

Vacations in the French Vosges

by

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1. Getting there

When the internet search brought up Vosges as a summer and winter holiday destination, I had to open my map of Europe to find out where it was. Split between France's Lorraine and Alsace regions and only six hours by car from Calais, it seemed like an ideal weekend getaway. Not too many Brits yet, but plenty of French, Swiss and German tourists, as in the Vosges, you are no more than a couple of hours away from their borders and the Alps.

The first five hours of the drive is all motorway and has something of the west country in it, but for the last hour you get off the motorway and quite simply fall in love with the mountain panoramas and the lake views. Alternatively, you can fly out Friday evening from Gatwick with AirFrance to Strasbourg. The flight is just over an hour, and the drive from Strasbourg to the Vosges is a further hour and a half. For your return journey, leave on Monday morning and you will be in London, on time for work.

2. Winter activities

Winter in the Vosges is great! Having skied in Kitzbuhel, Les 2 Alpes, Courchevel and Whistler, I was half expecting to be disappointed by the skiing, but was pleasantly surprised by excellent snow and a good range of pistes that kept my girlfriend and me fully occupied from December to February. Weekends are very busy with people, but you get more space to yourself during the week. And why not try out 100km of cross-country tracks to get over the Christmas lunch.

3. Summer activities

In summer, the mountains get transformed into luscious nature reserves, which are a heaven for mountain bikers, road cyclists and walkers. Sun seekers and water sports lovers get to share the three crystal clear mountain lakes. Two of the lakes - Longemer and Retournemer, do not allow any petrol based boats, so are ideal for swimmers. The largest of the lakes - Gérardmer, is perfect for kayak, wind surfer and dinghy sailing.

4. Dining out

Aside from sports activities, the area has a super selection of auberges that serve up delicious food at very reasonable prices - compared to London anyway, good value piste restaurants and in Gerardmer there are plenty of late night restaurants, bars and even a couple of night clubs. As you would expect from France, Munster - the local cheese, and the local wines like Pinot Noir and Gewurztraminer are all too easy to over-indulge in.