

ALSACE

Alsace is the fourth-smallest of the 26 regions of France in land area, and the smallest in metropolitan France. Alsace is located on France's eastern border and on the west bank of the upper **Rhine** adjacent to Germany and Switzerland. The political, economic and cultural capital as well as largest city of Alsace is **Strasbourg**. Due to that city being the seat of dozens of international organizations and bodies, Alsace is politically one of the most important regions in **the European Union**.

The name "Alsace" derives from the Germanic Ell-sass, meaning "Seated on the Ill", a river in Alsace. Although Alsace is historically a German dialect speaking region, today most Alsatians speak French, the official language of the country they have been a part of for most of the past three centuries. However, about 39% of the local adult population, but probably less than 10% of the children, are still fluent in the Alsatian language.

Alsace has an area of 8,283 km², making it the smallest région of metropolitan **France**. It is almost four times longer than it is wide, corresponding to a plain between the Rhine in the east and the Vosges mountains in the west.

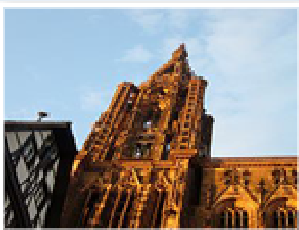
It includes the départements of **Haut-Rhin** and **Bas-Rhin** (known previously as Sundgau and Nordgau). It borders Germany on the north and the east, Switzerland and **Franche-Comté** on the south, and **Lorraine** on the west.

Several valleys are also found in the région. Its highest point is the Grand Ballon in Haut-Rhin, which reaches a height of 1426 m.





The château du Haut-Koenigsbourg is located at **Orschwiller** in **the Vosges mountains** just west of **Sélestat**. The castle is nestled at a strategic location on a high hill overlooking the Alsatian plain; as a result it was used by successive powers from the Middle Ages until the Thirty Years' War when it was abandoned. In 1900 it was restored under the direction of Emperor Wilhelm II. Today it is a major tourist attraction, located on **the Alsace wine route**.



Strasbourg Cathedral or **the Cathedral of Our Lady of Strasbourg** is a Roman Catholic cathedral. Although considerable parts of it are still in Romanesque architecture, it is widely considered to be among the finest examples of high, or late, Gothic architecture. Erwin von Steinbach is credited for major contributions from 1277 to his death in 1318. At 142 metres, it was the world's tallest building from 1647 to 1874, when it was surpassed by St. Nikolai's Church, Hamburg. Today it is the sixth-tallest church in the world. Described by Victor Hugo as a "gigantic and delicate marvel", the cathedral is visible far across the plains of **Alsace** and can be seen from as far off as the Vosges mountains or **the Black Forest** on the other side of **the Rhine**.

Mont Sainte-Odile, the holy mountain of **Alsace**, became an important place for pilgrimages. There are remains of an Iron Age hillfort, called 'pagan wall' (Mur Païen) on the mountain as well. It is over 10 km long and in parts still up to 3 m high. The wall was rebuilt in Roman times. The Holy Roman Emperor Frederick I had the church and monastery rebuilt. The Abbess Relindis established a school for the daughters of ruling families here. Herrad of Landsberg (1167-1195), another abbess at Ste. Odile, was the author of an important theological work called the Hortus Deliciarum.

Ouvrage Schoenenbourg is a **Maginot Line** fortification. It is located in the **Hunspach** and **Ingolsheim** districts, in the French département of Bas-Rhin, forming part of the Secteur Fortifié de Haguenau (Fortified Sector of Haguenau); Sous-Secteur de Hoffen (Sub-Sector of Hoffen), facing Germany. At the east end of the Alsace portion of the Maginot Line, its neighbor is the gros ouvrage Hochwald. It is the largest such fortification open to the public in **Alsace**. Officially recorded as an historical monument, it retains all its original structural elements.



Wasenbourg, located 400 metres in height on the northwest hillside of **Reisberg**, is a ruined castle in the North Vosges. Although its origins are fairly obscure, the historians attribute generally its construction, by 1273, to Conrad de Lichtenberg, then bishop of Strasbourg.

Ungersheim's Ecomusée is an open air museum showing: 70 old, rebuilt alsatian-style houses; many workshops of local traditional crafts with working craftspeople; the "Eden Palladium, a unique museum of old-timer carrousel and attractions still working.



