

THE VIA ALPINA

From Trieste to Monaco
A hiking trail to discover
the eight Alpine countries



Project presentation
May 2009

Via Alpina, right through the Alps...

At the outset the area was immense and the project a truly ambitious one: to help discover a unique region of 200,000 square kilometres of peaks and valleys, of high mountain pastures and forests, of large villages and hamlets by creating THE definitive trail for hiking and the discovery of the entire Alpine space.

Seven years after its creation the Via Alpina winds from Trieste (Italy) to Monaco, from the Adriatic sea to the Mediterranean, its 5000 kilometres of walking tracks marked out into 5 trails through eight European countries: Slovenia, Italy, Austria, Germany, Liechtenstein, Switzerland, France and the Principality of Monaco.

It gives you an exceptional invitation to discover, on foot, through some of the most fabulous mountain landscapes, the history, culture and the way of life in the Alpine mountain communities.

And first, a bit of history...

1991: a political will – The Alpine Convention is signed. An international Treaty ratified by eight countries – Germany, Austria, Italy, Switzerland, Slovenia, Liechtenstein and Monaco – and the European Union, with the shared objective of ensuring sustainable development of the entire Alpine region (see also page 12).

1999: a visionary project – On the initiative of the Grande Traversée des Alpes (a French association specialising in walking tourism) a project for a great transalpine walking trail is launched both as a symbolic link between the eight countries who have signed up to the Alpine Convention, as the cultural expression of the Alpine region and to support the development of sustainable tourism.

2000: a name, a brand – At the headquarters of the Rhône-Alpes region, in Lyon-Charbonnières, the representatives of the various States, regions and associations met to form an International Steering Committee (ISC). The christening of the project is complete: it will be called Via Alpina. The public launch is planned for **summer 2002** so as to coincide with the International Year of the Mountains.

2001-2004: a working trail – Within the framework of the European programme Interreg Alpine Space, the trails are identified, marked and described and first multilingual promotional tools are created. Studies and pilot projects for improving the quality and the sustainability of tourist offers are carried out. The Via Alpina is officially recognised by the Environment ministers of the eight Alpine countries as contributing to the implementation of the Alpine Convention.

2005-2007: a « royal path » for discovery – Thanks to the new Interreg funding a second development phase is launched. Objective: to work closely with all local stakeholders to help visitors and walkers to discover the natural and cultural heritage of the Alpine region all the way along the trails and to develop the tourism services on offer.

2008...: responsible tourism – The eight partners agree to strengthen walking tourism on the Via Alpina by using both their specific tools, a common Internet site and an International Secretariat managed by the Grande Traversée des Alpes.

The Via Alpina in figures

The Via Alpina covers in total **eight countries, 30 regions, cantons or länder and more than 200 municipalities.**

... from sea level to an altitude of over 3000 m - From one shoreline to the other - from the Adriatic to the Mediterranean seas – the Via Alpina reaches its highest point at 3019 m at the Niederjoch pass (on the Italo-Austrian border).

... on 5000 km of trails – The Via Alpina route is made up of five sections: the Red, Purple, Yellow, Green and Blue (*) Trails representing a total of **5000 km of walking trails.**

... and 342 stages 58 of which are cross-border - 22 in Slovenia, 121 in Italy, 30 in Germany, 70 in Austria, 3 in Liechtenstein, 55 in Switzerland, 40 in France and... 1 in Monaco.

(*) Red Trail: 161 stages. Trail linking Trieste and Monaco across all eight countries.

Purple Trail: 66 stages. *Slovenia, Austria, Germany.*

Yellow Trail: 40 stages. *Italy, Austria, Germany.*

Green Trail: 14 stages. *Liechtenstein, Switzerland.*

Blue Trail: 61 stages. *Switzerland, Italy, France.*

The Alps are...

- **13.9 million inhabitants, eight countries and more than 6000 municipalities**
- **4 national languages (German, Italian, French, Slovene) as well as regional languages and dialects (Romansch, Ladin, Frulian, Alemanic, Bavarian, Walser, Langue D'Oc, Franco-Provençal...)**
- **10% of world tourism with 370 million overnight stays per year - 4.7 million tourist beds - 60 million visitors – added value of EUR 25 bn¹.**

¹ Source CIPRA-International (1995).

Via Alpina : trails with a philosophy

Fiercely international...

The Via Alpina encompasses eight countries: France, Monaco, Italy, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Germany, Austria and Slovenia. The route allows walkers to cross the borders more than 60 times!

