



Stuttford Van Lines Country Guide for

France



Country Guides: Courtesy of Overseas Moving Network International (OMNI)

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Section	1	Contact Addresses
	2	Overview
	3	General Information
	4	Money
	5	Duty Free
	6	Public Holidays
	7	Health
	8	Accommodation
	9	Sport & Activities
	10	Climate
	11	History and Government



1 CONTACT ADDRESSES

Location: Western Europe.

Time: GMT + 1 (GMT + 2 from last Sunday in March to last Sunday in October).

Note: For information on French Overseas Departments, Overseas Territories and Overseas Collectivités Territoriales, consult the French Overseas Possessions section. See also the individual sections on French Guiana, Guadeloupe, Martinique, New Caledonia, Réunion and Tahiti and her Islands.

Embassy of the French Republic in the UK

58 Knightsbridge, London SW1X 7JT, UK Tel: (020) 7073 1000. Website: www.ambafrance-uk.org

French Consulate General in the UK

21 Cromwell Road, London SW7 2EN, UK **Visa section:** 6A Cromwell Place, London SW7 2EW, UK Tel: (020) 7073 1200 (consular section) or 1250 (visa section) or 7073 1295 (visa applications in progress; 1500-1700 only) or (09065) 508 940 (visa information service; calls cost £1 per minute) or 266 654 (24-hour visa application form request service; calls cost £1.50 per minute) or 540 700 (24-hour automated visa appointment booking service).

Website: www.ambafrance-uk.org or www.consulfrance-londres.org Consulate General in: Edinburgh.

Maison de la France (French Government Tourist Office) in the UK

178 Piccadilly, London W1J 9AL, UK Tel: (09068) 244 123 (information line; calls cost 60p per minute) or (020) 7399 3520 (travel trade only).

Website: www.franceguide.com

Embassy of the French Republic in the USA

4101 Reservoir Road, NW, Washington, DC 20007, USA Tel: (202) 944 6195. Website: www.ambafrance-us.org or www.consulfrance-washington.org (consular section).

French Government Tourist Office in the USA

444 Madison Avenue, 16th Floor, New York, NY 10022, USA Tel: (212) 838 7800 or (514) 288 6989 (travel trade only) or 288 1904 (public information service). Website: www.franceguide.com

2 OVERVIEW

'An enlightened way of life'

It's hard to generalise about France as Charles de Gaulle once remarked, 'how could one describe a country which has 365 kinds of cheese?' Yet there is something about this magnificent land which draws millions of francophiles back year after year for a taste of la vie française. Could it be the chic boulevards of Paris, the sparkling ski slopes of the Alps, sunlit vineyards and sun-baked beaches, a dusty game of boules, or coffee and croissants in an undiscovered village?



Or perhaps it's a tour of the majestic châteaux of the Loire that appeals, the glamorous jet-set lifestyle of the Mediterranean, or a relaxing picnic in Provence, where the air is fragrant with wild herbs and lavender? Consider also the delights of other lesser-known regions such as Franche-Comté, Gascony or Berry, deep in the green heart of France regions firmly rooted to the land, whose sleepy villages offer visitors a chance to sample the true *douceur de vivre* of provincial France. There is no denying that France is a land of great contrasts, offering an endless choice of enticing destinations, a rich diversity of landscapes, cuisines, climates and peoples, with an exceptional cultural heritage. It's easy to see why the French stay at home for their holidays and why they so felicitously call their country *La Belle France*.

Teresa Fisher

3 GENERAL INFORMATION

Area: 545,630 sq km (339,054 sq miles) (not including overseas territories).

Population: 60.65 million (official estimate 2005).

Population Density: 111 per sq km.

Capital: Paris. Population: 12.2 million (2.15 million in the city; 10.5 million in the suburbs) (2005).

GEOGRAPHY: France, the largest country in Europe, is bordered to the north by the English Channel (La Manche), the northeast by Belgium and Luxembourg, the east by Germany, Switzerland and Italy, the south by the Mediterranean (with Monaco as a coastal enclave between Nice and the Italian frontier), the southwest by Spain and Andorra, and the west by the Atlantic Ocean. The island of Corsica, southeast of Nice, is made up of two départements. The country offers a spectacular variety of scenery, from the mountain ranges of the Alps and Pyrénées to the attractive river valleys of the Loire, Rhône and Dordogne and the flatter countryside in Normandy and on the Atlantic coast. The country has some 2900km (1800 miles) of coastline.

