



CIPRA

RESPONSIBLE BIVOUACKING

Along the Via Alpina



Co-funded by
the European Union

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Make your journey count!

The Via Alpina is more than just a trail – it's a journey through breathtaking landscapes and a bridge between cultures. To preserve its beauty, a responsible approach to nature and bivouacking is essential. Nature is a living, delicate environment that can be easily harmed if we are not mindful guests.

This guide offers key insights into sustainable outdoor practices, helping adventurers respect both nature and local regulations. As wild camping gains in popularity, we must think ahead and adopt new approaches to minimize our impact on fragile ecosystems. That is why, toward the end of this document, we introduce alternative and already existing models that promote both nature preservation and accessibility.

Please note that the information in this brochure is intended as a general guidance. While we strive for accuracy, local regulations can change. It is your responsibility to verify and follow the most current rules and recommendations, so please consult with local authorities, land management agencies, or park services before your adventure. This ensures not only your safety and compliance with the law, but also the protection of the natural environments we all cherish.¹

Remember: by embracing sustainable and respectful practices, we can protect these landscapes and keep them preserved for future generations.

Happy hiking – and walk the change!

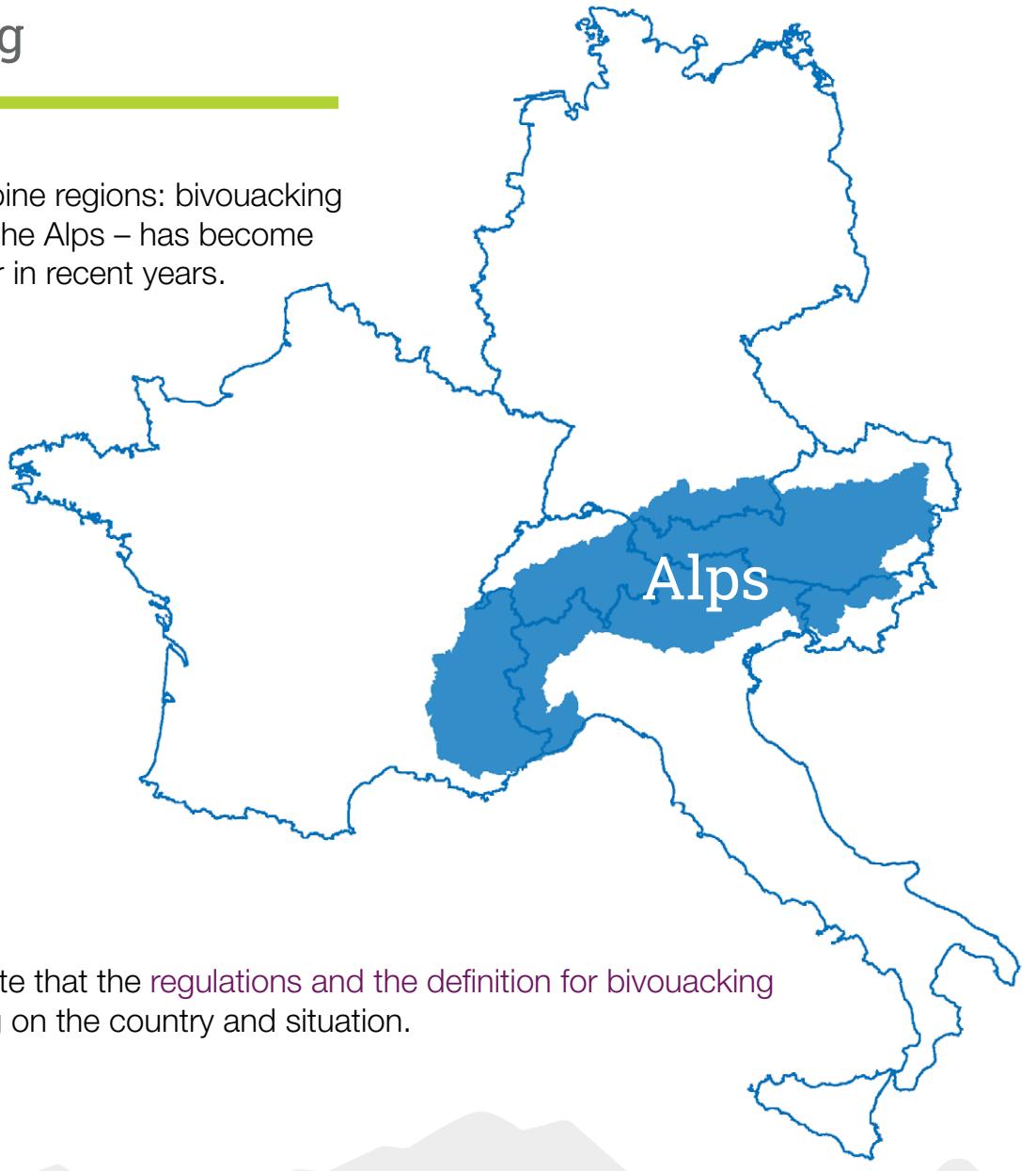
your CIPRA Team



1 The brochure's authors, publishers, and associated parties assume no liability for any consequences resulting from the use of the information contained herein.

Bivouacking

...in the different Alpine regions: bivouacking – in general and in the Alps – has become increasingly popular in recent years.



It is important to note that the [regulations](#) and the definition for bivouacking can vary depending on the country and situation.

We listed important regulations for each Alpine region

Definition

Bivouacking – with or without a tent? The bivouac is a makeshift outdoor overnight stay in the open air and is mainly associated with mountain sports.

The word comes from the French “bivouac” for night watch or from the even older Dutch “bijwacht” (bij = at and wacht = watch). In our modern times, the term “bivouacking” has developed slightly different nuances in the various Alpine countries:

In Germany, Austria and Switzerland, “bivouacking” refers to sleeping **without a tent** (this would be “camping”), while in France, “bivouacking” means sleeping outdoors **with a tent**, away from any official infrastructure. In Italy, “un bivacco” is a small unserviced hut.

This differentiation is very important to know, as there are differing regulations in some alpine countries for sleeping outside with a tent compared to sleeping without one.

Another important distinction is that between a planned bivouac and an emergency bivouac.



Know the difference!



@Freepik

Hardly ever brought along: guitar and gas cooker

