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To get here

- By car -

The nicest road : RD2204 : Nice-Col de Braus-Sospel 43 kms
The shortest road : RD2566 : Menton-Castillon-Sospel 18 kms
A8 Nice-Genova motorway : exit Menton

- By bus -

RCA shuttle services : Tel. 04 93 85 64 44
or contact Sospel Tourist Office

- By train -

International railway line between Nice and Turin

Information : SNCF Nice station : Tel. : 3635
SNCF Sospel station : Tel. : 04 93 04 00 17

N° Ach. : 0304_00_00_02 AN 06 - IMPRIMERIE TTG MENTON - Crédit Photos ADTRB - OFFICE de TOURISME SOSPEL - J.-P. LANÇON



sospel



CONSEIL GÉNÉRAL
DES ALPES-MARITIMES



To welcome you...

As a holiday resort situated on the famous Route des Grandes Alpes and the Barroco Road linking Nice to Liguria, Sospel is the main district town. It is composed of 3,250 inhabitants.

The Tourist Office puts at your disposal :

Detailed lists of the different kinds of accommodation - hotels, campsites and caravan sites, bed & breakfast, guest houses, self-catering flats.

Detailed lists of restaurants, pizzerias, snack bars, pancake restaurants and tea rooms.

Services

Post office, doctors' surgeries, hairdressers, beauty parlour, physiotherapists, speech therapist, dentist, chemist, hospital, retired people's home, district nurses, estates agents, insurance offices, taxis, banks, cash dispensers, cafés, souvenir shops, all kinds of shops and trades. Catholic Mass is celebrated at the cathedral on Sunday mornings.

Art and craft

You will be amazed by our talented artists : woodcarving, ceramics, papercarving, original jewel creation, dried flowers, various painting from different parts of the globe.

Local Products

Honey, olive oil (quality guaranteed by the "appellation d'origine contrôlée" from Nice), olives, pesto (basil and garlic sauce), cow and goat cheeses, jams, olive paste, gingerbread, nougat...

Local producers' market : Sunday mornings, Place du Marché

Town market : Thursdays, Place des Platanes



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Discovering a region...

Ideally situated between the sea and the mountains at an altitude of 350 metres, Sospel benefits from an exceptional micro-climate. This verdant valley, only a few kilometres away from the coast as the crow flies, forms a cirque running north-west to south-east.

Its river, the Bévéra, has its source at 2,000m, thereby linking the village with the Massif de l'Authion and its Alpine range - Mt. Bégo, Cime du Diable, Gélas, Mt. Clapier, Petit and Grand Capelet - which, from their 3,000m height, provide the valley with a pleasant breeze during the summer.

The Tourist Office proposes excursions giving you the opportunity to discover the "Route des Orgues historiques" (road of the historic organs), the famous hairpin bends of the Monte-Carlo Rally, vestiges of the "Route du Sel" (the Salt Road), the marks of Bronze-age Man, the Italian border 5km away, and of course the coast.

All these assets make Sospel a more and more sought-after resort.

The Mercantour National Park

Created in 1979, the Mercantour National Park is one of the seven National Parks in France.

The flora found in this natural site is unique in Europe, comprising more than 2,000 species (jovibarba, gentian...), 30 of which are endemic (saxifraga florulenta...). Its fauna is likewise extremely rich and



varied: ibexes, marmots, chamois roam along the summits. From Sospel, which is part of the Mercantour National Park, it is possible to reach the Valley of the Roya in one hour. The town is a 20-minute drive from the coast (Menton), 45 minutes from the Col de Turini and about an hour and a half from the Vallée des Merveilles, one of the most important open-air sites of prehistoric engravings in Europe, with its 37,000 or more symbolical representations of weapons, animals and human forms.

Superb visits...

Ancient monuments can be discovered in the maze of old streets, with their lintels, mullion windows, carved doors and trompe-l'oeil facades.

You can visit the fortifications of the Maginot Line and 4 of the carriages belonging to the prestigious Orient Express. For further details, please contact the Tourist Office.

Leisure activities...

There is plenty to do - in the air, in the water or on land...

Hiking tours :

You can hike along the registered trails GR52, GR52A, GR10, or on the paths around the "perched villages", or along the botanical trail.



Or you can go pony-trekking, mountain biking, rock-climbing, hang-gliding, canyoning, fishing or play tennis.

