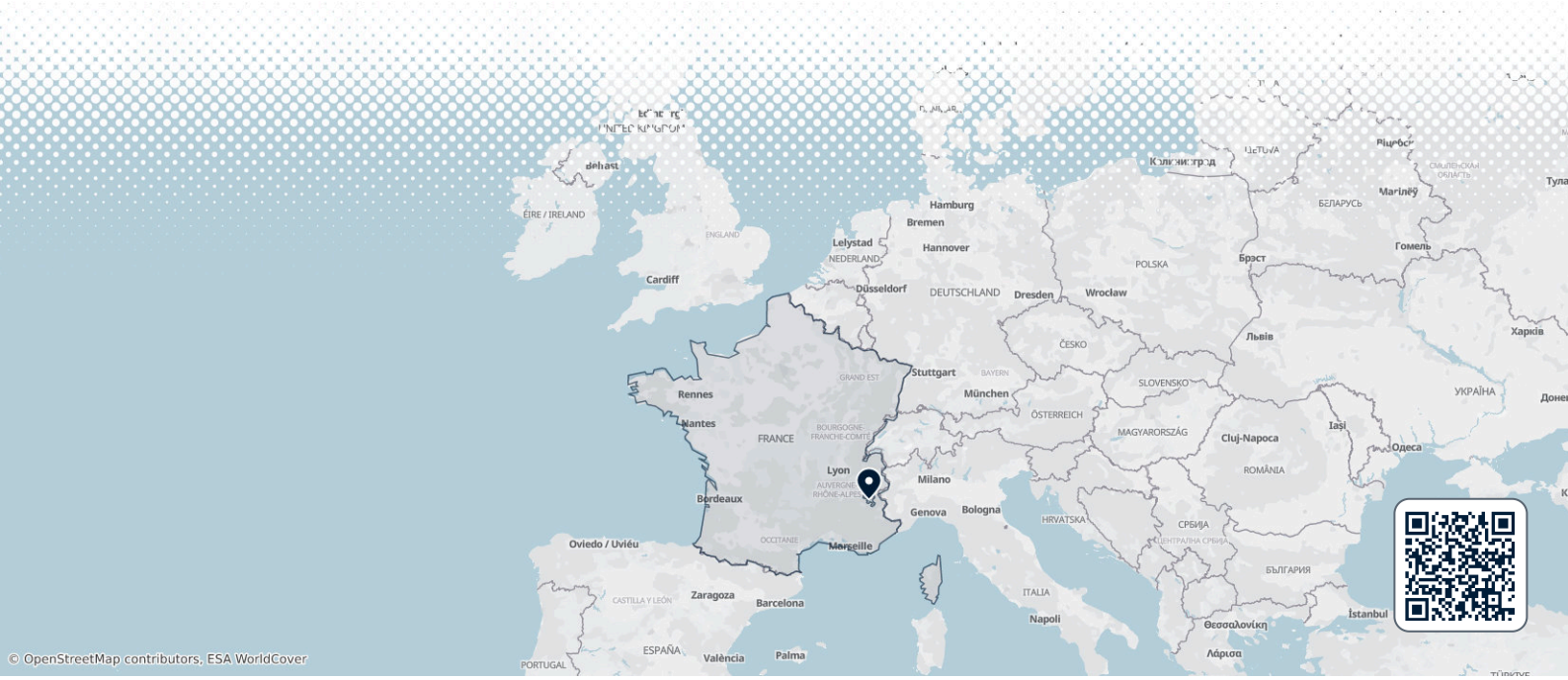


Parc national des Écrins (cœur)

Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur · France

TRAVEL GUIDE

Tripomatic



Overview

Écrins National Park is a high-mountain national park in the French Alps. It was created in 1973 and covers a wide range of glaciers, rock walls, alpine meadows and deep valleys. Its highest point is 4,102 m.