Planned bivouacking refers to deliberately spending one night outdoors outside official campsites. While this is allowed in some Alpine regions, in others it is banned due to its similarity to camping. Even in regions where you are allowed to bivouac, there are usually restrictions to follow. During long, alpine undertakings in extreme terrain, bivouacking is usually tolerated – even if taken into account beforehand.



@Sébastien Ernst

In dangerous conditions it can be better to seek shelter

Emergency bivouacking or the alpine bivouac is an unplanned overnight stay in the wilderness under extreme or unforeseen circumstances such as injury, bad weather or darkness due to incidents. Emergency bivouacking serves to protect and ensure the safety of people in emergency situations. It allows hikers and mountaineers to temporarily protect themselves and wait for help if a safe descent is no longer possible. This is permitted everywhere in the Alps.

Austria



Planned overnight stays with or without a tent are only permitted with the owner's permission. Unplanned emergency overnight stays are generally permitted. The regulations for public lands can differ between the federal states.



In protected areas (national parks, nature reserves, landscape conservation areas, natural monuments and drinking water protection areas), camping and planned bivouacking are not permitted.



On domain land (public property), camping and planned bivouacking are not permitted unless the municipality or the federal state has passed different regulations (see next page).



You need the permission of the land owner to stay on private land.

Austria: Federal States

Burgenland	No special regulations for private visitors
Carinthia	No special regulations for private visitors
Lower Austria	No special regulations for private visitors
Upper Austria	Municipalities can authorise or prohibit camping and bivouacking in certain areas of the municipality. Bivouacking with or without a tent is permitted on uncultivated Alpine terrain (above the tree line and outside pasture areas)
Salzburg	Bivouacking in the high mountains is not generally prohibited, but requires certain behaviour (sensitivity in dealing with nature). The Alpine Club recommends that groups in particular contact the nature conservation department of the relevant district authority in advance.
Styria	On uncultivated Alpine terrain (above the tree line and outside pasture areas) there is a free right of access, which should also include bivouacking.
Tyrol	No special regulations for private visitors
Vorarlberg	Generally permitted; the municipality may prohibit camping and bivouacking for reasons of public interest.
Vienna	No special regulations for private visitors

France



Wild camping and bivouacking are permitted anywhere with a few exceptions: it is in general not permitted to stay overnight on the coast, in protected natural sites and on the perimeter of historic monuments.



Authorities governing natural sites such as national or regional parks often establish specific rules where bivouacking is permitted under certain conditions. These differ from park to park, so be sure to be aware of the current rules!



On domain land (public property), local authorities may establish specific rules.



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France: Regional Nature Parks

Massif des Bauges Regional N.P.