Information and maps available at the Tourist Office.

Events...

Concerts in the cathedral and chapels.

Organ recital

Plays

Exhibitions in the Old Bridge and in the chapels

Festivities for 14th July and 15th August bank Holidays

Agriculture Festival in September

Mushroom show in October

Mountain bike races : Turini-Menton race, Free Ride Rally, "Raid du Mercantour"

Film festival

Films every Friday in the multimedia hall

Stopover point for the Monte-Carlo Rally

Individual events organised by the various associations and clubs

Yearly participation in the "Téléthon"

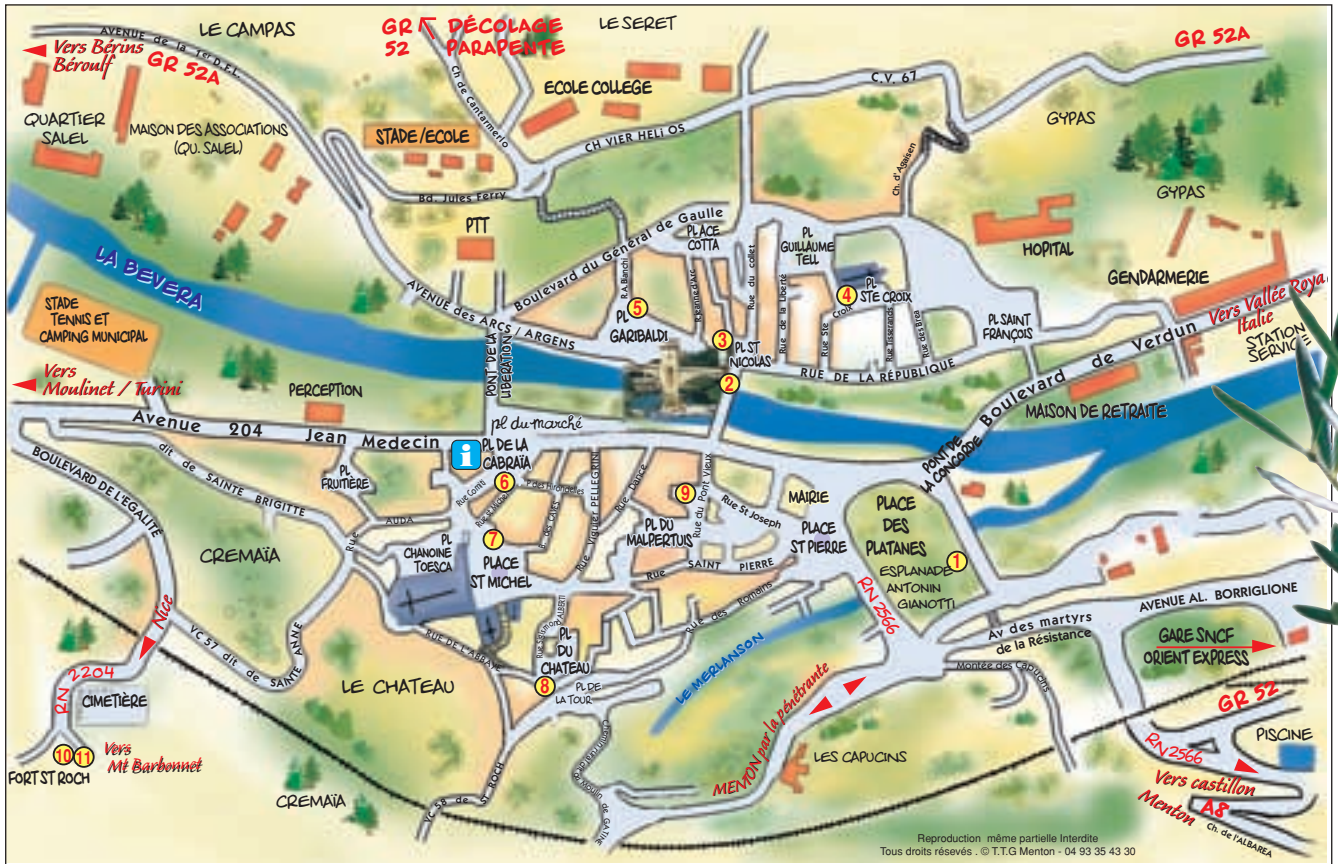
Programme available at the Tourist Office



between the sea and the mountains



A rich heritage



Opposite the Mairie (1) (Town Hall), some remains of 15th century columns and capitals, together with vestiges of the Church of St Pierre can be found.

