

## [Alpine Summer Virgin: Why Book Bourg in Summer](#)

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Alpine Summer Virgin: Why Book Bourg in Summer (function(d, s, id) { var js, fjs = d.getElementsByTagName(s)[0]; if (d.getElementById(id)) return; js = d.createElement(s); js.id = id; js.src = "//connect.facebook.net/en\_GB/all.js#xfbml=1"; fjs.parentNode.insertBefore(js, fjs); })(document, 'script', 'facebook-jssdk'); **Alpine Summer Virgin: Why Book Bourg in Summer**  
by Chartreuse Green 10/9/2013 19.45



If you've never holidayed in the mountains, likely you associate The Alps with ski-ing, snowboarding and tobogganing. So why go there in summer?

Situated in RhÃ´nes-Alpes, nestling up against the Swiss and Italian borders to the east, Bourg-Saint-Maurice (BSM to the local Brits) is in one of the French regions comparable to our UK counties though larger, in the department, like a borough or district here, of Savoie. BSM passes through two more territorial subdivisions to 'commune', a municipality. It is accessible via a string of motorways in about 9 hours from Calais if you want to take a car. Otherwise there is a train from Paddington Station straight into the heart of the town.

[View Larger Map](#) Good links then, but outside the snow season what can you do there? For the super active there's kayaking, mountain biking, hiking, climbing, caving, swimming and paragliding. On a more sedate level, there are forest and alpine walks, horse riding, cycling and boating.

With 28 villages to visit, the resorts of Val D'IsÃ¨re, Courchevel, Meribel and Tignes are within driving distance, all equipped with places to eat, acquire souvenirs, equipment and engage in activities. A roadside carpark near Tignes allows you to stop and take in the awe-inspiring dam and lake with sheerly rising mountains as a backdrop.



From Bourg, in summer you can hop over the Italian Border through La Rosière, allegedly so called because from there Mont Blanc, a few miles to the north, appears pink at sunrise and sunset. Cross back over the French border to the north and find yourself in Chamonix, busily buzzy and squarely aimed at tourists eager to part with their excess cash in exchange for its delights. The Montreux Jazz festival is also within driving range.

Because of the funicular that rises from Bourg-Saint-Maurice to the resorts on Mont Pourri, part of the Vaniose Massif range of mountains, which faces the town, it is regarded as being part of Les Arcs with stations at various altitudes: 2000 popular with families, and with photographers who wish to capture Mont Blanc with its characteristic bite out of the top fronted by alpine flowers in summer, 1950 with its picturesque village, 1800 for amateur and professional snow sports enthusiasts, and 1600. All of these are an enjoyable drive or cabin ride away. On a dull day in Bourg, you can often climb up above the clouds by the Les Arcs road or funicular and find yourself in hot sunshine. And if you really want to ski, from early July to early August, for a half-day adult pass at £23 you can take to the snowy slopes at Tignes about 30 miles away.



On market days vendors come from surrounding areas to sell cheese (including the regional specialities of gruyère, beaufort and reblechon), cold meats, artisan bread, jewellery, art, tools, clothing and accessories. The flags of the town and Savoie flutter aloft, cafés offer awninged and parasoled shade and the aroma of fresh coffee. This is the place to buy souvenirs as the resort prices seem to be er..hiked.

In the town itself, Bazoom boasts a bar, a restaurant, a dancefloor and a Friday night live band. Le Tonneau lacks a terpsichorean space but its food is both delicious and reasonably priced. Central Bar scores by staying open later than anyone else. It has been said that the local French are

somewhat averse to Brits, for which binge drinking may or may not be entirely responsible, but in my own experience the French were kind and polite. The sole exception was a no doubt much tried supermarket assistant likely at the end of her 8-hour shift who replied to my ungrammatical French enquiry with an unsmiling, world weary response in English that did nevertheless direct me to the correct location for dried fruit.

There are four campsites such as Le Versoyen which is not an economy option perhaps but has a well-maintained, garden-like quality with helpful staff, an adjacent river and woods, pleasant amenities. and is conveniently located between the town centre and Les Arcs. Otherwise accommodation abounds.



It is an ideal venue for the disabled visitor. Your Blue Badge applies in France and you won't need your clock. There's excellent information at the [AA site](#). The town's main retail area has disabled parking as does the old town (although its main street street is on a hill I did see those with mobility issues navigating both on wheels and with sticks) and the station. The mountain and its resorts are accessible and the drive up will show you all the glories of the valley below and the range the other side. There are places to stop along the way for admiration and photography. Arc 1800 has several carparks. Both in the town and elsewhere I saw a number of wheelchair users traveling both independently and with helpers.

It's not London. Or any other major UK city. You can't get a bag of chips at midnight and 24-hour corner shops are as scarce as hen's teeth. In fact eating out after 11pm is a challenge. On the other hand, you are surrounded by a ring of mountains that are breathtaking from any angle. At night the only indication of their presence is the occasional star-like glint of a resort, or a glowing string of street lights hanging high up in the air. It is a photographer's paradise. Families are catered for by, for example, clubs with activities for children. You can get gluten-free, dairy-free and other free-from foods in the supermarket Super U in the 'Bio' section and there's an aisle for those who miss UK products. Tetley appears with the other teas. The nearest bigger town is Albertville which you'll pass if you come by car.



I felt welcome and not just because my euro spending potential. You don't have to speak the language but the more you can the more your opportunities for enjoying interacting with the locals. The French in and around BSM seemed on the whole as eager to practise their English as I was my French so usually they spoke in English and I spoke in French and you can't get more entente cordiale than that.

Bourg-Saint-Maurice has something I experienced nowhere else. Of course mountains everywhere come with lakes, paths and rivers where you can do all or most of the things listed above. What makes Bourg different is that intangible thing: atmosphere. The people who live and work here have a sense of well-being, they look fit, active, healthy as though the place is energising at a cellular level.



Perhaps it is partly the trees abundantly clothing the mountain slopes in stark contrast to, for example, Tignes. These provide welcome shade on walks and photo ops as the sun's rays stream through the branches onto the bronzed pine needle carpet below. It may be a personal physical reaction to the mineralogy of the area. It may be that it is as much an agricultural as a tourist area; the crops and herds are not laid on for visitors and their lenses. It is primarily a French town which welcomes and provides for Brits especially with whom the place is admittedly rammed in the winter season but who appear to blend in gently during the summer. The air of contentment is enhanced by the visitors who come there expectant of enjoyment. We saw families, older couples and teens all contentedly or excitedly occupied.

Different from London's purposeful tension, there is a freshness, a sense of possibility that anyone can flourish there. Bourg is a place where people come to be happy and are often so overjoyed they find a way to stay by, for example working in the sports industry, (seasonaires as young as 18 willing to bunk in a dormitory and work 60 hours a week for a pittance just to remain there), working remotely, starting a business or through managing or renting out properly. Others simply return for holidays year after year.

Bourg-Saint-Maurice is more than a small town. Its arms reach up the mountain and around those who stay there for any length of time. I do not, as you may suspect, work for the local tourist office. This was simply my personal experience and I wish that it may be yours.

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