...and with a strong Alpine identity!

Mainly situated between altitudes of 1.000 and 3.000 metres, the Via Alpina's trails follow the topology of the massifs and their climatic features. They make up a network of alternative and complementary trails in order to ensure better visitor management.

Accessible to everyone...

The Via Alpina is generally accessible from the 1st of July to the 15th of September. However, depending on their altitude or exposure some sections may be crossed off-season. The trail is of moderate difficulty, avoiding climbing sections and glaciers. The paths are well sign-posted and marked at regular intervals with discreet information plaques with the Via Alpina logo. Furthermore several "gateway towns" make access even easier.

...for an in depth discovery of the Alps

The Via Alpina is always close to the most prestigious sites of cultural and natural interest to let you discover the Alpine heritage in all its shapes and forms and to allow you to meet local communities, their festivals, their traditions, their craft industries and their way of life.

Respectful of the environment...

The Via Alpina crosses 9 national parks, 17 nature parks and 22 nature reserves. Discovery opportunities and joint awareness campaigns are proposed to the local population and walkers and visitors alike. The existing trails and facilities are fully developed: no additional trails have been built and neither will there be any heavy infrastructure development.

... and attentive to the walkers every need

At the end of each daily stage the walker will find accommodation and catering facilities. At regular intervals he has access to the shops and services he needs. All along the trails, which are well served by public transport, local tourism

professionals are invited to satisfy the walkers' needs in a coherent and concerted way.

A tool for local development...

Crossing 30 regions, cantons, länder and more than 200 municipalities, the Via Alpina is clearly a strong encouragement for local development, whether for tourism professionals or the many local communities involved. It is a real international showcase for the Alpine regions its aim being to ensure new business for guides, mountain leaders and accommodation providers. Finally, it is also a place for mountain professionals to exchange experiences so as to stimulate the improvement of the quality of all that is on offer to the walkers.

... a connecting link to the Alpine territory

The Via Alpina is a physical link between the regions. Thanks to a large number of intersections with other Alpine trails it offers a multitude of access points to discover other areas beyond the five official trails. Its ability to appeal to a wider public made up of families and senior citizens as well as experienced long-distance walkers makes it an exceptional starting point from which to explore the border crossing Alpine reality in all its diversity.

A name and a logo



All the Alpine regions have in common the fact that they once belonged to the Roman Empire. *Via Alpina*, « alpine way » in Latin, expresses in two universally understandable words the essence of the project: it is a trail and it represents the Alps.

For the logo we also opted for the obvious: three geometric shapes sketch the letters V and A which the walker will find painted or engraved on all the wooden, metal or composite material signposts in all shapes and forms from one end to the other of the Alpine Range.

The triangle is naturally a symbol of the mountain. The right hand stroke representing the Alpine Range: extending from South-West to East and wider in its Eastern part. The left stroke is the Via Alpina that hangs on to it. On the ground its colour changes according to the trail followed: Red, Purple, Yellow, Green or Blue.



The five Trails

The Red Trail

Julian Alps – Karawanken – Carnic Alps – Dolomites – Zillertal – Tuxer Alps – Karwendel – Wetterstein – Lechtal Alps – Allgäu – Rätikon – Silvretta – Rhaetian Alps (Grisons/Ortles) – Lepontine Alps (Lombardy/Ticino) – Valaisian Alps – Bernese Alps – Chablais – Mont Blanc – Graian Alps (Val d’Aosta/Vanoise) – Dauphiné – Cottian Alps (Queyras/Viso) – Maritime Alps – Lower Piedmont – Ligurian Alps.

161 stages, or more than one walking season, across eight different countries: Italy, Slovenia, Austria, Germany, Liechtenstein, Switzerland, France and Monaco.

The Red Trail joins all eight Alpine countries. It crosses the main Alpine range several times, connecting Trieste to Monaco via Bavaria and Liechtenstein. Along the way, particularly in the numerous nature and national parks, the walker can experience the vast scale of the Alps, the largest natural area in Europe, and discover the rich diversity of the landscape, flora and fauna. The trail skirts some of the highest peaks along the way, such as the Triglav, Tre Cime of Lavaredo, Hochfeiler, Zugspitze, Silvretta, Bernina, Mont Blanc, the Vanoise glaciers and the Barre des Ecrins. However it also allows you to discover the rich cultural heritage of the gateway towns on or near the trails (Trieste, Monaco, Feldkirch but also Innsbruck and Briançon) and away from the crowds it meanders through the remote villages of the Julian and Carnic Alps, Ticino and Western Alps.