Government: Republic since 1792. Head of State: President Jacques Chirac since 1995. Head of Government: Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin since May 2005. Recent history: Jacques Chirac is now in his 11th year as President after winning the most recent presidential election in 2002, which will keep him in office until 2009. This latter poll was notable for the strong performance of the neo-fascist Front National (FN) leader Jean-Marie le Pen, who came second in the first round of voting (although he lost the second decisively when all other parties, including the left, united to support Chirac). 2002 also saw the centre-right, operating under the umbrella banner of the Union for a Presidential Majority, regain control of the national Assembly, bringing to an end five years of 'co-habitation' the situation where the presidency and the national assembly are in the hands of different parties. President Chirac, who had thrown his weight firmly behind the proposed European Union constitution, suffered a major setback in May 2005 when voters rejected it in a referendum. He acknowledged that the outcome was to some degree a reflection of voter dissatisfaction with the policies of his Government. The vote precipitated profound changes in the Government line-up, including the appointment of a new Prime Minister. In November 2005, the accidental death of two youths in the Paris suburb of Clichy sous Bois, which has large African and Arab communities, led to violent clashes between the police and thousands of rioters in several French cities. These three weeks of violence led the Government



to impose a state of emergency which was only lifted in January 2006. In spring 2006, large demonstrations against the Government's proposed youth employment law also took place in Paris and other cities throughout France. The Government was eventually forced to withdraw the law, leaving de Villepin's Presidential ambitions in tatters.

Language: French is the official language, but there are many regional dialects. Basque is spoken as a first language by some people in the southwest, and Breton by some in Brittany. Many people, particularly those connected with tourism in the major areas, speak at least some English.

Religion: Approximately 83 per cent Roman Catholic; Protestant two per cent; Muslim five per cent; Jewish one per cent; unaffiliated nine per cent .

Electricity: 220 volts AC, 50Hz. Two-pin plugs are widely used; adaptors recommended.

SOCIAL CONVENTIONS: Shaking hands and, more familiarly, kissing both cheeks, are the usual forms of greeting. The form of personal address is simply Monsieur or Madame without a surname and it may take time to get on first-name terms. At more formal dinners, it is the most important guest or host who gives the signal to start eating. Mealtimes are often a long, leisurely experience. Casual wear is common. Social functions, some clubs, casinos and exclusive restaurants warrant more formal attire. Evening wear is normally specified where required. Topless sunbathing is tolerated on most beaches but naturism is restricted to certain beaches local tourist offices will advise where these are. Smoking is prohibited on public transport and in cinemas and theatres. Tobacconists (tabacs) display a red sign in the form of a double cone. A limited choice of tobacco brands can be found in restaurants and bars.

Passport/Visa

	<i>Passport Required?</i>	<i>Visa Required?</i>	<i>Return Ticket Required?</i>
British	1	No	No
Australian	Yes	No	Yes
Canadian	Yes	No	Yes
USA	Yes	No	Yes
OtherEU	1	No	No
Japanese	Yes	No	Yes

Note: France is a signatory to the 1995 Schengen Agreement. For further details about passport/visa regulations within the Schengen area, see the introductory section, How to Use this Guide.

PASSPORTS: Passport valid for at least three months beyond length of stay required by all except: (a) 1. EU/EEA nationals (EU + Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway) and Swiss nationals holding a valid national ID card. Note: EU and EEA nationals are only required to produce evidence of their EU/EEA nationality and identity in order to be admitted to any EU/EEA Member State. This evidence can take the form of a valid national passport or national identity card. Either is acceptable. Possession of a return ticket, any length of validity on their document, sufficient funds for the length of their proposed visit should not be imposed. (b) nationals of Andorra, Monaco and San Marino, holding a valid national ID card.



