

TRAVEL:

Chamonix, France

BY KRISTEN PATTERSON

Currency: the French Franc is worth 0.23 Canadian dollars (one Canadian dollar is worth 4.26 French francs)

All right, you athletic types, this is the place for you. Chamonix is located in the French Alps, at the bottom of a valley surrounded by gorgeous mountains, the prize of which is Mont Blanc, famous to anyone who loves hiking, climbing, or just risking their life for the fun of it. For those of you whose sportive abilities are less enamoured by your peers, fear not, this place is still worthy of a visit, to say the least. Chamonix is a town built for tourism - the place is packed throughout the year. It's certainly picturesque - I imagine that the mountains speak for themselves. Not to mention the town, which is right off a postcard.

How to get to Chamonix: There are different tours that hit Chamonix, designed for hikers and adventure seekers of the outdoor variety. You can get there by train via France or Switzerland. Bus tours are dubious - check with Travelcuts. Forget walking and unless you're completely insane, forego cycling. Mountains=uphill=death.

*if going by train, remember: Chamonix looks like it's close to Geneva, but that's because the map can't show you how much higher it is than the other. Allow yourself at least three hours to get there.

Where to stay: The youth hostel is absolutely wonderful. However, it's not located in

Chamonix - it's in Les Pelerins, a small village half-an-hour's walk away. Les Pelerins has its own train station, so get off there to save yourself time and pain. The hostel closes at ten p.m. and it is rather hard to find at night - the locals are very helpful. This hostel is too fantastic to miss because the scenery is to die for and the accommodations are superb. It's easy enough to get over to Chamonix, either by car or walking (be prepared to sweat and bring plenty of water). The trains don't run very often and are therefore not the recommended mode of transportation for getting to and from Chamonix/Les Pelerins.

How to get around Chamonix: Well, there just isn't a huge area to get around, so just walk everywhere. Driving is okay, but the crowds are fairly huge and tend to spill into the streets so it might be more frustrating than worthwhile.

What to do: Chamonix is not a place to see per se, it's a recreation centre. Hang gliding, hiking, mountain climbing, skiing: whatever is in season. There are tons of shops and restaurants, all exorbitantly priced, as tourist traps usually are: use your own discretion. I just like to look at the mountains.

I'd have to say that Chamonix/Les Pelerins is definitely a favourite destination of mine. I'd be back there in a second if only I had the money. If you have the money, then there's no question: get over there before another moment is wasted.

Next issue: Paris.

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