The Via Alpina runs from Trieste, where a wide range of cultures meet – Illyrian, Roman, Venetian, Slav, and Habsburg – to the Principality of Monaco, extending between sea and mountain, a land especially rich in history, culture and recreational opportunities.

The scenery alternates between wooden chalets and stone sheep barns, mountain shelters and lively towns and villages. The Red Trail also travels through different linguistic areas, demonstrating the historical significance of the Alpine passes as trade routes. The dialects are not confined to the administrative divisions, and in addition to German, Italian, French and Slovene, Romansch and Ladin, Walser, Franco-Provençal and the Langue d’Oc can also be heard. This trail crosses the national borders 44 times, and also former borders marking the remains of the military past that remind us of how, all too often, the peaceful mountains have been the scene of long confrontations.



The Purple Trail

Eastern Julian Alps – Kamnik Alps – Karawanken – Styrian Alps – Lower Tauern – Dachstein – Salzburg Alps – Berchtesgaden Alps – Chiemgau Alps – Bavarian Pre-Alps – Ammergau Alps – Allgäu.

66 stages across three countries: Slovenia, Austria, Germany.

The Purple Trail takes the walker through the Eastern Limestone Alps, from the Karawanken to the Allgäu. It forks off to the east of the Red Trail in the heart of the Triglav massif. Far from the beaten track, through the high limestone plateaux and forests, it crosses nine of the ten national long-distance trails that cut through the Austrian Alps, incorporating the Via Alpina to a network of paths leading to Vienna and the Hungarian, Slovakian and Czech borders. A path strewn with the very best cultural sites such as the Abbey of Seckau, the Abbey of Admont which is home to the largest monastic library in the world and then the World Cultural Heritage site of Hallstatt-Dachstein.

In Bavaria, most of the trail follows the Maximiliansweg, which commemorates King Maximilian II of Bavaria's journey across the Alps in 1858. The trail covers a number of tourist sites, such as the Berchtesgaden National Park with Lake Königssee, the castles of Ludwig II of Bavaria (the son of Maximilian II) and religious monuments, in particular from the Baroque and Rococo periods.

The Yellow Trail

Eastern Julian Alps – Carnic Alps – Dolomites – Ötztal – Lechtal Alps – Allgäu.

40 stages across three countries: Italy, Austria, Germany.

The Yellow Trail takes the walker from sea level to 3000m, from the Adriatic Coast to the mountain pastures of Allgäu, from the blend of cultures in Bolzano to the untouched Lechtal environment, from the Dolomites, volcanic formations from the ancient sea bed, to the land of Ötzi the Iceman of the Similaun: a journey full of contrasts.

On leaving Trieste, the scenery is characterised by ruins from various periods and natural monuments typical of the karst: caves, gorges and torrents. In the Southern Carnic Alps the Via Alpina crosses several traditional routes which link Friuli to Carinthia, and offer numerous opportunities to make a circular walk combining the Red and Yellow Via Alpina Trails. In the heart of the Dolomites it crosses the legendary massifs of the Marmolada and Catinaccio/ Rosengarten. On arrival in Bolzano, the multicultural city par excellence the Via Alpina veers north (you can also link up with the Stelvio National Park in the west, which allows you to rejoin the Red Trail while remaining on the southern slopes of the Alps). The trail crosses the Niederjoch (3019m), the highest Via Alpina pass, very close to the site where Ötzi the Iceman was discovered. Then comes a change in scenery with the crossing of the largest glacier massif in the Alps, the Ötztal, before descending to the wooded Inn Valley. The return to limestone is marked this time by the high mountain pastures in the Allgäu that lead to the junction of the Yellow, Red and Purple Trails in Oberstdorf in Bavaria.

The Green Trail

Rätikon – Central Switzerland – Bernese Alps.

14 stages – crossing 2 countries : Liechtenstein and Switzerland.

The shortest trail of the Via Alpina, it can be a holiday itinerary on its own or used to shorten the full Trieste to Monaco trip.

Starting off from the second smallest Alpine country, the Principality of Liechtenstein, it crosses the Valley of the Rhine. Then it links an astounding succession of passes amongst the most beautiful in the Alps with a new valley at each stage. It covers no less than five cantons, guaranteeing a variety of both geological features and cultural heritage.

