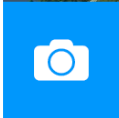


DESTINATIONS

# Chamonix, France: An Alpine outdoor adventure paradise for every sport, skill and budget

**Jerry Soverinsky** Special to USA TODAY

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16 photos

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## Chamonix, France: An outdoor sports paradise in the French Alps

Sick of stifling summer heat? You'll feel a little cooler after looking at these photos of people climbing, biking and paddling in the French Alps.

For the novice or even competent adventurer, visiting a dedicated outdoor adventure destination can breed insecurity.

There's only so many carabiners (climbing), fluid suspension forks (mountain biking), carbon fiber wheels (road cycling) and spandex (power shopping) that one can encounter before introspection sets in and you start wondering, am I strong enough? Am I fast enough? Is my credit card limit high enough?

Not so in Chamonix, France. Located just over an hour's drive or train ride southeast from Geneva – or six hours southwest from Paris – the Alpine town straddles the Swiss and Italian borders, nestled at the southern base of Mont Blanc, the highest mountain in the Alps. For complete area, visit the [Chamonix Mont-Blanc website](#).

Despite world-class hiking, rock climbing, skiing, ice climbing, mountain biking, electric biking, paragliding, whitewater rafting, high-end shopping and even summer luge-ing (!), there's a quiet confidence and humility in Chamonix that make everyone feel welcome here, freeing them on an uninhibited pursuit of their bucket list of active experiences.



Luge: It's not just for Winter Olympians in spandex. RAPHOZ Pierre/Chamonix Tourist Office



The first thing you notice when you arrive in Chamonix are myriad small groups of purposeful activity. Hikers march in sync, en route to one of the dozens of well-marked trails; mountain climbers arrive at a gondola station, pick axes in hand, ready to conquer a rock or ice challenge; and cyclists set psych themselves up to conquer the famous mountain passes of the Tour de France. The three-week race heads into the Alps for its final three mountain stages [beginning Thursday, July 25](#). That's where the winner – and [possibly the first French champion since 1985](#) – [will likely emerge before heading for the finish line in Paris on July 28](#).



 50 photos

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## Tour de France 2019: Best images from the premier cycling race

Take a look at the best images from the 2019 edition of the Tour de France, which started in Brussels, Belgium and finishes in Paris.

While one can wander aimlessly in Chamonix, most come with a plan in mind, maximizing their time. And for those less strategic, a knowledgeable tourist office staff is well-versed in nearly all aspects of the area's attractions and facilities and ready to lend a hand, while hiking and climbing experts at the neighboring high-mountain office provide complimentary information and advice, including preferred routing, weather alerts and the like. Accommodations are bountiful in every price and luxury category, from no-frills camping and huts to legendary five-star resorts.



For those seeking downtime, fret not: Dining, drinking and Euro-people watching are prominent in the town's lively main square and surrounding streets, where homey restaurants, bars and gelato stands cater to nearly every taste and budget.

With its glass floor, the attraction allows visitors to peer over a 3,200-foot precipice.



The Cosmo Jazz Festival attracts visitors from around the world, who enjoy eight days of music set amidst the most dramatic alpine scenery in Europe. *Chamonix Tourist Office*

Even for those not set on personally navigating gradients, pitches and boils, Chamonix's social calendar is packed hosting global events that attract the world's fittest and most ambitious. A recent four-week period includes the four-day [Marathon du Mont-Blanc](#) and its 10,000+ participants from 80 countries; Cosmo Jazz, a free, eight-day music festival staged among Chamonix's most dramatic high altitude locations, including atop 12,605-foot Aiguille du Midi, a mountain in the Mont Blanc massif; and the [Climbing World Cup](#), one of the most prestigious wall climbing competitions in the world, with its inspiring backdrop of ... what else ... Mont Blanc.



No matter your pursuit, Mont Blanc stands majestically above Chamonix, a focal point for hikers and climbers from around the world. A comprehensive transport system (trains, gondolas, lifts) supports visitors as they explore more than 170 routes along 200+ miles of well-maintained trails and paths, culminating with the Tour of Mont Blanc, an epic 105-mile trek traversing up to 11 passes with a collective height gain of more than 32,000 feet (the full tour passes through Italy, Switzerland and France and takes up to 12 days).

For those longing for water thrills, whitewater rafting excursions propel visitors down the gushing Arve River, a glacial torrent fed mainly by France's largest glacier, Mer de Glace.

Resist the temptation to squeeze in Chamonix as part of a whirlwind France vacation; the town is fully deserving of four days minimum to experience the Alps and area attractions. It's welcoming and accessible – no matter your abilities or credit card limit.



With its glass floor, Step Into the Void allows visitors to peer over a 3,200-foot precipice from Aiguille du Midi. *Bertrand DelaPierre/Chamonix Tourist Office*



Rafting: Glacial melt delivers a thrilling whitewater rafting experience along the Arve River, with excursions