

ROUTE DES GRANDES ALPES

FROM THE FRENCH ALPS TO THE CÔTE D'AZUR

Winding its way from Lake Geneva to the Mediterranean, through quaint ancient villages, glitzy ski resorts, and roadside bar-café oases in log chalets, the Route des Grandes Alpes is the grande dame of the Western Alps.

Tucked in a corner of Rhône-Alpes in southeastern France, Thonon-les-Bains is the source of the Route des Grandes Alpes. Here, gazing across the twinkling waters of croissant-shaped Lake Geneva to the green hills of Switzerland's Vaud region, generations of riders have begun their passage. They set off along the ridges of the mythical French Alps, and are destined for the beach umbrellas, red Maseratis, and warm, lapping waves of the Côte d'Azur

684 km (425 mi) away—namely Menton, the quintessential Riviera commune nestled between Nice and the Italian border.

The Route is as old as cycling itself. With two-wheeled pursuits emerging as a European health craze in the 1880s, the alpine endurance races of the bicycle tourism—promoting Touring Club de France (co-founded by Paul de Vivie, who invented the derailleur, founded *Le Cycliste* magazine, and produced France's first bicycle, La Gauloise) soon >

→ D902 between Guillestre and Izoard, Parc Naturel Régional du Queyras.

