with Italy. The Col de l'Argentière was in the possession of the house of Savoy from 1388 to 1713, offering an easy route between Piedmont and its outlying valley of Barcelonnette. This gave the pass an important economic role at the time.

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#5: Col de la Lombarde (2350m)



Col de la Lombarde (or Colle della Lombardia) is an interesting and light traffic passage across the French-Italian border and the main ridge of the Maritime Alps. The route is loaded with curves and switchbacks and is partly narrow (single lane). The summit area with its sparse vegetation shows high-alpine surroundings and an impressive panorama. Not far down the South ramp and on the French side you find Isola 2000, a typical skiing resort.

#6: Cime de la Bonette



From the Col de la Bonette, the fourth highest paved pass in the Alps, a loop leads around the Cime de la Bonette and rises to 2,802 metres. Many see it as the highest asphalt pass in the Alps, but this is not true as this loop is not a proper pass but a panoramic road. Also, among all asphalted roads of the Alps, including the non-passes, it "only" takes the second place, number one is in Austria and provides access to a glacier ski area. Tragic. Nevertheless, the short route around the summit and the viewpoint at the summit itself offer breathtaking views over the French Alps and the memorial stone at the highest point is a must for all selfie photographers.

RIDING DAY 9 : BARCELONNETTE - VENCE

Standard Route (221 km / 137 miles)

What a diverse and entertaining day lies ahead of us: we set course and head south, inhaling the odour of the Maritime Alps for some time in the morning and gradually picking up the scent of the Mediterranean approaching on the horizon, as the hours go by.

Col de la Cayolle is our first destination and the road up there is spectacular, leading through a canyon first and progressively taking us up into a high-alpine vegetation surrounded by beautiful views. On our descent on the southern slope we can already feel the change of climate and atmosphere, the influence of the nearby ocean cannot be ignored. Lush green vegetation and superb backcountry roads take us into the stunning Gorges du Cians, a gorge cutting through deep red rock, a true nature spectacle. Culture will not fall short either, though, our next stop is at a chapel, La Madone d'Utelle, a pilgrim's place with an interesting origin, but above all located beautifully high up on a rock. From here we can almost overlook today's itinerary - the peaks of Maritime Alps on one side and the coast of the Mediterranean on the other. Alongside romantic rivers we head on south and eventually make it to Vence. This town combines the charm of a historical village with an exceptionally mild micro-climate, hence a perfect place to enjoy a drink after a more than entertaining riding day!

Highlights:

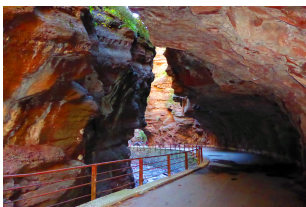
#1: Col de la Cayolle (2326m)



Despite the partly poor surface conditions and narrow sections, the Col de la Cayolle is one of the most beautiful and varied pass roads in the Western Alps in terms of landscape. Just South of Barcelonnette, the road takes you through the Gorges du Bachelard, a tight canyon. Higher up, the scenery changes, first into a surrounding with alpine forest and rivers coming down on both sides, then near the top, into a rocky high-alpine setting. In the early 1900s, for military reasons, the old mule trail over Cayolle was the first to be turned into a road.

BEST OF SOUTHERN FRANCE

#2: Gorges du Cians



The deep gorge carved through the mountains by the River Cians undoubtedly is a first-class natural sight. It is made all the more spectacular by the contrast of the deep red of the exposed rock and the lush green vegetation in the canyon. The river descends considerably, by 5,250 ft in just 15 miles between the villages of Beuil and Touet-sur-Var. The narrowest and most spectacular part of the canyon is at Pra d'Astier, just in the middle between the two villages. Mostly wide enough, the road gets quite narrow in the tunnels, so pay attention to oncoming traffic.

#3: La Madone d'Utelle



The sanctuary of La Madone d'Utelle is located high up on a hill, offering a 360 degrees view over the French Riviera from Nice to Antibes and even further towards the mountains of Alpes Maritimes. The road up there is nice and twisty too, offering superb views of the valley below. The story says, that in the year 850, the Virgin Mary appeared to two sailors, who were almost shipwrecked during a huge storm. In order to commemorate their salvage, they erected a sanctuary at a place Mary had shown them inland. The place gained a reputation amongst the population and became a pilgrim's destination. The sacred building was enlarged over the centuries, the current church dates back to 1806.

#4: Gorges de la Vésubie




Originating high in the Alps of the Mercantour National Park, the Vésubie River winds its way through its namesake gorge, until it joins the Var River and little later flows into the Mediterranean. Enjoy the ride alongside the river, take a picture of the blue waters and green flora, have a look at the ancient stone bridge crossing the river or even take a swim and cool down in the Vésubie River.

BEST OF SOUTHERN FRANCE

#5: Vence



The town of Vence is only about 10 km away from the coast, but you feel like being in a completely different world. It is a quiet, little place in a nice hilly landscape. The main attraction is a chapel (1947/51) designed by Henri Matisse. Also the old part of Vence, which forms a network of old streets behind partly still existing gates from the 15th century, is quite interesting. On the Peyra square, the former place of the „Forum Romanum“ built by the Roman Empire, the cathedral of this little town can be found. Vence already had its first bishop in the 4th century!



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