

An aerial photograph of a historic town, likely Sospel, France. The town is built on a hillside, featuring numerous buildings with terracotta roofs. A prominent church with a tall spire is visible in the center. The town is surrounded by lush green trees and vegetation. In the foreground, there are some green leaves and branches, suggesting the photo was taken from an elevated position. The overall scene is bright and clear, with good lighting.

Secret Sospel

Discover 1000 years in 60 minutes
on this fascinating walking tour around
the old town's hidden treasures

Mark Moxom

You probably don't realise it yet, but in the next 60 minutes, you will see more of this village than many of the folk who have lived here for years. By the time you get to the end of the tour, you will not only have some great memories but you will also have had the chance to experience what it must have been like to live here all those hundreds of years ago .



Mark Moxom

As you follow this easy to read guide, you'll certainly find yourself in some of the most unusual places. Places that are stacked full of mystery, history, rumour and intrigue.

And it's certain that you won't want to miss the golden opportunity to take some unique photos that will outshine anything you can buy on a postcard!

So please do accept our invitation and get to know this lovely old town as you uncover its hidden treasures and find Sospel behind the scenes . Your trip around Secret Sospel really will reveal...

A 1000 years of history in 60 minutes.

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This publication is meant for information and education. E & OE

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Where did Sospel come from?

The first time Sospel appears in any traceable records is in 1095 in the Loco Sespedeli. It was first under the rule of Ventimiglia, and then in 1258 it came under the Counts of Provence. Finally, it was ruled by the Counts of Savoy.

Back in 1370, Sospel took the side of Pope of Avignon against the False Pope in Rome. For that it was elevated to the status of a diocese and that's the reason why we have a Cathedral in such a small town of this size.

When you look at the situation of Sospel, you may wonder why it's here in the first place. Well simply because it's actually in a very strategic location.

You may have noticed when you came into the town that it's right in the centre of a rich alluvial valley, just where the Bevera and Merlanson rivers come together. Compared with the mountains around it, the valley is a very easy path to take so it's only natural that the first tracks going through this region would use this valley.



Pope Gregory XI Became pope in 1370

Over the millennia, the Bevera and the Merlanson rivers have carved out their respective routes in the valley floor to form an easily defended rocky outcrop right next to a fordable crossing point on the Bevera. These, combined with the richness of the valley, makes it an obvious location for what was initially a staging point on that route. Virtually everything needed to refresh travellers and provide their needs could be produced within the valley.

Remains from Ligurian, Celt and Roman epochs testify to the fact that this was a well trodden path beside which many chose to build a home. Roman settlement is witnessed by the aquaduct at the eastern end of the valley, that was thought to provide fresh water to a garrison station nearby. Over the years the settlement became a village and eventually a town. a town that has an interesting and fascinating history.

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We'll see later that the town was in fact a staging point for the old Route de Sel, (the Salt Road) and part of the old royal road between Turino and Nice.

The Bevera river divides Sospel in two, and it's like having two distinct old towns – one on each side of the river. In times past, there were often periods of intense rivalry between the two halves.

As you will see - many of the streets of the old town are very narrow between very tall buildings, and these are nice and cool even in the hottest summers. These street are so efficient at holding in the cool moist air that you may even notice that 'after rain' smell as you go through them. And you definitely will notice it around some of the fountains.

Although in the past the streets were quite uncared for, that situation is now improving as you'll see as we go through. But even with all the improvements, the town hasn't lost that distinct medieval atmosphere.

During this tour, if you'll just let your imagination colour the scene, I know you'll discover some interesting and surprising things as we wander through the old streets of Sospel.

Lets begin.

Starting from the tourist office, Turn right out of the door and go the few meters to the first stop -

1 - Place de Cabraia.

In the centre of the Place you will see the two level fountain. The lower side is for animals, and the higher one for people. The name "cabraia" actually means "herd of goats", and back in the 17th century this area was used literally for that – it was a corral for goats. That's partly the reason there is an animal side to the fountain.

The 'Cabraia Restaurant' named after the square, is a nice place to eat if you want somewhere to go later on in the evening.