The Pont Vieux (2) (Old Bridge), the emblem of the village, was built on the road between Nice and the Piedmont as early as the 13th century. Its construction in the Middle Ages was a major achievement, also having great impact on the surrounding country. The bridge was partly rebuilt in the 16th and 17th centuries and only the lower part of the central tower survives from medieval times. Its tower, originally used for defence purposes, subsequently served to collect tolls. It was at one time inhabited and up until 1960 housed a small shop. The two arches were destroyed during the German retreat on the night of 27 to 28 October 1944, but were restored in 1951, faithful to the original.

The Place Saint-Nicolas (3) was also known as the Place du Saint-Esprit (Square of the Holy Spirit) during the 18th century. In the arcades of the central building, which formerly belonged to the Brothers of the Holy Spirit, meetings of the governors of Sospel were held. On the ground floor, the Loggia was used for gatherings of the Parliament of the men of Sospel. In 1793, it became the Town Hall (Hôtel de Ville). The sculpture of the Paschal Lamb on the wall symbolises divine protection. The fountain dates back to 1788.

The rue de la République, also known as the Carriera Longua (local dialect for "long street"), followed the former "Salt Road", the mule track along which salt was transported, and was the commercial thoroughfare from the Middle Ages up until the 18th century. It was lined with shops which were sheltered from bad weather by wide arcades, now mostly walled up. Outlets on the river-side of the street allowed the evacuation of rainwater and sewage into the Bévéra. Along this street you can find several 14th and 15th century houses (at n° 9, there is a fine carved column). Near the Place Saint-François, the fountain with the circular drinking trough for animals is one of the town's three fountains that date back to the 17th century. On the square itself is the former Chapelle des Pénitents Noirs (Chapel of the Black Penitents).

On the Place Sainte Croix, (4) you can find the Chapelle des Pénitents Blancs de la Sainte-Croix (Chapel of the White Penitents of the Holy Cross) with its façade restored in the traditional colours of Liguria. The Chapel was built in the 16th century on the site of a Romanesque church dedicated to St Nicholas. Formerly the Prieuré de Saint-Pons (St Pons Priory), the only remaining part of the original building is the 11th century apse. The triangular baroque bell-tower is also worthy of note. Inside, there is a small museum depicting the religious history of the former brotherhoods of Sospel.

(If you wish to visit the Chapel, please contact the Tourist Office).

On the Place Garibaldi, (5) the "lavoir" (washing place) is still in use. In the days when animal-rearing and agriculture were the main source of Sospel's economy, this square was the central market place. It is lined with stone terraces and arcades from the 18th century.

The Place de la Cabraïa (6) (the Goats' Square) exhibits a fountain with two different levels - the lower one for animals and the upper one for household needs. The warehouses to store the salt that was brought along the Salt Road also used to be in the vicinity. The name "cabraïa" is the old local dialect for a herd of goats. In the 17th century, the goats were gathered together in that place before they were lead to pasture.



The Place Saint Michel (7) offers a magnificent display of Baroque architecture. It is dominated by the double-level façade of the cathedral, which is topped by a typically triangular pediment dating from the early Baroque period. In front of the cathedral, the winding steps lead down to the square, which is cobbled with white and grey stones. On the left are the Chapels of the Red and Grey Penitents; on the right is the 13th century Lombard bell tower. The former Town Hall, now the community centre, and the Palais Ricci des Ferres complete this urban setting. On the wall of the Palais Ricci, a plaque bears an inscription commemorating the fleeting visit of Pope Pius VII, prisoner of Napoleon, on 10 August 1809. Beneath the arcades is a fine lintel with the coat of arms of the House of Savoy.



The Cathédrale Saint Michel was built between 1641 and 1762. Its impressive size makes it the largest church in the Alpes-Maritimes.

The cathedral was built on the lines of a basilica whose transept crossing is topped with a flattened dome. The chancel is made up of a succession of 18th century concave niches. With its carved wooden bishop's seat, the cathedral bears witness to the

Great Schism, when Sospel was raised to the status of diocese (1380). In the chapel on the left of the altar, two reredos, masterpieces of Niçois primitive art, can be admired.