VISAS: Required by all except the following for a period not exceeding three months: (a) nationals of countries referred to in the chart and under passport exemptions above; (b) nationals of Argentina, Bermuda, Bolivia, Brazil, Brunei, Bulgaria, Chile, Costa Rica, Croatia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Hong Kong (SAR; blue passport holders only), Iceland, Israel, Korea (Dem Rep), Macau, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Norway, Panama, Paraguay, Romania, Singapore, Uruguay, Vatican City and Venezuela; (c) transit passengers continuing their journey by the same or first connecting aircraft, provided holding valid onward or return documentation and not leaving the airport. The following nationals always require an airport transit visa when not leaving the airport, unless they are permanent residents in the UK, or Indian nationals with a visa for the UK: Afghanistan, Albania, Angola, Bangladesh, Congo (Rep), Eritrea, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Haiti, Iran, Iraq, Liberia, Libya, Nigeria, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic and holders of Palestinian refugee travel documents issued by the Egyptian, Lebanese or Syrian authorities.

Note: (a) Pupils travelling on a school trip may also be exempt from visa regulations if their names are entered on a 'List of Travellers' obtainable from the British Council (tel: (0161) 957 7755), for those resident in the UK. (b) Nationals of Bermuda, although visa-exempt when entering France, may still require visas to enter other Schengen countries. (c) Visa-exempt nationals may still be required to produce proofs of financial means of support, hotel bookings or a return ticket to country of residence, either at borders of entry or within the Schengen area.

Types of visa and cost: A uniform Schengen visa, is issued for Short-stay visits (tourist, business and students), Airport Transit, Transit and Long-validity (circulation) visits. A circulation visa allows the holder to freely travel within the Schengen visa area for one to three years. The visa will be given to those who can prove their frequent trips are for family or business purposes. Visa application fees must be paid at the time of application. No visa application fee can be refunded, whatever the result of the application. A Long-Stay visa is available for those who wish to reside (more than 90 days), retire, work or study in France, Andorra, Monaco or a DOM/TOM (French Overseas Territory). Schengen visa applications are charged at a fixed rate of €35, irrespective of the duration of stay requested (except for long-stay visas: stays over 90 days). The fee remains payable in Pounds Sterling only, approximately £22-26; Long-Stay visas are approximately £66-£70; Student fee is £35 to £40.

Note: (a) Prices change with the prevalent exchange rate, so visitors are advised to check the exact price before travelling. Payment is by cash or by credit/debit card (excluding American Express and Diners), and in Pounds Sterling only. (b) Spouses and children of EU nationals can obtain a visa free of charge on presentation of relevant documentation.

Validity: Short-stay visas are valid for a maximum of six months from date of issue for single or multiple entries of maximum 90 days in total. Transit visas are valid for single or double entries of maximum five days per entry, including the day of arrival. Visas cannot be extended; a new application must be made each time. Circulation visas are valid for one to three years from date of issue, for single or multiple entries for a maximum of 90 days over a six month period.

Application to: All persons wishing to apply must make an appointment by telephone or on the Internet before attending and submitting their documents in person at the consulate. An automated telephone appointment booking service is available; see Passport/Visa Information. It is also possible to arrange a meeting by post although this is much slower. Travellers visiting just one Schengen country should apply to the Consulate of that country; travellers visiting more than one Schengen country should apply to the Consulate of the country chosen as the main destination or the country they will enter first (if they have no main destination).



Application requirements: (a) Passport valid for at least three months longer than validity of the visa with blank pages to affix visa stamp. If British, the British Residence Permit must exceed the validity of the requested visa by more than three months. An exception will be made (one month) for those returning permanently to their country on presentation of travel tickets. (b) One completed application form. (c) Two passport-size photos. (d) Evidence of sufficient funds for stay (eg a recent bank statement less than one month old or traveller's cheques; a minimum of £40 per day spent in France is required). (e) Proof of occupation with letter from employer, accountant, school or university (less than three months old) and last three payslips. If self-employed, submit up-to-date letter from solicitor/accountant/bank manager/local Chamber of Commerce; if student, submit up-to-date letter from educational institution (less than three months old), stating course, type of studies and attendance record; if inactive and married, submit letter from spouse's employer and marriage certificate. (f) Return ticket to country of residence, and visa for next destination if required, or confirmed booking from travel agent. (g) Evidence of hotel reservations, a certificate of board and lodging to be obtained by your French host from the local town hall, means of support or proof of official invitation from host or company. (h) Evidence of medical insurance (including repatriation and covering the duration of the requested visa). (i) Fee; payable by cash or credit/debit card. If applying by post, fee must be paid by credit card or postal order only. (j) For business travellers: a letter of invitation from a French company. (k) For student trips: a letter from school stating dates of trip, address in France and name of persons responsible for student. (l) A self-addressed, pre-paid special delivery envelope for the safe return of documents. (m) Minors: Birth certificate of the child with an official translation in French or English, certified by the consular representation of the country of the applicant; passports of both parents or certified copies; minors who apply for a visa without their parents, or with one parent, must provide a letter from their parents or legal representative authorising them to reside in France. This authorisation must be certified by a lawyer or the consular representation of the country of the applicant. A copy of the parents' passport must be sent with the form.