Place de Cabraia- Place of goats

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Next, head on over to the right going between the buildings up the Rue St Michel

2 - Place St Michel

Just as you get to the top of the road, you'll see a lot of old signs on the wall, as you come past the corner shop we affectionately call "Open All Hours". It's one of those 'got everything' shops

To look at it you would not believe it is a very famous shop - known in all France. It's famous because it has been on French TV as a typical example of the old-style kind of French shop. If you do need anything, from batteries to tooth-picks, just pop in there and ask for them.



Former Mairie in Place St Michel

Those of you who are familiar with Ronnie Barker's series "Open All Hours" will know exactly what to expect when you walk in the door! And to be honest, it's well worth a visit. You might even want to ask the gentleman owner to autograph this guide?

Move further on into the square, and in the middle of it you will see that there is a star design in the cobbles. Stand in the centre of the star and you can look around and see everything from a good perspective. Dominating this square is the Cathedral, which is a fine example of the Baroque period of architecture; we'll come back to that in a minute. Just to the right of the Cathedral you will see a building that is now called the Foyer Rural. This is just one of the buildings that has been a Town Hall in Sospel's history, it's now a library and community centre. Swinging almost 90° round to your right, you'll see the Palace Richie. On the front is a plaque that celebrates the visit of Pope Pious VII back in 1809. It probably wasn't the best visit he'd ever had, as at the time he was a prisoner of Napoleon.



St Michel - Cathedral
AM's biggest church

If you go through the arches of this building and look behind the centre pillar, you'll see a carved coat of arms for the House of Savoy, (up near the ceiling). But don't go

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just yet, you can take a smashing photo using the arches to frame the Cathedral if you want.

Back on the star. If you continue to swing on around clockwise, you'll see all sorts of old and fascinating buildings, that over the years have had any number of uses, from hotels to palaces and some things they won't let us mention in the guide-book! As we swing further around clockwise, you'll see the Chapels of the Red & the White Penitents.

Even up until recently, as in the last few years, Sospel had its Procession of Penitents a number of times in the year. As part of their religious observances, penitents thought it necessary to march as an act of humility. and forgiveness. Throughout the rest of the year they performed more useful tasks, such as aiding and giving to the poor or helping the sick and otherwise needy.

There were five groups of penitents in Sospel - blue, red, black grey and white. Each had their own chapel and each drew their members from a particular class or profession. Nobles had their group, tradesmen had theirs, and so on.

3 - St Michel Sospels Cathedral

If you swing back round now to the Cathedral, you'll see that this is actually a very large building. In fact, it's the largest church in the Alps-Maritime. Construction was started in 1641 but wasn't completed until 1762. That makes 121 years in the building. And we think modern builders take their time.

The design is based on that of a Basilica, and if you'd like to take a little while to go and visit it, you will see that there are a lot of fine architectural details inside. It's really quite impressive and well worth a visit. There is more information about the Cathedral in other pamphlets, so we won't go into them in too much detail here, but do go in and have a look.

As you come out of the Cathedral doors, turn right and leave the square up the wide steps between the pinkish and orangeish buildings (The two churches of the penitents). When you get to the top of the stairs you will be able to see the parts of the Cathedral that many people don't get to see.

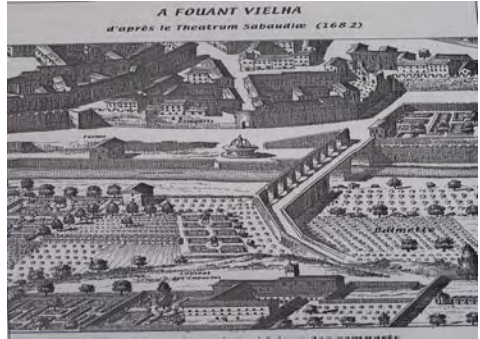
Note the subtle contrast with the way it looks from the front! Also just as you come up to the top of the stairs there you'll see a ruin overgrown with ivy. That's the remains of the old Convent of the Discalced Carmelite Nuns.

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4 - Castle Square.

If you continue on up the next set of steps there are two square stone bollards at the top (just to make sure you're on the right way). You will start to see the remains of the old tower of the castle. As you go around the old tower you'll notice that it has corners – which is a very old design – and different shaped windows reflecting the different periods in which it was remodelled and rebuilt.



Sospel in 1683

Back in the 14th century, Sospel was a walled town, as you will see by the copy of engraving to the top right here. At the centre of the walled town we have the castle or the tower of the Counts of Provence, whom I mentioned earlier. While only part of the walls and the remains of the tower are left, you can still get a good idea of what it was like.