The Via Alpina runs along the flanks of the three summits which are symbols of the Bernese Oberland: Eiger, Mönch and Jungfrau.

The Green Trail coincides with the National Swiss Route number 1 which then with four further stages takes walkers to Montreux on the East bank of Lake Geneva.

The Blue Trail

Valaisian Alps – Pennine Alps – Cottian Alps (Queyras/Viso) – Maritime Alps.

61 stages across three countries: Switzerland, Italy and France.

From the glaciers of Monte Rosa to the peaceful villages of the Maritime Alps, the Blue Trail largely follows the *Grande Traversata delle Alpi* through the Piedmontese Alps. In the north, it follows the Italian/Swiss border in the footsteps of the Walser, a people who came from the upper Rhine valley in what is now the Valais, and colonised the high-altitude lands from the Vorarlberg in Austria to the southern slopes of Monte Rosa in Italy in the 13th century. Even today, minority German-speaking communities can still be found as far as Gressoney in the Val d'Aosta.

While the Walser areas are characterised by cattle farming and cheese making, you will find sheep in the mountain meadows further south, which are still used every year as a summer pasture for thousands of animals brought from Provence and the Po plain. The Via Alpina crosses the wilder southern slopes of the Gran Paradiso National Park, once the final sanctuary for the ibex, and from whence the species was then reintroduced throughout the Alps.

Between Val de Susa and the Maritime Alps, the trail comes close to the French border, crossing it several times. There are many opportunities to link up with the Red Trail and other local routes along the way.

Around Monte Viso, with its profile that symbolises the Southern Alps and a mountaineering Mecca, on whose slopes the River Po originates, the Piedmont valleys were hit hard by the rural exodus in the 20th century. Nowadays, local initiatives based on green tourism and pluriactivity try to revive the abandoned villages.

The Via Alpina Blue Trail continues along the French slopes, going down through the quietest part of the Mercantour National Park to the village of Sospel, where it meets the Red Trail.



The Via Alpina team

The International Steering Committee (ISC) was founded in June 2000 and comprises national and regional authorities, walking associations and tourism promotion bodies from the eight countries involved in the project. It is a work group without a legal figure that meets once a year to make key policy decisions.

It is supported by a network of **eight National Secretariats**, which deal with the actual implementation of the project in each country. The National Secretariats are integrated into public or private structures that are competent in the subject of walking tourism.

The Grande Traversée des Alpes association manages the **International Secretariat**.

Each country manages its own national secretariat and its actions on its own territory. France, Austria, Switzerland, Germany, Slovenia, Liechtenstein and Monaco currently contribute to the financing of the International Secretariat.

The members of the International Steering Committee

Austria: Austrian Alpine Club (OeAV), Land of Salzburg (representative of the 6 Bundesländer involved).

Switzerland: Swiss Hiking Federation, SwissTrails GmbH, IG SchweizMobil; observer: Swiss Alpine Club (SAC/ CAS).

Germany: German Alpine Club (DAV), Bavarian Minister for the Environment, Health and Consumer Protection (bay. StMUGV).

France: Government (Committee for Planning and Economic Development in the Alps / DIACT), Rhône-Alpes Region, Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur Region, French Hiking Fédération (FFRandonnée), French Federation of Alpine and Mountain Clubs (FFCAM), Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur Regional Tourist Board, Riviera-Côte d'Azur Regional Tourist Board.

Liechtenstein: Government (Office of Forests, Nature and Landscape AWNL), Liechtenstein Tourism; observer: Liechtenstein Alpine Club (LAV).

Italy: Piedmont Region, Lombardy Region, Friuli-Venezia Giulia Region (representatives of the 8 ordinary or autonomous Alpine regions and provinces), Italian Alpine Club (CAI), South Tyrolean Alpine Club (AVS).

Monaco: Monegasque Alpine Club (CAM), Government (Department of International Cooperation), Tourism and Congress Board (DTC).

Slovenia: Hiking Slovenia, Slovenian Tourist Board (STO), Ministry for the Environment and Regional Planning: Slovenian Alpine Club (PZS).

The National Secretariats

France : The Grande Traversée des Alpes Association

Italy: The Piedmont Region

Austria: The Austrian Alpine Club

Switzerland: The Swiss Hiking Federation

Germany: The German Alpine Club

Slovenia: Hiking Slovenia

Liechtenstein: The Office of Forests, Nature and Landscape

Monaco: The Monegasque Alpine Club

(contact details on page 15).