The park suits hikers, climbers and anyone who wants quiet mountain scenery. There are no ski-resort towns inside the core, and roads are few. Most visitors walk from valley trailheads to day-hike viewpoints or sleep in mountain huts. Marmots, chamois and ibex are common, and golden eagles and bearded vultures live here.

When to visit

July and August are the best months. Trails are mostly snow-free, huts are staffed and the high lifts run. June and September can be good, but snow can remain on high trails and nights are cold.

Winter is quiet. Most huts and roads are closed, and the park core is for ski touring and snowshoe routes. The glacier lifts at La Grave run in summer, from early June to mid-September, and again for the ski season from mid-December to early May. Plan hut stays ahead for July and August.

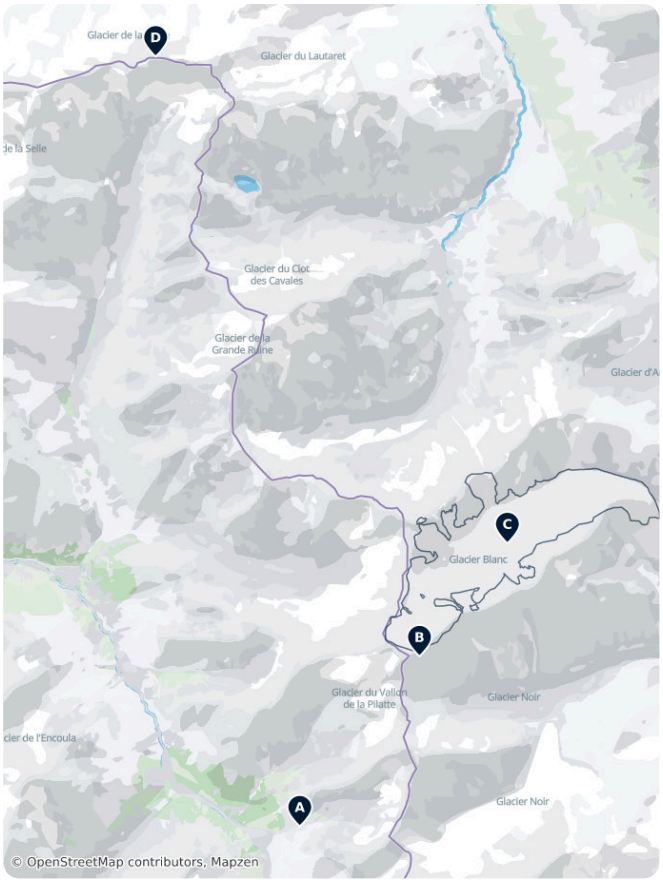
MONTH	CONDITIONS	DAY °C avg / max	NIGHT °C avg / min	
January	Poor Poor for hiking	-1° / 3° Feels like -6°	-10° / -17°	Dry air · Calm winds
February	Poor Poor for hiking	0° / 5° Feels like -5°	-9° / -19°	Dry air · Calm winds
March	Poor Poor for hiking	3° / 10° Feels like -1°	-6° / -14°	Dry air · Calm winds
April	Poor Poor for hiking	8° / 15° Feels like 4°	-1° / -7°	13 rainy days · Dry air · Calm winds
May	Fair Fair for hiking	13° / 18° Feels like 10°	3° / -3°	17 rainy days · Dry air · Calm winds
June	Good Good for hiking	17° / 23°	7° / 1°	14 rainy days · Dry air · Calm winds
July	Great Great for sightseeing	19° / 25°	9° / 3°	Dry air · Calm winds
August	Great Great for sightseeing	20° / 26°	9° / 3°	Dry air · Calm winds
September	Good Good for hiking	16° / 22°	5° / -1°	Dry air · Calm winds
October	Fair Fair for hiking	12° / 18° Feels like 8°	2° / -4°	12 rainy days · Dry air · Calm winds
November	Poor Poor for hiking	4° / 12° Feels like 0°	-4° / -12°	13 rainy days · Dry air · Calm winds
December	Poor Poor for hiking	0° / 6° Feels like -4°	-8° / -17°	12 rainy days · Dry air · Calm winds

