

GOOD TO KNOW

START/FINISH

Thonon-les-Bains, Haute-Savoie, France  
Nice, Côte d’Azur, France

SEASON

July to September is best. Mid-July to mid-August is busy as it coincides with the French national holiday period. September is quieter and sometimes has better weather, with a lower risk of thunderstorms.

ACCOMMODATIONS

There are plenty of mountain refuges. The GR5 passes through many villages and towns, and most have a selection of *gîtes*, plus hotels and campsites. Book well in advance. Low-profile bivouacking is possible along most of the trail if quiet and discreet. Tents are banned in the Vanoise National Park (except near huts). In the Mercantour National Park, bivouacking is allowed between 7:00 p.m. and 9:00 a.m. if more than an hour from the park border or a road.

HIGHLIGHTS

- 1. The view over the Mont Blanc Massif from the Aiguilles Rouges
- 2. Lac du Grattaleu, a beautiful mountain tarn in the Vanoise National Park
- 3. View of the Grande Casse on the way through the Vanoise
- 4. The castle of Château-Queyras
- 5. Reaching the Mediterranean shore at Nice

HELPFUL HINTS

WHAT TO BRING

Keep your pack light. For waterproofs, some prefer a poncho to save further weight. Sun protection is essential, as is a sleeping bag liner for huts. If wild camping, carry the lightest tent or tarp you can find. A bivvy bag is useful for keeping dew off your sleeping bag.



FOOTWEAR

You’ll be walking for a month in whatever shoes you choose, so make sure that they fit and you’re comfortable wearing them on rugged terrain. Due to the heat, lightweight, quick-drying trail shoes are recommended. If crampons are needed, make sure they fit safely.

NAVIGATION

The GR5 is fully waymarked, mostly by white-and-red GR trail markings, but navigation is not always straightforward at high elevations; topographic maps, a compass, and/or GPS are recommended.

SAFETY

Lingering snow on high passes is a key hazard early in the season, and can be problematic late into the summer—check conditions before hiking, and if necessary, change your route or carry an ice axe and crampons.

SUPPLIES

There are frequent villages and towns along the way, so you’ll rarely need to carry food for more than two or three days.

WATER

Some sections of the GR5 are very dry. Carry a lightweight filter and capacity for several liters. Always top off at huts and campsites.

BONUS TRACK

THROUGH THE VANOISE

Those who wish to see the big peaks of the Vanoise up close can cut straight through the middle rather than skirting its edge. The GR55 travels for 55 km (34 mi) through the national park from Tignes to Modane, bringing hikers up close and personal with the Grande Casse.

BACKGROUND

THE GRANDE RANDONNÉE PATHS

The GR5 is one of over 100 GR routes. Most are in France, the Netherlands, Spain, Germany, and Belgium, and they vary in length and difficulty. Some are segments of even longer European long-distance paths (E-paths); the GR5, for example, is part of the longer E2. The GR paths were established from 1947 as a response to the introduction of French paid summer holidays in the 1930s.

FLORA & FAUNA

THE ALPINE MARMOT

Among the many plants and animals that call the Western Alps home, the Alpine marmot, *Marmota marmota*, is perhaps the one you will see the most—and is one of the most evocative creatures of these mountains. These sturdy, ground-dwelling squirrels evolved during the Ice Age and today live in the high meadows and forests, whistling and trilling to each other over long distances.