The International Secretariat: la Grande Traversée des Alpes

Created as an associative body in 1971 to “promote walking tourism between Lake Geneva and the Mediterranean”, GTA was the first to set out the idea of “gîte d’étape” and of the first great Alpine walking trail which still carries its name. Today it is above all a shared tourist development instrument at the service of the territorial communities of the whole of the French Alpine massif (regions, departments, local communities). The interregional scope of its operations and programmes makes it a unique organisation as regards tourism policy.

The main mission entrusted to GTA today is to make walking tourism “a new chance for the mountains”. Developing a programme of great trails and qualified accommodation, allowing customers to travel and discover the entire French Alpine massif in their own time, it actively participates in the development of the areas and the local economy and thus responds to the new challenges of mountain tourism: diversify with an offer valid for all four seasons, implement soft and durable tourism, support the mountain territories facing the first effects of global warming.

With the support of the French government it was the Grande Traversée des Alpes that in 1999 and 2000 carried out a feasibility study which led to the creation of the Via Alpina. Since then its partners have reiterated their confidence by confirming its management of the International coordination of the project.

Beyond the Via Alpina, a series of initiatives tailored to the Alpine Range

A Political Framework: the Alpine Convention (www.alpconv.org)

This international treaty, signed in 1991 by the eight Alpine countries and the European Union, bears witness to the political will to ensure sustainable development in the Alps with a supra regional viewpoint. It consists of a framework convention and eight administrative protocols to enforce:

- Regional planning and sustainable development
- Nature conservation and landscape management
- Mountain farming
- Mountain forests
- Tourism
- Energy
- Soil protection
- Transport.

As well as the protocols the Ministers for the Environment of the eight countries have adopted two further declarations: The Declaration on Population and Culture and The Declaration on Climate Change.

Since 2003 the Convention has had a Permanent Secretariat based in Innsbruck (Austria) and Bolzano (Italy). A « Memorandum of Understanding » was signed in February 2005 (and renewed in March 2009) between the Permanent Secretariat of the Alpine Convention and the Via Alpina Steering Committee as a basis for the common concrete actions of the two organisations.

The International Commission for the Protection of the Alps CIPRA-International (www.cipra.org): a non governmental umbrella organisation founded in 1952 that represents over one hundred associations and organisations in seven Alpine countries, within the framework of a global approach it is devoted to the protection of cultural and natural heritage in the Alpine region.

It also runs the information service Alpmedia and coordinates various international projects and also at national and regional levels through the eight representatives.

The Alpine Network of Protected Areas ALPARC (www.alparc.org): network of all large scale protected area management bodies in the Alps, that is to say nearly 1000 national, natural and regional parks, nature reserves and biosphere reserves. Since 1995 ALPARC has been favouring and supporting exchanges of experiences and know how between the management bodies of protected areas on many different subjects. The network is working in particular towards the

creation of an Ecological Alpine Network. It also develops common communication actions and tools for the protected areas.

Alliance in the Alps (www.alpenallianz.org): created in 1997 this network now brings together more than 270 municipalities spread over seven Alpine states. They have actively become involved in the implementation of a sustainable common policy. Through meetings and a variety of projects the network allows an exchange of experiences and the exploitation of good practise.

The Club Arc Alpin (www.club-arc-alpin.eu): this working group set up in 1995 made up of the eight Alpine clubs aims to defend their common interests above all in the field of mountaineering, nature conservation and the development of the Alpine region, of Alpine culture within the framework of the Alpine Convention.

The Alpine Space programme (www.alpine-space.eu): by means of the Interreg IIIB Alpine Space programme from 2000 to 2006, and now under the name of European Territorial Co-operation, within the framework of a new Alpine Space Programme 2007-2013, the European Union has agreed to support regional and transnational territorial development projects in the Alps. The first programme supported more than 50 projects and 12 are currently in the development phase. Furthermore transborder programmes also exist aimed at supporting initiatives between two countries to take place on both sides of the border.

The Via GeoAlpina (www.viageoalpina.org) is an initiative set up in 2008 by a group of geologists of six Alpine countries to mark the International Year of Planet Earth (www.yearofplanetearth.org): geological details of a selection of walking routes will be described and illustrated in multi lingual leaflets and events will be organised on site. Many of these routes follow the Via Alpina, which is a partner in this project, and all the geological information will be available on the pages corresponding to each Via Alpina stage.

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