Note: (a) Postal applications are only acceptable for certain nationals; consult the Consulate (or website: www.ambafrance-uk.org) for further information. (b) Each document must be presented with one photocopy. (c) Minors under 18 must present original full birth certificate, stating both parents' names with official translation if not in French or English, plus parents' original passports or certified copies if the parents are residing abroad. If travelling alone or with only one parent, nationals will need to submit a completed and signed application form granting parental authorisation, and appointing the person responsible for the minor's welfare. This letter must be duly authenticated by a solicitor or Commissioner of Oaths, or by a Consular Officer of the applicant's nationality. In cases of adoption/fostering, contact the Embassy for further advice. (d) For Long-Stay visas the application requirements depend on the individuals circumstances; Contact the consulate general for information (see Passport/Visa Information).

Working days required: From a few hours to several weeks depending on nationality and if applying by post.

Temporary residence: A Work Permit may have to be obtained in France. For full details, contact the long stay visa section of the Consulate General; see Passport/Visa Information.

Passport/Visa Information: Embassy of the French Republic in the UK58 Knightsbridge, London SW1X 7JT, UK Tel: (020) 7073 1000. Website: www.ambafrance-uk.org French Consulate General in the UK21 Cromwell Road, London SW7 2EN, UK Tel: (020) 7073 1200 (consular section) or 508 940 (visa information service; calls cost £1 per minute) or (09065) 540 700 (automated telephone appointment booking) or (020) 7073



1295 (visa applications in progress; Mon-Thur 1500-1700 only) or (09065) 266 654 (24-hour visa application form request service; calls cost £1.50 per minute). Visa section: 6A Cromwell Place, London SW7 2EW, UK Opening hours: Mon-Wed 0845-1500, Thurs-Fri 0845-1200 (general enquiries); Mon-Fri 0845-1130 (visa applications). Website: www.consulfrance-londres.org Embassy of the French Republic in the USA 4101 Reservoir Road, NW, Washington, DC 20007, USA Tel: (202) 944 6195. Website: www.ambafrance-us.org or www.consulfrance-washington.org (consular section).

4 MONEY

Single European currency (Euro): The Euro is now the official currency of 12 EU member states (including France). The first Euro coins and notes were introduced in January 2002; the French Franc was still in circulation until 17 February 2002, when it was completely replaced by the Euro. Euro (€) = 100 cents. Notes are in denominations of €500, 200, 100, 50, 20, 10 and 5. Coins are in denominations of €2 and 1, and 50, 20, 10, 5, 2 and 1 cents.

Currency exchange: Some first-class hotels are authorised to exchange foreign currency. Shops and hotels are prohibited from accepting foreign currency by law. Travellers should check with their banks for details and current rates.

Credit & debit cards: American Express, Diners Club, MasterCard, Visa and Eurocard are widely accepted. Check with your credit or debit card company for details of merchant acceptability and other services which may be available.

Traveller's cheques: Traveller's cheques are accepted nearly everywhere.

Currency restrictions: The import and export of local and foreign currency is unrestricted. Amounts over €7600 must be declared.

Exchange rate indicators

Date At time of publishing £1.00 = €1.46 \$1.00 = €0.82

Banking hours: Mon-Sat 0900-1200 and 1400-1700. Some banks close Monday and some are open Saturday. Banks close early (1200) on the day before a bank holiday; in rare cases, they may also close for all or part of the day after.