Best months: July, August

Climate data: NASA POWER (MERRA-2) · 1996–2025

Top sights

- A Parc national des Écrins is the whole park, with more than 700 km of maintained trails and about 30 mountain huts. The park runs visitor centres (Maisons du Parc) in several valley villages, and the official website has route and hut information.
- B Barre des Écrins is the highest summit in the park at 4,102 m. It is the only 4,000 m peak in France outside the Mont Blanc massif. It was first climbed in 1864 and is a major mountaineering goal.
- C Glacier Blanc is the longest glacier in the Écrins massif. A hut trail runs along its side. It is one of the most popular hikes in the park, and the glacier has retreated a lot over the last century.
- D La Grave - La Meije is the jagged ridge above the village of La Grave, at 3,983 m. It is the second-highest peak in the park. You can see it from the road at the Col du Lautaret and from the village.
- **Valgaudemar** is a long, steep-sided valley on the south-west side of the park. It has waterfalls, hanging valleys and fewer crowds than Vallouise or the Oisans.
- **Vénéon valley** leads to many climbing huts and high peaks. The hamlet of La Bérarde at its end was largely destroyed by a flood in June 2024, and access stayed closed in 2026. Check current rules before you go.



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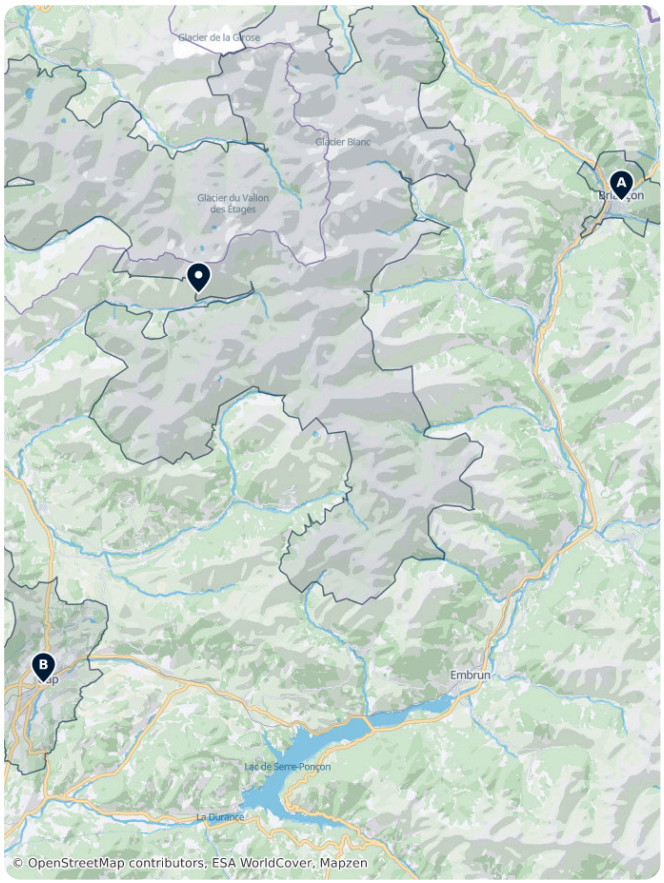
What to experience

- **Stay in a mountain hut.** Most huts serve a hot evening meal and breakfast with a bed in a shared dormitory. Book ahead for July and August, especially for the huts below the high peaks.
- **Walk part of the Tour de l'Oisans (GR 54).** This long-distance trail runs through the park, and you can walk a section of it with hut stays.
- **Look for wildlife.** Marmots are easy to see on alpine meadows in summer. Chamois and ibex are often seen near rock bands, and golden eagles and bearded vultures fly over the high ridges.
- **Visit the ice cave at 3,200 m.** It is cut into the Girose glacier, reached by two cable cars from La Grave. It is open in summer and in winter, so check dates before you go.
- **Climb with a mountain guide.** The guides' office in La Grave runs glacier walks and summit ascents for people without alpine experience.