Only permitted from sunset to sunrise for one night.¹
Eleven designated camping areas were opened in 2025.²

Chartreuse Regional Nature Park

No special regulations; general rules apply.

Vercors Regional Nature Park

Only permitted between 5pm and 9am.³

Queyras Regional Nature Park

No special regulations; general rules apply.

Préalpes d'Azur Regional N.P.

Only permitted from sunset to sunrise.
Prohibited between 1 July and 30 September below altitudes of 1,500m metres.^{4,5}

Verdon Regional Nature Park

Prohibited on the banks of lakes and in gorges.⁶

Haut-Jura Regional Nature Park

Only permitted without a tent between 7pm and 9am and at most 20 metres from authorised footpaths and outside active wildlife quiet zones.⁷



- ¹ www.parcdesbauges.com/decouvrir-respecter/
- ² www.france3-regions.franceinfo.fr/auvergne-rhone-alpes/savoie/il-faut-que-les-gens-comprennent-dans-le-massif-des-bauges-des-aires-de-bivouac-installees-pour-lutter-contre-les-incivilites-3231950.html
- ³ www.parc-du-vercors.fr/sites/default/files/actualites/Accueil%20Biodiversit%C3%A9/2020_LivretAccueil_RNNHPV.pdf
- ⁴ www.parc-prealpedsdazur.fr/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Guide-du-bon-bivouac-1.pdf
- ⁵ www.parc-prealpedsdazur.fr/actualite/bulletin-risque-incidente-dans-les-prealpes-dazur
- ⁶ www.parcduverdon.fr/fr/conseils-des-ecogardes/rappel-de-la-reglementation-par-type-de-milieu
- ⁷ www.rnn-hautechainedujura.fr/en/reglementation-bivouac/

France: National Parks

Vanoise National Park

Only permitted in the immediate vicinity of certain huts.
Tents can be pitched between 7pm and 8am.
Spots have to be reserved during summer.
€5 per person.⁸

Ecrins National Park

Only permitted at least one hour's walk from road access points and core area boundaries or close to particularly popular refuges on long-distance hiking routes.
Small tents can be pitched between 7pm and 9am for one night or for the duration of bad weather.⁹

Mercantour National Park

Only permitted more than one hour's walk from park boundaries or nearest road. Tents can be pitched between 7 pm and 9 am.¹⁰

8

www.vanoise-parcnational.fr/fr/parc-national-de-la-vanoise/la-reglementation-du-coeur

9

www.ecrins-parcnational.fr/sites/ecrins-parcnational.com/files/fiche_doc/9678/14-06-192ardir-reglementationbivouac.pdf

10

www.mercantour-parcnational.fr/fr/le-parc-national-du-mercantour/la-reglementation

Germany



The regulations regarding bivouacking with a tent vary depending on the federal state, but are generally very restrictive. Bivouacking without a tent may be subject to a fine but is sometimes tolerated.



In protected areas (nature conservation areas, national parks, biosphere reserves, landscape conservation areas and nature parks, NATURA 2000 areas), camping and planned bivouacking are not permitted and may even be a criminal offence.



On domain land (public property), planned bivouacking is a legal grey area and often tolerated, unless the municipality or the federal state has passed different regulations. In Bavaria, the same regulations apply as mentioned above.



You need the permission of the land owner to stay on private land.

Italy



In Italy, bivouacking at night from dusk to dawn is generally tolerated everywhere, unless clearly stated otherwise. Most regions have set a legal framework, but in many cases the permission or prohibition lies with the municipalities and local authorities.



In national parks and nature parks bivouacking is generally not permitted. Nevertheless, some national and nature parks allow bivouacking at certain locations or under certain conditions: check with park authority.



On domain land (public property), planned bivouacking is permitted after obtaining prior authorisation from the local authorities. In municipalities without explicit regulations, it is permitted to bivouack from sunset to sunrise with or without a tent.