5 DUTY FREE

The following goods may be imported into France without incurring customs duty by passengers **17 years of age or older arriving from non-EU countries:** 200 cigarettes or 50 cigars or 100 cigarillos or 250g of tobacco; 1l of spirits over 22 per cent or 2l of alcoholic beverage up to 22 per cent; 2l of wine; 50g of perfume and 250ml of eau de toilette; 500g of coffee or 200g of coffee extract; 100g of tea or 40g of tea extract; medication: quantities corresponding to the needs of the patient; other goods up to the value of €175 (€90 per person under 15 years of age);



Restricted items: (a) Plants and plant products. (b) Meat and meat products from Africa. (c) Pharmaceutical products (except those needed for personal use). (d) Works of art. (e) Collectors' items and antiques. (f) Gold jewellery: other than personal jewellery below 500g in weight must be declared.

Abolition of duty free goods within the EU: On 30 June 1999, the sale of duty-free alcohol and tobacco at airports and at sea was abolished in all of the original 15 EU member states. Of the 10 new member states that joined the EU on 1 May 2004, these rules already apply to Cyprus and Malta. There are transitional rules in place for visitors returning to one of the original 15 EU countries from one of the other new EU countries. But for the original 15, plus Cyprus and Malta, there are now no limits imposed on importing tobacco and alcohol products from one EU country to another (with the exceptions of Denmark, Finland and Sweden, where limits are imposed). Travellers should note that they may be required to prove at customs that the goods purchased are for personal use only.

6 PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

Below are listed Public Holidays for the January 2006-June 2007 period. Jan 1 2006 New Year's Day. Apr 17 Easter Monday. May 1 Labour Day. May 8 1945 Victory Day. May 25 Ascension. Jun 5 Whit Monday. Jul 14 Bastille Day. Aug 15 Assumption. Nov 1 All Saints' Day. Nov 11 Remembrance Day. Dec 25 Christmas Day. Jan 1 2007 New Year's Day. Apr 9 Easter Monday. May 1 Labour Day. May 8 1945 Victory Day. May 17 Ascension. May 28 Whit Monday.

Note: In France, the months of July and August are traditionally when the French take their holidays. For this reason, the less touristic parts of France are quiet during these months, while coastal resorts, especially in the south, are very crowded.

7 HEALTH

	Special Precautions	Certificate Required
Yellow Fever	No	1
Cholera	No	No
Typhoid and Polio	No	N/A
Malaria	No	N/A

1: A yellow fever certificate is required for travellers coming from South American and African countries.

Other risks: Visitors to forested areas should consider vaccination for tick-borne encephalitis. Rabies is present. For those at high risk, vaccination before arrival should be considered. If you are bitten, seek medical advice without delay. For more information, consult the Health appendix.

Health care: European Economic Area (EEA) and Switzerland: If you or any of your dependants are suddenly taken ill or have an accident during a visit to an EEA country or Switzerland, free or reduced-cost necessary treatment is available in most cases on production of a valid European Health Insurance Card (EHIC). Each country has different rules about state medical provision. In



some, treatment is free. In many countries you will have to pay part or all of the cost, and then claim a full or partial refund. The EHIC gives access to state-provided medical treatment only and the scheme gives no entitlement to medical repatriation costs, nor does it cover ongoing illnesses of a non-urgent nature, so comprehensive travel insurance is advised. Note that the EHIC replaces the Form E111, which will no longer be valid after 31 December 2005. Doctors, dentists and prescriptions: Travellers should make sure the doctor or dentist they consult is conventionné - i.e. they work within the French health system. After treatment, obtain a signed statement of the treatment given (a feuille de soins) as you cannot claim a refund without it. You will be charged for the treatment you receive, as well as for any prescribed medicines, and the amount(s) should be shown on the feuille de soins. Around 75 per cent of standard doctors' and dentists' fees are refunded, and between 35 and 65 per cent of the cost of most prescribed medicines. The cost of common remedies and items such as bandages are refunded at the lower rate. The cost of medicines marked with a \ / vignette or NR is not recoverable. Hospital treatment: Travellers must pay for out-patient treatment and then claim a partial refund from the local Sickness Insurance Office (Caisse Primaire d'Assurance-Maladie or CPAM). If you are treated as an in-patient in an approved hospital and show your European Health Insurance Card (EHIC), the office will pay 75 per cent or more of the cost direct to the hospital. You pay the balance. You must also pay a fixed daily hospital charge (forfait journalier). The 25 per cent balance and the forfait journalier are non-refundable. Local Sickness Insurance Offices handle reimbursements. Travellers should send their application for a refund (the feuille de soins and any prescriptions) to the nearest Sickness Insurance Office while still in France. The refund will be sent to their home address later, but it may be subject to a bank charge. Before sending the money order, the French authorities will send an itemised statement of the amount to be refunded. This refund process normally takes around two months. When you are obtaining prescribed medicines, the pharmacist will hand you back your prescription and you should attach it to the feuille de soins in order to claim a refund. Medicine containers also carry detachable labels (vignettes), showing the name and price of the contents. Stick these in the appropriate place on the feuille de soins, and sign and date the form at the end. There are a wide network of pharmacies in most towns. Hours of business are usually the same as for ordinary stores. The standard of medical facilities and practitioners in France is very high but so are the fees, and health insurance is recommended. More information can be obtained from the Centre des Liaisons Européennes et Internationales de Sécurité Sociale (CLEISS), 11 rue de la Tour des Dames, 75436 Paris Cedex 09, France (tel: (1) 4526 3341).