Day trips

Most visitors stay near the park. These places work as a half-day or full-day break from the valleys.

- **Col du Lautaret** is a 2,058 m mountain pass on the road between Grenoble and Briançon. It has big views of the Meije and an alpine botanical garden that opens in summer.
- A Briançon is a walled mountain town with fortifications by *Vauban* that are on the UNESCO World Heritage list. It is about 30 minutes by car from Vallouise.
- **Embrun and Lac de Serre-Ponçon** is a historic small town beside a large reservoir with swimming and sailing. It is about 45 minutes by car from Vallouise.
- B Gap is the nearest larger town on the southern side and the park's headquarters. It is about 1 hour by road from the Valgaudemar valley.



Getting there

- **By air**: The main airport is Lyon Saint-Exupéry (LYS), about 200 km from La Grave. Take a coach or train to Grenoble and continue by bus. Grenoble Alpes-Isère airport has limited, mostly seasonal winter flights. Turin (TRN) is another option, by train to Oulx and onward to Briançon.
- **By train**: An overnight Intercités train runs from Paris to Briançon in about 11.5 hours. Grenoble and Gap also have train stations. No train goes into the park valleys.
- **By bus**: ZOU regional coach line 55 links Grenoble and Briançon in about 3 hours. It stops at Le Bourg-d'Oisans, La Grave and the Col du Lautaret. Timetables change by season, so check before you travel. La Grave access and bus information
- **Main bases**: Vallouise is the base on the Briançon side. Le Bourg-d'Oisans and La Grave are the bases on the Grenoble side. Saint-Firmin is the base in Valgaudemar, on the Gap side.

Getting around

- **Car**: A car is the easiest way to reach valley trailheads. Public transport inside the valleys is limited and mostly runs in summer.
- **On foot**: Trails are the only way into the park core. Roads stop at the valley heads, and hut-to-hut routes continue from there.
- **Road damage**: Two key access roads have been damaged by floods. The Vénéon valley road to La Bérarde has restricted access, and in summer 2026, from 5 July to 30 August, car access to the upper valley was limited and a paid shuttle served it. Rules may change. A flood in late August 2026 destroyed most of the road from Ailefroide to Pré de Madame Carle, the usual start of the Glacier Blanc hike. Officials say the paved road will not be rebuilt. An unpaved track or shuttle is being studied, so check the park website for current access to the Glacier Blanc trailhead. Écrins National Park
- **Cable cars**: The Glaciers de la Meije lifts in La Grave rise from the village to 3,200 m in two stages. They run in summer and for the winter ski season.

Driving

- **Is a car worth it?**: Yes, for reaching valley trailheads. The valleys are far apart and buses are limited. You do not need a car once you start walking.
- **Mountain roads**: Valley roads are narrow and steep. The D1091 over the Col du Lautaret (2,058 m) links Le Bourg-d'Oisans and Briançon and is normally open all year. The Galibier, Izoard and Échelle passes close in winter.
- **Winter equipment**: Winter tyres, or chains or snow socks on at least two drive wheels, are required from 1 November to 31 March.
- **Parking**: Trailhead car parks fill early on summer mornings. Arrive before 8:00 for popular starts, and follow current rules for restricted roads such as the Vénéon valley.

Food & drink

Alpine food here is hearty. Look for the Dauphiné dishes, such as gratin dauphinois, and for local cheeses, cured meats and bilberry tarts in valley restaurants. Ravioles du Champsaur are a local pasta speciality made in the Champsaur valley near the park. Génépi, an alpine herb liqueur, is a common digestif.

Mountain huts serve fixed menus with soup, a main dish and dessert. There are no restaurants in the park core, so eat in the valley villages such as Vallouise, La Grave or Saint-Firmin before and after your walk. Many valley restaurants close in the off-season.