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Italy: regions

Trentino-South Tyrol

Bivouacking is permitted with or without a tent for a maximum duration of 24 hours where there is no explicit ban or if the owner of the land authorises this.¹

Aosta Valley

Bivouacking is permitted with or without a tent above 2,500 metres from sunset to sunrise. Bivouacking with a tent is prohibited in protected areas or near huts and shelters.²

Liguria

Liguria has no overarching regulation. Check with the municipality or the protected area for the applicable regulations. In the ligurian Alps, unintended refuges are available for alpinist activities.³

Friuli-Venezia-Giulia

Bivouacking with a tent is only permitted in specially designated and equipped areas; otherwise it is prohibited. National parks and protected area have their own regulations and can set official bivouac sites.⁴

Piedmont

Bivouacking with or without a tent is permitted for a maximum duration of 48 hours in areas where no official camping sites are available.⁵

Lombardy

Lombardy has no overarching regulation. Check with the municipality or the protected area for the applicable regulations. Refuges without wardens are available for mountain activities in the Lombardy Alps.⁶

¹ Consiglio della Provincia Autonoma di Trento: Legge provinciale 4 ottobre 2012, n. 19, Art. 7

² Consiglio regionale della Valle d'Aosta: Legge regionale 24 giugno 2002, n. 8, Art. 19

³ Consiglio regionale della Liguria: Legge regionale n. 2 del 07-02-2008

⁴ Consiglio regionale del Veneto: Legge regionale 16 agosto 1984, n. 40, Art. 12

⁵ Consiglio regionale del Piemonte: Legge regionale n. 5 del 22 febbraio 2019, Art.10

⁶ Consiglio regionale della Lombardia: Legge regionale 1 ottobre 2015, n. 27, Art. 7 and Art. 32

Liechtenstein



Liechtenstein has no clear regulations regarding bivouacking with or without a tent. Check with the municipality to be sure. Camping is explicitly forbidden in protected areas and forest areas.^{1,2}



Camping and planned bivouacking are not permitted in protected areas (nature and landscape conservation areas).¹



On domain land (public property), planned bivouacking and wild camping is a legal grey area and often tolerated. Check with the municipality to be sure.³



You need the permission of the land owner to stay on private land.

¹ Art. 12 und Art. 20 des Gesetz vom 23. Mai 1996 zum Schutz von Natur und Landschaft (Naturschutzgesetz; NSchG), LGBI. 1996 Nr. 117

² Art 15 des Waldgesetz (WaldG) vom 25. März 1991, LGBI. 1991 Nr. 42

³ Liechtensteiner Vaterland (2017): Reizvolles, aber verbotenes Abenteuer. Zeitung.

Monaco



No camping or planned bivouacking are permitted throughout the Principality of Monaco.¹



For the protection of the sea, camping and planned bivouacking are explicitly forbidden on beaches or areas where swimming is allowed.²



No camping or planned bivouacking are permitted on domain land (public property).^{1,2}



You need the permission of the land owner to stay on private land.

¹
²

www.legimonaco.mc/tnc/arrete-municipal/1950/12-20-L002106/
www.legimonaco.mc/code/code-mer/

Slovenia



No camping or planned bivouacking are permitted outside of designated areas. Municipalities can lay down conditions, areas and rules for camping in their territory.¹



In the Triglav national park (TNP) and other protected areas, no camping or planned bivouacking are permitted and may be subject to a fine.²



On domain land (public property), no camping or planned bivouacking are permitted outside of designated areas.^{1,2}



You need the permission of the land owner to stay on private land.

¹
²

Zakon o varstvu javnega reda in miru (ZJRM-1), člen 18

Zakon o Triglavskem narodnem parku (ZTNP-1), člen 13, odstavek 1, številka 46

Switzerland



Switzerland has no uniform legal situation covering camping and unplanned bivouacking. As a general rule, anyone has the right to access woodlands and meadows. Restrictions may apply in some cantons or municipalities. Unplanned emergency overnight stays are generally permitted.



Camping and planned bivouacking are not permitted in Swiss National Parks, Swiss game reserves (wildlife reserves), many nature reserves and designated wildlife areas (during the protection period). Restrictions on cantonal and communal nature reserves can be found in the cantonal geoportals.



On domain land (public property) outside of protected areas, camping and planned bivouacking are usually tolerated, unless the canton or municipality has passed different regulations.



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Switzerland: traffic light system for bivouacking (SAC)

Unproblematic

Ideal sites are located above the forest line, on Alpine meadows or in rocky terrain