Place de la tour - before the war looking east with the lavoir on your left

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Continue on down the Place de la Tour and about two-thirds of the way down you'll see the remains of an old Gateway. Go through the Gateway and you'll come out by the Chemin de L'Abby. Turn immediately right and go up the slope, about five or six metres, then look back and see that the middle of the old ruin is now someone's garden. You'll also be able to see how thick the old walls of the town were.

Continue on up the slope, you'll notice that the wall juts out a bit. If you stand on that, you are standing right on the edge of what was the old Town Wall back in the 13th Century.

5 - Place de la Tour

Return back down the slope and you'll see that there is a very small archway going through the wall and a few stairs going down, go through that and you'll come out right next to the 1888 washing place. If you stand with the washing place to your left and look east down the road you are looking at the same view as the one in the picture on page 7. But these are nearly 100 years apart.

Like all the fountains in Sospel, the water comes from a natural spring high up in the mountains that surround the town. (you can just see it through the houses there) Believe it or not, this washing place is still in use most days of the week.

Come out of the washing place and turn left, past the post box on your left, and then past two pink columns with white tops to the right, (there's a green gate between them). You'll notice there is now a low wall to your right. If you've got kids, please take care of them here. Just where the level of the wall drops down a bit, stop and have a look over the edge, you can see the old Merlendson River below.

6 - Menton -Sospel Tramway

Directly across from you, you can see the buildings that were left behind from when there used to be a tramway coming up from Menton.

At the beginning of the last century, Sospel was served by a very efficiently run tramway that joined it with the coast at Menton. The line opened on the 15th April 1912. The buildings you can see across the valley in



Tramway Workshops

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Tramway Station and Cafe with the fort on the peak just right of centre front of you, starting from the right, are the old workshops. On the left hand end you can just about see the archway that's been partially blocked off where the trams used to go through. To the left of that building you can see the old tramway station and the vestiges of the platform poking out on the right hand side.

Further to the left - just across a small lane from the station, at the back of the Villa Amiel, you can see a small square building that was in fact the old station café. You'll be able to have a more detailed look at those further on if you have time. Nowadays, the two larger buildings are used by the DDE, part of the Consiel General department that looks after the roads in this department.

The photo on page 10 shows the same building back in the 20's with the trams running.

The tram service that came up from Menton had both first and second class passengers and also it carried a lot of goods. Back in the twenties, when they were building the main Nice to Breil railway line, (which you will see on the hill behind the workshop) the tramway was used for carrying much of the construction materials. But when construction of the main railway finished in 1928, the tramway traffic to and from Menton dropped off quite considerably, and like many of the coastal routes, this one became uneconomic and had to be closed. It carried it's last passengers on 23rd March 1931.

If you came up to Sospel by car, you will have seen different parts of the various viaducts at the side of the road, which are all that remains of the tram lines.

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Tramway buildings with trams circa 1930

7 - Maginot Forts

In the distance on top of the hill up to the right is Fort Barbonnet. Over to the left you'll see a very high hill, and just below it there's a smaller hill in the middle distance. You might just be able to make out the turret of a gun emplacement on top of that hill. (see page 9) Like the other gun emplacements etc you can see on the hill tops around Sospel, this one is part of the Maginot Line defences. However, this particular one has been built right in the middle of what we believe to be a 14th or 15th Century castle. There is a very nice walk up to that castle that takes about two or three hours. It's great to take a picnic, spend an hour up there and then come back but only if you have the time.

Incidentally the picture on the front cover of this guide was taken from just in front of the turret on the top of that hill.

Continue on down the road to a few metres from where the iron fence starts and you'll see the other parts of the old tramway buildings more easily. Behind the Villa Amiel, you may also see the remains of the mill race that came from about a mile up the Merlendson valley to power the mill wheel behind it. (If the trees don't block the view)

As you look down and follow the course of the river, you can also see the same bridge in the photo above.

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Turn behind you and you'll see that there is a nice garden through the double iron gates. Go left up the allyway that runs in front of them. As you're walking through, do look left and right because you may see some quite interesting sights.

