

Travel Journal – Day 7: Annecy, Chamonix, Vallorcine, Annecy

A day wrapped in gentle rain and clouds, which gave the Alpine valleys a completely different kind of magic. The misty curtain over the mountains added a sense of mystery and awe, revealing only glimpses of towering peaks—just enough to stir the imagination. It was as if the Alps were whispering, rather than shouting, their greatness.

On the bus, we stayed warm and cheerful, playing a lively game of guess-the-French-expression, laughing our way through sayings involving itchy rabbits, onions, sugar, monks, bread, wine, and cheese—a language game that felt just right for a journey through this flavorful corner of France.

We arrived in Chamonix Mont Blanc, nestled at 1,035 meters (3,396 feet), at the foot of the towering Mont Blanc itself—the highest mountain in Western Europe at 4,808 meters (15,774 feet). Across the valley, we admired the jagged profile of les Aiguilles Rouges (2,965 meters / 9,728 feet), a range known for its red-tinged rock and dramatic peaks. Though partly veiled in cloud, their presence was unmistakable—imposing and timeless.

We also learned about la Mer de Glace, France's largest glacier, stretching over 7 km (4.3 miles), once a mighty river of ice flowing through the mountains, now a somber symbol of climate change as it retreats year by year.

Despite the weather, Chamonix charmed us. We strolled through its picturesque streets, where alpine chalets meet Belle Époque façades, and crossed the bridge over the rushing river that slices through the heart of town. We paused for a treat at the Fattier chalet, tasting their blueberry tart, a local favorite, and the unforgettable Florentine—crunchy caramelized almonds over dark chocolate.

Inside cozy shops, we explored regional treasures: génépi, a herbal liqueur made from Alpine flowers, local saucisson, small-batch gin, and plush marmotte souvenirs.

Lunch was at Josephine's, where we warmed up with a classic soupe à l'oignon, thick with caramelized onions and crowned with bubbling cheese and bread—just what the day called for.

Back on the bus, Alex skillfully handled every twist and turn of the mountain pass, even beating the train to Vallorcine, a quiet mountain village near the Swiss border. At La Ferme de Vallorcine, we met Victorien, who spoke passionately about his farm and life nestled between two mountain passes, sometimes snowed in for days. He shared how much he and his partner love this life—even when it's hard—surrounded by such majestic but remote beauty.

We tasted their rich, unpasteurised cheeses: tomme, raclette. Honest flavors, lovingly produced.

On our drive back, the clouds finally lifted just enough to let the sun kiss the peaks, revealing the “gentle giants” in their springtime robes. A quiet moment of awe as we slowly left the high mountains behind.

Back in Annecy, we had a little time to rest while Alex cared for the bus—cleaning, checking, and fueling up for the next leg of our adventure.

That evening, we walked through the meandering lanes of Annecy, glowing in golden light, to reach Le Fréti. We shared:

- Fondue Savoyarde, bubbling with a blend of Alpine cheeses,
- Raclette, scraped hot cheese over charcuterie,
- Salade au chèvre chaud,

- Diots, Savoyard pork sausages in red wine,
- and for dessert, crème brûlée, crème au chocolat, and fromage blanc.

A leisurely walk back through Annecy's picture-perfect streets closed this special day—resting up for more lakeside adventures tomorrow.