

2 FABULOUS FRANCE

With the highest percentage of runners per population in Europe, France is a running holiday Mecca. There are many books written about France's running trails, and Tracks and Trails Holiday Company (operating out of Chamonix) is often sold out, a testament to the destination's popularity.

Starting in the mountains, the GR10 hiking trail runs from the Atlantic's Bay of Biscay to the Mediterranean Sea over the Pyrenees. Divide the trip into sections or join those in the record books who have taken on the full 850 kilometres (48,000 metres of ascent).

Climb to the highest peaks including Vignemale (3295m) and sidle across glaciers. After something steeper and more populated? Head to the Alps and climb any one of the 100 peaks that are 4000-plus metres: here you will encounter steep climbs, speedy zig zags, gentle romps, via ferrata chain and rope sections, rough rocks or groomed paths: whatever your running desire, the Alps are likely to provide. Lush meadows sprawled beneath towering mountains inspire even the tidiest legs to keep pushing.

***Good to know:** if you prefer to

be guided, you will need to employ a professional with a licence according to French regulations.

The ultra trail running pilgrimage is to circumnavigate Mont Blanc in the Ultra Trail du Mont Blanc race: it is through this event that trail running made its mark on the world.

Held in the last week of August, the 160km trail race is by qualification only and is limited to 7500 runners over five different course distances. Passing through France, Italy and Switzerland, the trail gains more than 9500 metres of height with the average competitor taking more than 40 hours on the return journey to Chamonix.

If wine and fancy dress are your thing, don't miss the Marathon du Medoc linking châteaux throughout the Medoc region to form a marathon. Each aid station is in a winery where wine tasting replaces sports drink. The event is themed and most of the 10,000 runners comply, running in huge, brightly coloured costumes. For the most part, the event is more about wine tasting than running as many châteaux only open for tasting for this event.

To top off the day, each competitor receives a bottle of wine with their medal as they cross the finish line – in the recovery tent expect to be offered a glass of wine or beer.