When you get to the top of that alleyway there is an archway through the building, but you need to turn immediately right and start heading down the hill. Again, don't just look at the path, do look up and to the sides, you will see lots of interesting features of the village, some of which haven't changed in hundreds of years. Continue on down and you'll have to turn right, just between a blue door on the right and a green door on the left, and go down the next part of the alleyway. At the bottom to the right you'll see the remains of what we believe may have been an old wine-cellar.

The path continues on down as it doubles back to the left and becomes the Rue De Voutes. As you go further down the slope, you will see the front of the cathedral appearing through the archway in front of you.



Lion and Lamb motif - Rue St Pierre

8 - Rue de St Pierre

As you come down the last steps, you're now on the Rue St Pierre. Turn to the right on the Rue St Pierre and you'll notice a square that opens out in front of you to the left. Just walk a few paces into the square on the left hand side and then look back at the building on the opposite side of Rue St Pierre. About halfway up, you'll see the remains of a window or door lintel with a lion and a lamb carved on it. This was the Salt Tax Office, or the Hotel de Gabella, and also the Viguerie or the house of the Ventimiglia guards. Looking at it now, it does seem strange to think that back in the 13th century this 'little' town of Sospel was, in fact, the administrative capital of the Roya, Bevera, Ventimiglia and the Lantosque valley. This is probably one of the oldest standing buildings in Sospel.

In past times, the Rue St Pierre was known as a *carriera dretcha*, (the straight street), and was inhabited by many of the Sospel nobility. In fact as you go along it do look up as you can see the remains of many old and fine architectural features on many of the buildings. Watch out for the pigeons!

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60 Minute guide to Secret Sospel - Just Follow the red line

Walking further down the street you'll notice that there are quite a few carved lintels with birds, dogs and all sorts on them.

Continue on down and you'll see opening out in front of you, the open eating area for the Sout'a Lopia Restaurant, which is a great place for an evening meal if you like Provencal food.

A little bit further on and on the right hand side of Rue St Pierre you'll see L'Estabis which is a Corsican run pizza restaurant, again a nice place to eat of an evening and sometimes at lunchtimes too. Opposite that, you'll see the Bar de Rome. That incidentally is where a lot of the locals eat their lunch-time main meal. The pink building, the last one on the left at the end of the Rue St Pierre, is the current Mairie, and then as you get out further into the square over to the right, you'll see the two fountains Vielha.

9 - The Mairie

Looking at the fountains you may think it strange that there are two fountains there, both semicircular. There is a little story to that. A fountain existed on this site since 1682, and that fountain in turn dates back to about 1387 when it's construction and maintenance was ordered by the Reverend Seigneur Frere MARINACO, from Ventimiglia. However, that was just a circular fountain, much like one of the others you'll see later on in this tour. Yet now you can see two fountains. Here's the story to that.

At the end of the 19th century, the communal administrators of the town noticed that the area you are now standing in, which incidentally was in front of one of the old town gates, had become somewhat run-down and had gained a rather insalubrious reputation. As it was just opposite the Town Gate, anyone coming to the town could see the poor state this area had got into so the town administrators thought



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they had better do something about it! Whether the problem was a sanitary one or the area had become the meeting place of undesirables it's hard to say.

However, the administrator's simple solution was to pull down the old circular fountain, cut it in two, and then stick it to the aqueduct wall as you now see it . As you look, you'll notice that the columns and the capitals and everything else there, simply are like they've been saw in two and stuck to a wall. Surprising? NO, not really, because that's just what they did.



Incidentally, you can see that there are three fountain heads gushing water. The two upper ones are fed from the hill up behind the fountain, and the lower one come from over the other side of the town. By the way, that has the nicest tasting water in the town so fill up your water bottle now.

Also just in front of the Mairie you've got the town bus-stop, where you can get a fairly efficient and cheap bus into Menton several times a day.

Once you've had a look at the fountains, leave the Place St Pierre and go to the right along the pavement footpath past the building with the little columns around it,(next to the fountains). You'll see a green railing on the right hand side.

Down below you should see the Merlanson River and a vegetable garden. The fact that it's a vegetable garden is actually quite in keeping as 700 years ago it used to be part of the garden of the Convent de Capucins.

You will notice to the back of the garden there is an old mill wheel stood up on its edge, about which there is a fascinating story which we are trying to uncover. As far as we know it concerns a travelling millwright and the daughter of a local noble.



