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This week's dream: a beach holiday in the French Alps

At the height of summer, France's Mediterranean coast gets overcrowded, overpriced and overrun by vendors of "tourist tat". For a peaceful beach holiday in beautiful surroundings, head instead to the Alpine lakes of the Pays de Savoie, says Lee Marshall in Condé Nast Traveller. Lakes Annecy, Bourget and Aiguebelette have clean water that's surprisingly warm in summer; and beaches with good water sports facilities and safe swimming areas for children. Surrounding them are idyllic old towns with fine yet "affordable" restaurants and wild, majestic mountain scenery. Unsurprisingly, they're popular with French visitors – but their shores never feel crowded.

The Abbaye de Talloires hotel overlooking Lake Annecy

The region was part of the Kingdom of Sardinia (previously the Duchy of Savoy) until 1860, and its "Italianate past" still shows in the "*dolce vita* charm" of Annecy town, at the northern tip of the lake. With its canals and "winding medieval streets" lined with Savoyard delis, cafés and craft shops, it is touristy, but in a "laid-back, French way". The lake's eastern shores are its "Côte d'Azur", with grand villas, formal country-house hotels and "well-heeled" visitors. Particularly glamorous is the "elegant, cultured" town of Talloires. Wrapped around a small bay with views across to the castle of Duingt, it is the haunt of film stars such as Jean Reno (who co-owns the Abbaye hotel).

Aix-les-Bains, on the Lac du Bourget, was once an "elegant" spa resort, but now feels "past its prime". Elsewhere, the lake's steep, forested shores are glorious and unspoiled, with peaks such as Molard Noir (1,452m) offering sweeping views westwards to the Rhône Valley and eastwards to the High Alps. Finally, there is "pretty" Aiguebelette, the smallest and most rustic of the three lakes, which has startling green water and shores covered in "cool and shady chestnut woods". *Various airlines, including easyJet and British Airways, fly year-round from the UK to Geneva, which is a 40-minute drive from Annecy.*