Travel - International

AIR: The national airline is Air France (AF) (website: www.airfrance.com). Many airlines operate to France, including an increasing number of low-cost airlines from the UK including Easyjet (www.easyjet.com) and Ryanair (www.ryanair.com).

Approximate flight times: From Paris to London is one hour five minutes; from Nice and Marseille is two hours. From Paris to Los Angeles is 15 hours five minutes; to New York is eight hours; to Singapore is 15 hours five minutes; and to Sydney is 25 hours five minutes.

Main airports: Paris-Charles de Gaulle (CDG), also known as Roissy-Charles de Gaulle, (website: www.adp.fr) is 23km (14 miles) northeast of the city (travel time 40 minutes). To/from the airport: Coaches to the city run at least every 20 minutes. Taxis are readily available and journeys to the centre cost around €38. An airport limousine service can also be hired for approximately €90. Roissybus services operate from the airport to Place de l'Opéra between 0545-2300 every 15 minutes. Fare is approximately €8 and takes approximately 60 minutes. Air France coaches run from Étoile via Porte Maillot, from Montparnasse via Gare de Lyon and from Orly Airport to Roissy-Charles de Gaulle. Services run every 12 to 20 minutes and



take 40 to 50 minutes. Fares are approximately €11. The airport is also easily accessible by train on the RER B line or SNCF with connecting ADP shuttle bus. A new €145 million inter-terminal train service will be launched in the autumn of 2006 called CDGVAL. The airport claims the train will link passengers with all the terminals within eight minutes rather than the usual 25 minutes. The train will run 24 hours a day, seven days a week, with a train every four minutes. Paris-Orly (ORY) (website: www.adp.fr) is 14km (9 miles) south of the city. To/from the airport: Coaches and buses run to the city every 12 minutes (travel time 25 minutes) from outside Orly Ouest. Taxis are available. RER B and C line trains run every 15 minutes via Saint-Michel (travel time 30 minutes). Bordeaux (BOD) (Merignac) (website: www.bordeaux.aeroport.fr) is 12km (8 miles) west of the city. To/from the airport: There are coaches, buses and taxis to the city. Lyon (LYS) (Lyon-Saint-Exupéry) (website: www.lyon.aeroport.fr) is 25km (15 miles) east of the city. To/from the airport: Coaches or taxis are available to the city. Marseille (MRS) (Marseille-Marignane) (website: www.marseille-provence.aeroport.fr) is 30km (19 miles) northwest of the city. To/from the airport: A coach service departs to the city and taxis are available. Nice (NCE) (Nice-Côte d'Azur) (website: www.nice.aeroport.fr) is 6km (4 miles) west of the city. To/from the airport: Buses depart every 20 minutes. Taxis to the city are available. Toulouse (TLS) (Blagnac) (website: www.toulouse.aeroport.fr) is 10km (6 miles) northwest of the city. To/from the airport: Buses to the city depart every 20 minutes. Taxis and trams are available to the city. Facilities: The airports listed above are all of a high international standard and include banks/bureaux de change, duty free shops, restaurants, bars and car hire. For information about other airports, contact Union des Chambres de Commerce et Etablissements Gestionnaires d'Aéroports (UCCEGA) (website: www.aeroport.fr).

Departure tax: None.