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10 - Ancient Hotel de la Gare - Villa Amiel

Behind and to the left of the mill wheel, you'll see what is now the Villa Amiel, a chambre d'hôte. The right hand part of the house is shown in engravings (page 14) dating back as far as 1682, and we understand that the part shown was built between 100 and 150 years before the engraving was done. Over the years this fascinating building has been used for a number of things, with the construction of the building to the right, the old oil and flour mill, happening some time in the 18th century.

By the late 1800's early 1900's, the building as you can see it now had been quite extended, and had become a hotel. Once the tramway was built it became the Hotel de la Gare. It wasn't known especially as a hotel, its reputation in the past was as a top-class restaurant. And in fact, the old locals say that Winston Churchill used to eat and stay here sometimes when he was up in Sospel playing golf.

The large veranda that you can see stretching across the front now, was at that time just an uncovered patio. You can probably just see through the windows, to the left are some large doors, and that is the main eating room; and the rooms to the right, the oldest part of the building, is the old kitchen.

As I said earlier, it's now a chambre d'hôte, and the only three-star chambre d'hôte in Sospel. One place we can recommend you stay.



Merlanson bridge & Hotel de la Gare

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In front of the Villa Amiel, use the crossing to go over the road towards the park and to your left you will see the War Memorial.

II - Photo Opportunity

20 Minute detour for great views and photos. (Follow the blue route on the map)

Now if you want a fantastic photo opportunity, cross over the next road where you can see a sign on the wall that says Monte de Capucins and take the little lane that goes up fairly steeply. The lane itself bears round to the right in black tarmac, but you need to take the cobbled path which dives off to the left. While crossing the railway bridge, the view off to the right makes a nice photo, depending on where the sun is, if it's behind you all the better, but have a look, see what you think.

To the left you'll have an unusual view of the railway station. Continue on the other side of the bridge, up the slope, where you'll notice that the path again changes to what could loosely be described as cobbled steps. At the top of the path you will meet the road, turn right on the road and walk about 50 metres up, where you'll notice a little bit of a lay-by just on the corner where you can see right over the town. To the left of this point, on the small hill opposite you can also see one of the batteries of Fort St Roch poking out from between the trees. You can visit this most days of the week. Details from the Tourist Office.

As you look down the valley to the right, you'll notice that there is a big old building in the distance. That's the Hotel De Golf. All of the terrain that you can see in the bottom of the valley before you used to be a golf course back in the 1920's 1930's. This is where locals tell us that Winston Churchill used to come and play golf, along with many other members of the rich and elite of Europe.

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From this vantage point, you can see how the town is continuing to grow and spread out along the valley. In fact over the last three or four years the rate of growth in Sospel has accelerated quite dramatically.

Just a few years ago the population here was only about 2,500, now it's 3,500 (this is 2006) and it's guessed that by 2008-09 there will be nearly 5,000 people living the town and surrounding areas.

Once you've had your fill of the view and the photos, just go back down the road remembering which way the cars come from— and then take the footpath that you came up to go back down to the village.

12 - The War Memorial

The War Memorial shows the names of 132 people who died in the 1st World War. You will notice there are fewer names shown for the 2nd World War.

You may be wondering why? Well, something that's often left out of many guide books that tell you about Sospel is the fact that during the 2nd World War much of the population was transported out of the village to work elsewhere.



Sospels War Memorial

Those that remained were basically prisoners in the village and had to make the best of it with no real help and support from anywhere else. The older villagers tell many tales that demonstrate the hardships, the victories and heroism of many of the people who were left behind. If you want more details about that, please let us know.

From facing the War Memorial, turn towards your left and go towards the Boules Sospeloise building. Just in front of that turn left again, and go along the back of the park. Incidentally, there is a WC just here if anyone needs to go! This park by the way was built entirely on spoil from the construction of the Nice/Breil railway. If you look over the wall at the back of the park, you'll see just how much they have filled in. Amazing.

As you get to the opposite corner of the park you'll see the remains of what used to be the Church that stood on this site – interesting, eh? If you continue on and go out

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the back corner, you will come right on to the Pont de la Concorde.

13 - Pont de la Concorde

Before you cross over the bridge, do take a look at all the houses that line the other side. These present a striking example of many of the architectural painted features that are typical of this region. We are told that there isn't as good a selection in one place anywhere else in the Alpes-Maritime. In fact you're looking at probably the most painted and most photographed buildings, not just in Sospel, but in this region in general. So do take your time and take a few photographs yourself. Later on you will see them from the other side so you will be able to compare front and back.