Be particularly aware

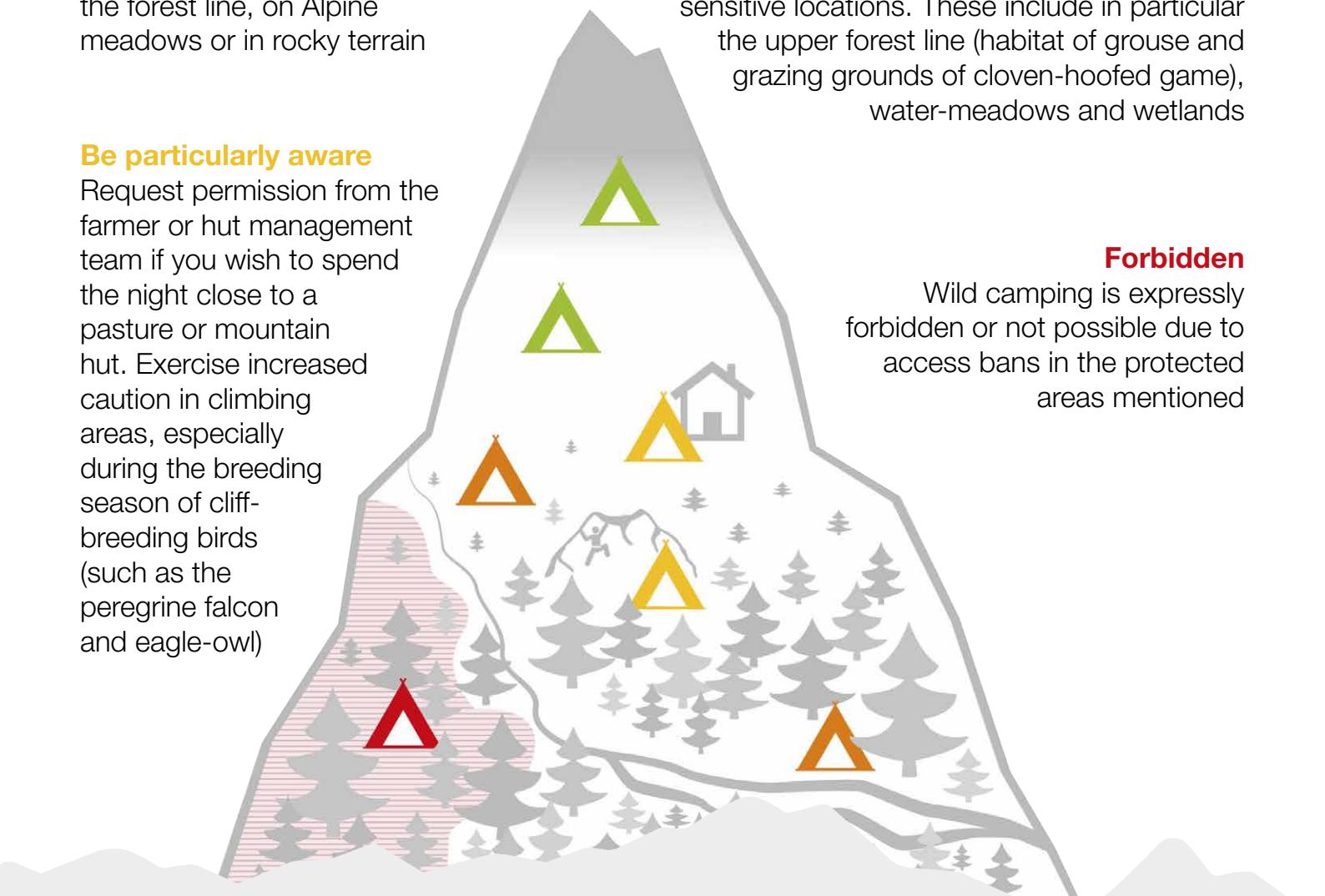
Request permission from the farmer or hut management team if you wish to spend the night close to a pasture or mountain hut. Exercise increased caution in climbing areas, especially during the breeding season of cliff-breeding birds (such as the peregrine falcon and eagle-owl)

Please avoid

Avoid overnight stays in environmentally sensitive locations. These include in particular the upper forest line (habitat of grouse and grazing grounds of cloven-hoofed game), water-meadows and wetlands

Forbidden

Wild camping is expressly forbidden or not possible due to access bans in the protected areas mentioned



Alternatives to bivouacking

Trekking sites are legal alternatives to wild camping and examples of good practice in areas with restrictions. These sites, accessible only on foot, are typically available from April to October. They offer space for up to three tents, a fire pit, and a toilet block, costing 15 euros per tent. Reservations are usually required, providing exact coordinates. While basic, these sites are ideal for nature stays or budget-friendly multi-day hikes. Currently, there are no trekking places in the Alps but, as a new concept, they may become a good alternative in the future. For example, in the Contamines-Montjoie National Nature Reserve, to allow hikers to enjoy natural spaces while preserving their integrity, a new bivouac reservation tool was set up in 2024. You can now locate authorized sectors and book a bivouac spot on a dedicated website (www.cen-haute-savoie.org).