What to eat & drink

BREAKFAST

Croissant
Buttery, flaky laminated pastry and a classic French breakfast staple.

LUNCH

Ratatouille
A Provençal stewed vegetable dish of eggplant, zucchini, peppers, and tomatoes.

DINNER

Coq au Vin
Chicken braised slowly in red wine with mushrooms, onions, and lardons.

Beef Bourguignon · Bœuf Bourguignon
Beef stewed in red Burgundy wine with carrots, onions, and mushrooms.

Escargot · Escargots de Bourgogne
Snails cooked in garlic and parsley butter, a classic starter.

SNACKS & STREET FOOD

Baguette
Long, crusty white bread loaf bought fresh daily from the local boulangerie.

Cheese · Fromage
France produces hundreds of cheese varieties, often served as a course before dessert.

SWEETS & DESSERTS

Crepes · Crêpes
Thin pancakes served sweet with sugar or jam, or savory as galettes.

Macarons
Delicate almond meringue sandwich cookies in a range of flavors and colors.

DRINKS

Wine · Vin
France's wine regions, including Bordeaux, Burgundy, and Champagne, are among the world's most renowned.

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Safety & health

The area is very safe in terms of crime. The risks come from the mountains: sudden storms, fog, loose rock, steep snow and crevasses on glaciers.

- Check the mountain weather forecast before you start. Start early, because storms are common on summer afternoons.
- Do not walk on glaciers without equipment and training. Hire a guide for glacier routes.
- Dial 112 for mountain rescue. Many valleys and huts have little or no phone signal.
- In the park core, dogs are not allowed, even on a leash. Drones, fires, camping and picking plants are also banned. Bivouacs are allowed only under strict conditions, so check the park rules first.

History

Alpine climbing history here is recent. Climbers first reached Barre des Écrins on 25 June 1864, by *Edward Whymper*, *A. W. Moore* and *Horace Walker* with the guides *Michel Croz* and *Christian Almer*. The Meije summit, La Grave - La Meije, was climbed in 1877 by *Emmanuel Boileau de Castelnau* with the guides *Pierre Gaspard* and his son.

The park was created in 1973 to protect the high mountains, their wildlife and traditional pastures. Glaciers have shrunk a lot since then. The tongue of Glacier Blanc retreated by about 1 km during the 20th century. The old Tuckett hut near the Glacier Blanc trail is now a small exhibit.

Country facts

Quick practical facts for France at a glance:

CURRENCY
EUR €

EMERGENCY
112

ELECTRICITY

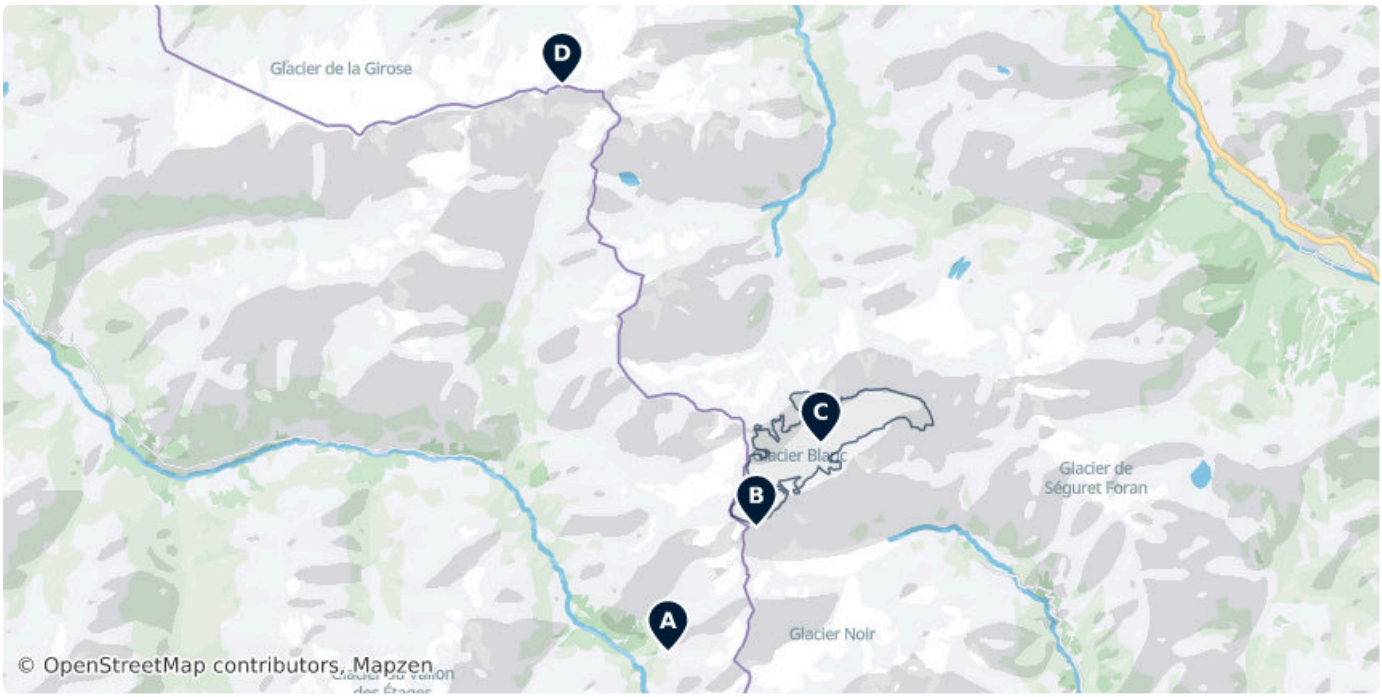


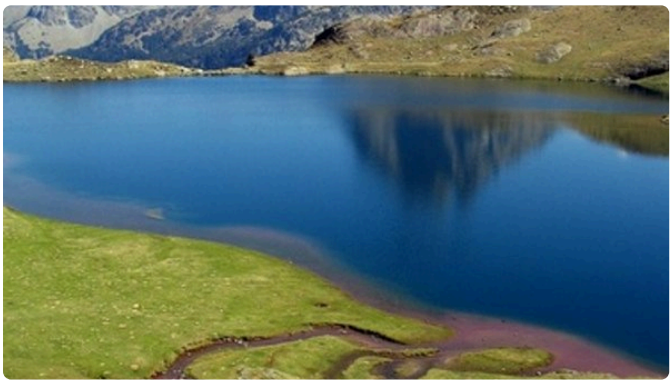
Type C / Type E
230 V · 50 Hz

LANGUAGES
French

TAP WATER
Safe to drink

Top sights





A Écrins National Park

Écrins National Park is a French national park located in the southeastern part of France in the Dauphiné Alps south of Grenoble and north...

Les Gourniers, 05160 Réallon, France (44.89869, 6.33636)

ecrins-parcnational.fr, +33 04 92 40 20 10



B Barre des Écrins

The highest summit of the Massif des Écrins at 4,102 m, and the southernmost 4,000-metre peak in the Alps. First climbed in 1864.

05340, France (44.92220, 6.35970)



C Glacier Blanc

Valley glacier in the Écrins massif, the longest there and the largest in the southern French Alps. Its surface looks white because it carries almost no moraine debris.

05340, France (44.93783, 6.37683)



D La Grave - La Meije

Highest summit of the Meije ridge, at 3,983 m, in the Écrins massif. It is the second highest mountain of the range and long had no easy route to the top.

05320, France (45.00504, 6.30825)

la-grave.com, +33 476 79 92 67

DATA SOURCES

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- Glacier Blanc — "Chasseurs alpins au Glacier Blanc près du refuge Cézanne, Pré de Mme Carle" by Raymond Lavagne / Agence Rol, pd
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