Once you get across the bridge, go just past the Hotel de France and then using the crossing, cross over the road and go down the alleyway just to the right hand side of it. At the bottom of the slope, is the Hopital St Eloi. To the left of the hospital garden is the Chapelle des Penitents Noirs- (Chapel of the Black Penitents) Turn immediately left and go up the Rue de la Republic.

14 - Rue de la Republic

You'll pass a couple of large garage doors and then come upon the Fountain de Carriera Longa. This is similar to the one that was cut in half over by the Mairie. This fountain was installed in the 17th century. In fact we've been told it was installed before 1682, as it's shown in an old engraving dated at about that time.



Fountain de
Carriera Loga

The Rue de la Republic as you see it now, follows almost exactly the route followed by the Salt Road back in the 13th century. In olden times this was known as a carrerra longa , which you may have worked out is otherwise translated as "long street ". Just as an aside, this street appeared in quite a famous advert that was on the TV in about 2000-2001. Can you guess which one it was? Well, if you can't don't worry, because we'll tell you later!

After the fountain continue up the Rue de la Republic not forgetting to look up at the houses, and take the 2nd alleyway on your right - which is roughly opposite a nicely painted house with an orangey/ochre bottom and a blueish top half. As you enter the alleyway, there's often quite a nice photo opportunity straight in front of you. When you get to the end of the alleyway, turn left and you'll see immediately in front of you the Chapel of the White Penitents of the Holy Cross.

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15 - Chapel of the White Penitents...

The Chapel has recently been restored and painted in typically Legurian colours. Inside this chapel you will find there is a small museum which tells about the religious brotherhoods that have played such an important part in the history of Sospel. You will need to arrange a visit with the tourist office.

Before this 16th century Chapel was built, there was another Romanesque church on this site called St Nicolas, precious little of which remains today. You will notice atop the church there is a tower with a clock on it. If you've been in Sospel any length of time, you may have heard that on every hour there are two lots of chimes coming from the two different churches – one comes from the Cathedral and the other comes from this church. The funny thing is, that even though the clocks say the right times, the chimes can be anything up to five minutes apart.

If you go to the left-hand end of the church as you look at it, go round the corner

and you'll come to the back of the church. Continue on and you arrive in a square that's got lots of chestnut trees in it. Pass through there and you'll come out almost opposite a telephone box, (slightly to the right) on the Boulevard Charles de Gaulle (every French town has one!).

Turn left and go up the road, and literally just past the other side of the square you'll see a concrete slope up to the left with a couple of steps up from the road, (in front of house number 24) turn left at the top of the slope and you'll come out into another square. You'll see a set of steps from which you can have a look out over the square.

Continue on down the alleyway. Just where the alleyway narrows you'll notice another nicely painted house, continue on down the alleyway. As



Typical regional style

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you get to where the houses bridge over the top, have a look through the broken windows there and you'll see one of the famous fountains of Sospel. Continue on a few steps and your in the place St Nicolas



Place de St Nicolas

16 - The Place de St Nicolas.

Back in the 18th century this Place was known as the Place St Esprit. The fountain that you see under the arches there dates from 1788. The building itself was used by the Brotherhood of the Holy Spirit with the upper floors used for the governor's meetings, and the ground floor, or the loggia, was the place where the men of Sospel held their parliament. In 1793 this building became the Town Hall.

Incidentally the Souta Loggia restaurant in the left-hand arch as you look at it, is a nice place for a lunch or a snack at any time of day.

Now as you stand and look at this building, it may or may not be familiar to you. But just turn right now and look back down this end of the Rue de la Republic and then look right again, back at the old bridge. Then go into the right-hand arch in front of the newsagents and tabac, stand by the wall and look back out you'll be in the position where the camera was when they shot the very famous "Hero's Return" – Stella Artois advert. Again you can see links to that on the website. And you may not know it, but you are probably standing next to, or have walked past, at least one of the many locals who appeared in that advert!

17 - The Pont Vieux

This old bridge, which was built as early as the 13th century, was the only crossing place of the Bevera for many miles on the main route between Nice and Piedmont. At that time, the town was surrounded by walls, so the bridge played a big part in its defence.