Bivouac boxes and shelters serve as **emergency shelters** or stopovers for challenging summit or multi-day hiking tours away from mountain infrastructure. The equipment and facilities of bivouac shelters vary widely across the Alps, ranging from basic huts with a few mattresses to luxurious huts with stoves, kitchens, and solar panels. It's important to remember that bivouac boxes/shelters are intended for emergencies and as starting or resting points for demanding tours, not for recreational free overnight adventures. Nevertheless, in Italy and France this kind of facility is available for use by all hikers, subject to available space. It is of course necessary to leave the hut in the same condition as it was found and respect the location and its surroundings.

For example, the French website “Refuge info” is a non-commercial site that provides information on numerous mountain shelters all across France and the Alps. It is a collaborative website where anyone can add information or comments.



The map allows you to search for free shelter (“refuge non gardé” in French), water sources or tricky passages, among others. However, **it is always important to check the existence of huts** on other websites or with tourist offices to prepare your excursion (www.refuges.info).

Private camping offers, such as 1nitent, provide a unique way to camp on private land, similar to Couchsurfing but outdoors. Landowners with scenic spots can list their locations on the platform, allowing travellers, hikers, and outdoor enthusiasts to camp there for one night at no cost. This system fosters a community of shared outdoor experiences at no financial gain (www.1nitent.com).

Check the following webpages for available huts:

Austria & Germany

www.alpenvereinaktiv.com | www.alpenverein.at | www.alpenverein.de

Italy

www.sat.tn.it | www.prenotarfugi.cai.it

Slovenia

<https://en.pzs.si/> | www.pzs.si/koce.php

ZAPRTO (closed); OS (open Saturdays); OSNP (open Saturdays, Sundays, public holidays)

Switzerland

www.sac-cas.ch



Responsible bivouacking

Plan your visit sustainably

Try to access the natural world on foot, by bike or via public transport. If you must drive, consider sharing a ride to reduce your environmental impact. Nature is not meant to become one big car park.

Avoid sensitive areas

These include transition zones between forests and meadows, sparse tree stands, wildlife paths or areas with many wildlife traces (tracks, droppings), areas with shrub groups, heathlands, moorlands, river floodplains and, in winter, bare spots and hilltops.

Avoid disturbance

Avoid or minimise noise, especially during twilight when most wildlife is active and particularly sensitive to disturbances. During the breeding season of ground-nesting birds in early summer, stay away from structurally rich dwarf shrub, grassy areas and the area around boulders. Keep control of dogs as they can disturb other species.

Waste management

Any natural toilet should be used at least 50 metres from water sources. Bury excrement or cover it with a large stone. Take toilet paper and all other rubbish (tampons, sanitary pads, wet wipes, etc.) with you in a bag. Don't burn it - it is a fire risk.

Leave no trace

When leaving the site, restore it to its original condition. Do not leave any waste behind. This includes leftover food (compostable material can take years to decompose at high altitude; peels can add toxins to the soil). Take any litter left by others back down to the valley.

Fire management

To prevent wildfires, do not build fires in sensitive areas or in dry conditions. Collect only dead wood from the ground; do not cut live trees or branches. Only use established fire rings or places where fires have clearly been made before, as fire pits destroy vegetation and soil for years. Use water to douse the fire and stir the ashes to make sure no embers remain. **Never leave a fire unattended. Ensure the fire is fully extinguished before leaving. Respect fire prohibitions.**

Site selection & safety

Check on site whether your planned location really does not affect any sensitive habitats or is exposed to increased natural hazards (lightning, rockfall, avalanches, flooding). To avoid contamination, set up camp at least 100 metres away from watercourses. Rivers and streams can swell suddenly even in fine weather due to heavy rain elsewhere or hydropower plants opening dams.

Food and hygiene

Do not leave any food, leftovers or compostable material lying around. Do your washing (dishes, soap, toothpaste) with easily biodegradable products at least 30 meters away from water, without the waste water entering the watercourse directly.

Keep special places secret

Use social media and GPS tracking responsibly. Remember, the main reason to be in the great outdoors should be for your own personal satisfaction—not for social media likes or external appreciation.

Via Alpina Youth

This publication is part of the “Via Alpina Youth” project, an initiative that promotes sustainable lifestyles, inclusion and environmental protection. It is inspired by the Via Alpina long-distance trail, which, for over two decades, has served as a pathway of connection—uniting all Alpine countries and weaving together diverse cultures, communities, and stunning natural landscapes.

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LIVING IN
THE ALPS



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