The baptistry near the entrance is noteworthy for its tent-shaped ceiling in magnificently carved walnut. The organ loft, built by the Agati Brothers in 1843, is of Italian craftsmanship. Its colossal case incorporates different pieces from the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries.



In the Place du Château (8) (Castle Square), there are ruins of the ramparts that encircled the town at the end of the 14th century. Near the washing place, you can find a very fine gate in the south wall, together with the loop-holed tower of the ancient castle of the Counts of Provence (early 14th century). To the west of the tower are the ruins of an old convent of the Discalced Carmelite nuns. Narrow intersecting alleyways run down from the square.

The rue Saint-Pierre, formerly known as the “*carriera dretcha*” or the straight street, displays many doors surmounted with family coats of arms of the Sospel nobility. Here too is the former Hôtel de la Gabelle (where the salt tax was collected), with its stonework in black and white layers, a renaissance window and carved cornices. This building was the seat of the “*Viguerie*”, the Guards, who represented the main authority in the 13th century when Provençal Sospel became the administrative centre of Ventimiglia and Lantosque Valley.

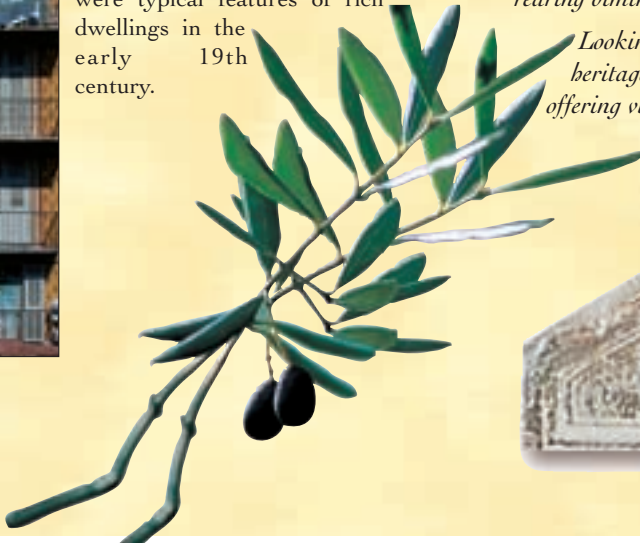


In the Place Pastoris (9) (the Shepherds’ Square), a fine 17th century doorway can be seen.

The rue du Pont Vieux was an important thoroughfare in the medieval town. On the wall of one the houses is a 15th century mullioned window framed with brightly-coloured carved lozenges.



On the left bank of the Bévéra, the houses display “*trompe l’oeil*” facades, which were typical features of rich dwellings in the early 19th century.



In 1588, in the footsteps of Nice, Sospel turned itself over to the Counts of Savoy. Rich houses, busy shopping streets, fairs and markets - all bore witness to the prosperity of this crossroads, which in medieval times sheltered some 3,000 inhabitants. In spite of the epidemics and wars of the 17th and 18th centuries, the governors of the city led “*Sospello*” to the peak of its glory.



Under the powerful authority of the Kings of Sardinia, everything demonstrated the grandeur and the magnificence of the Baroque era: the new cathedral, the

chapels of the brotherhoods, the convents, the royal college and the private houses. The splendours of religious feasts and princely weddings were widely displayed. A “*royal road*” replaced the former mule track. Sospel, never enfeoffed, was proclaimed “*County of Castillon and Moulinet*”.



Revolutionary France, however, brutally set out to conquer its natural frontiers and in 1794 Sospel, devastated by the war of the “*sans-culottes*”, became just another town in the Alpes-Maritimes. Victor-Emmanuel, in 1814, promised that everything would be as before, but the past was the past and in 1860 the inhabitants of Sospel voted to be re-united to France.

Despite a certain prosperity in the domains of agriculture and animal-rearing, the slow decline continued. Sospel’s contribution to the first World War was 152 dead. In 1928, the Nice-Cuneo railway line raised high hopes but the 1940 evacuation and the 1944 bombings accentuated still further the rural exodus. Agriculture and animal-rearing diminished.

Looking to the future, this attractive little town with its rich heritage is hoping to develop into a high-quality tourist centre, offering visitors both cultural and leisure activities.