Pont Vieux after WWII

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The bridge has not only been just a bridge though. It's been used as a toll both and tax collection point collecting the salt tax (Yes there was a tax on salt) In fact at one point the taxes levied on salt became so excruciatingly high, that people used to try and find other ways to get across the river. It has also served as a dwelling house too.

Between 1951 and 1960, the rooms in the tower were used as a shop and more recently these same rooms were used by the tourist office. It may not be a surprise to you that the people who work in the Tourist Office prefer their new building!

Over the centuries, the bridge has gone through many, many changes as well. It was partly rebuilt in the 16th/17th century and even though you can still see two arches, you may not have guessed that they were destroyed during the German retreat during the night of 27th and 28th October 1944

However, by 1951 the bridge was restored as faithfully to the original as was possible. Despite the remodelling, rebuilding and so forth it's incredible that the bottom of the tower is still part of the original bridge which is over 600 years old

As it has played such a central role in the life and history of the town it's only natural that this bridge has ended up as the emblem of Sospel.

Before you leave the square, do take time to look in the Artelier Habana. You can find some unique and original jewellery and other artistic pieces in there. Jenny is one of many talented artists who have made Sospel their home.

18 - Lavoir Place Garibaldi

Continue on out of the Place St Nicolas towards the Place Garibaldi. On entering the place (It looks like a carpark) you'll find one of the other washing places in the town immediately on the left by the river. Although this was remodelled in the 50's it is probably one of the most highly decorated ones you'll see for miles so its well worth a quick tour around, and again this is in daily use.



Lavoir Place Garibaldi

You might well see washing hung over the railings

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by the river! Another good point about this wash place is that if you need it there's a WC. The gents is entered from the outside and the Ladies is entered from the inside.

As you go down to the railings you also get another close-up view of the bridge, not its prettiest side, but nonetheless interesting. Once you've finished there go back out into the square. Over towards the right-hand side, you'll see that there are some arches that follow the line of the buildings. Go through the covered archway and as you come out the other end, immediately opposite you will find the Mordagne Restaurant, which is a lovely creperie/grill.

Again, we recommend it. Immediately in front of it you can see one of the most modern fountains in Sospel.

Like most of the fountains in Sospel you can drink from this. The only ones you can't drink from are the ones marked "eau non potable".

Continue up the slope towards the Boulevard Charles De Gaulle, just at the top of the slope to your right you will see a very unusual tower that makes the corner of a garden wall. The opinion about what's its used for is divided. Most people seem to think that it's a cover for an old well, others say it's a pigeon loft, and yet others say it used to be a little place which contained a statue of Mary.

What do you think?

Cross over the Boulevard Charles de Gaulle, and you'll notice a little children's play park to the right. To the left of the play park gate, you'll see that someone's made a very imaginative lintel over the gateway into their garden!



Pont Vieux model

19 - Views from the other side

Continue on up the slope then up the stepped slope to the left. Halfway up it swings to the right and gets just a little bit steeper. When you get to the top you come out just in front of the school. Turn right to see an alternative view over the rooftops of Sospel. Go as far as the rusty old lamppost with the "No Stopping" sign on it- about 20 paces. You can take some good photos from there. When you've finished go back past the top of the steps, past the recycling bins, and then follow the

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road as it winds its way back down to the village. After a left hand hairpin bend, when you get to the bottom cross over the road on the crossing and go along the Avenue Des Arcs des Arge. About 20 metres later on you'll see another children's play park on the left, behind that you'll see the Post Office, (if you want to post your cards), and on the right you'll see the Pizzeria de la Gare, another nice place to eat of an evening or some lunchtimes. They do a really nice 'maigre de canard'.

20 - Pont de Liberation

At the other side of the car park you'll find the Pont de Liberation. Standing in the middle of the bridge to take a photograph, you will get you nice views either way. On the other side of the bridge you'll find the Bar de Marché, another good place for a lunch time or early evening drink. If you turn left once you get across the bridge you'll notice just down underneath by the river (you may have noticed it when you came across) there's another washing place, the lowest washing place in Sospel. It also has a WC.

You are just across the road from the Tourist Office so if you want any more information on the places you have seen just pop in and ask. Also you're conveniently in front of lots of different cafés for somewhere to eat or drink!

Well, that concludes our Tour of Sospel - and I hope you've enjoyed it.

All the best,

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