Le Grand Ballon is the apex of **the Vosges mountains**, located 25 kilometres northwest of **Mulhouse**. Some still call it Ballon de Guebwiller, after the name of the closest city, Guebwiller, located 8 km to the east. It is 1423.7 metres high, according to the Institut Géographique National (IGN). The well known **Route des Crêtes** (French for road of the peaks) circumvents the mountain top around east, crossing a mountain pass at an altitude of 1343 m, between the Markstein winter sports station and

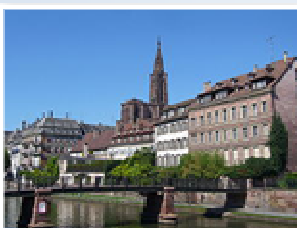
Hartmannswillerkopf rocky spur.

The Route des Vins d'Alsace (Wine route of Alsace) is an approximately 170 km long road, crossing the main wine producing areas of the region. From north to south, 67 communes are crossed by the Route.

Other places to visit:

- **Cité du Train.** Visit the Cité du Train or French Railway Museum in Mulhouse. Through the 15,000 m² of the largest train museum in France, discover the history of French railway.
- **Cité de l'automobile** - National Motor Museum - Collection Schlumpf - Mulhouse
- Discover the fantastic Fritz Schlumpf collection: Bugatti, Rolls Royce, Ferrari, Hispano Suiza. They're all there, in an area covering 17,000 m², 400 exceptional cars from amongst the most famous. There are giant screens, simulators, reconstructions truer than real life, games.
- **The Struthof**, the only concentration and extermination camp on the French territory during WWII.

Cities:



Strasbourg is the capital and principal city of the **Alsace region** in north-eastern France. Located close to the border with Germany, it is the capital of **the Bas-Rhin department**. Strasbourg's historic city centre, the Grande Île ("Grand Island"), was classified a World Heritage site by UNESCO in 1988, the first time such an honor was placed on an entire city centre.



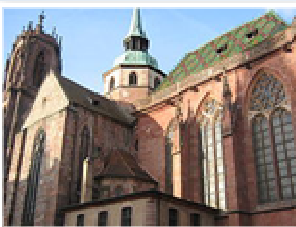
Mulhouse is a city and commune in eastern France, close to the Swiss and German borders. An industrial town nicknamed "the French Manchester", Mulhouse is also the main seat of the **Upper Alsace University**.



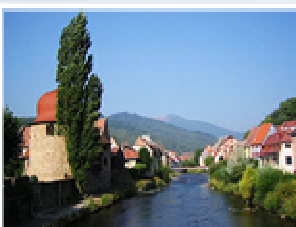
Colmar is the home town of the painter and engraver Martin Schongauer and the sculptor Frédéric Bartholdi, who designed the Statue of Liberty. The city is renowned for its well preserved old town, its numerous architectural landmarks and its museums, among which **the Unterlinden Museum**.



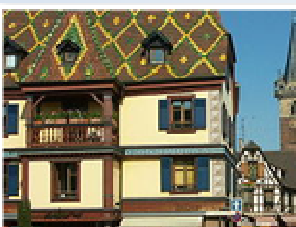
Haguenau is a commune in the Bas-Rhin department, of which it is a sub-prefecture. It is second in size only to **Strasbourg**, some 30 km (19 mi) to the south. To the north of the town, the Forêt de Haguenau is the largest undivided forest in the country.



Sélestat is located in central **Alsace**, 22 km (14 mi) north of **Colmar** and 47 km (29 mi) south of Strasbourg, on the left bank of the Ill River. Sélestat is near the Alsace wine route, and other notable sites such as the Château du Haut-Kœnigsbourg. The city is one of the richest and most varied in terms of architecture among the smaller cities of Alsace. Most remarkable are the romanesque church Sainte-Foy and the gothic St. George's Church, the baroque clock tower (1618) and the neo-medieval water tower.



Thann is situated at the foot of **the Vosges mountains**, at the mouth of the valley of **the Thur River**. The Thur runs through the middle of the town. Thann is 43 km from **Colmar** and 21 km from **Mulhouse**. Despite sustaining heavy damage in World War I and World War II, Thann contains several old buildings and monuments of significance.



Obernai is an important center of wine and beer production as well as a touristic destination. The historical wine of the city is called **the Vin du Pistolet** in reference to a local legend.

TO DO

A drive or bike where **the Vosges mountains** meet **the Rhine valley** is a highlight of a visit to Alsace.

Christmas markets in Kaysersberg, Strasbourg, Mulhouse and Colmar.

INFORMATION

Tourism Office of Alsace

Comité Régional du Tourisme d'Alsace
20A, rue Berthe Molly
BP 50247
68005 Colmar cedex
France

Phone : +33 (0)3 89 24 73 50

Fax : +33 (0)3 89 24 73 51