SEA: Numerous services (scheduled passenger crossings, leisure boating and cruises) are available to the French islands, to European and other international destinations. Main ports: Atlantic: La Rochelle (website: www.portlarochelle.com): leisure boating. North Sea: Boulogne (website: www.portboulogne.com): leisure boating and cross channel services; Calais (website: www.calais-port.com): cross-channel services; Le Havre (website: www.havre-port.net): scheduled services and cruise lines to national and international destinations. Mediterranean: Marseille (www.marseille-port.fr): cruises and scheduled services to Corsica, Sardinia, Algeria and Tunisia; Nice: leisure boating and ferries to Corsica (website: http://www.ccinice-cote-azur.com/port_nice.html). For information on other ports, contact the French Transport and Sea Ministry (website: www.mer.equipement.gouv.fr).

RAIL: International trains run from the channel ports and Paris to destinations throughout Europe. For up-to-date routes and timetables, contact French Railways (SNCF) (tel: (08) 2588 8088; website: www.sncf.com) or in the UK, Rail Europe (tel: (08705) 848 848; website: www.raileurope.co.uk). Eurostar: Eurostar is a service provided by the railways of Belgium, the UK and France, operating direct high-speed trains from London (Waterloo International) to Paris (Gare du Nord) and to Brussels (Midi/Zuid). It takes two hours 40 minutes from London to Paris (via Lille) and two hours 20 minutes to Brussels. For further information and reservations, contact Eurostar (tel: (0870) 600 0792 (travel agents) or (08705) 186 186 (public; within the UK) or +44 (1233) 617 575 (public; outside the UK); a £5 booking fee applies to all telephone bookings; website: www.eurostar.com); or Rail Europe (tel: (08705) 848 848; website: www.raileurope.co.uk). Rail passes: The Inter-Rail pass offers unlimited second-class train travel in up to 29 European countries (includes Morocco and Turkey) split into eight zones (A-H). Three different tickets are available: a ticket covering one zone (two to six countries, 16 days' validity), a ticket covering two zones (six to 10 countries, 22 days' validity) and an All Zone Pass (29 countries, one month's validity). Ferry services between Italy and Greece are included.



Passengers must be resident in Europe for at least six months before the pass is used. Travel is not allowed in the passenger's country of residence. Travellers under 26 years receive a reduction of about 30 per cent. Children's tickets are reduced by about 50 per cent. Supplements are required for some high-speed services, seat reservations and couchettes. Discounts are offered on Eurostar and some ferry routes. Available from Inter Rail (website: www.interrailnet.com). The Eurailpass offers unlimited first-class train travel in 17 European countries. Tickets are valid for 15 days, 21 days, one month, two months or three months. The Eurailpass Saver ticket offers discounts for two or more people travelling together. The Eurailpass Youth ticket is available to those aged under 26 and offers unlimited second-class train travel. The Eurailpass Flexi allows either 10 or 15 travel days within a two-month period. The Eurail Selectpass is valid in three, four or five bordering countries and allows five, six, eight or 10 travel days (15 for five countries) in a two-month period. The Eurail Regional Pass allows four to 10 travel days in a two-month period in one of nine regions (usually two or more countries). Children receive a 50 per cent reduction. The passes cannot be sold to residents of Europe, Turkey, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia or the Russian Federation. Available from The Eurail Group (website: www.eurail.com).

ROAD: There are numerous and excellent road links with all neighbouring countries. Eurolines (52 Grosvenor Gardens, London SW1W 0AU; tel: (08705) 143 219; website: www.eurolines.com) and National Express (Ensign Court, 4 Vicarage Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham B15 3ES; tel: 08705 808 080; website: www.nationalexpress.com) run regular coach services from the UK to France. Passes: Travellers can either choose Mini-Pass breaks or book a 15-, 30- or 60-day pass. The six Mini-Passes give travellers the freedom to visit three cities, with prices starting from £55. Travellers can stay as long as they like in each city. For documentation and traffic regulations, see the Travel - Internal section. The Channel Tunnel: Eurotunnel runs shuttle trains for cars, bicycles, motorcycles, coaches, minibuses, caravans, campervans and other vehicles over 1.85m (6.07ft) between Folkestone in Kent, with direct road access from the M20, and Calais, with links to the A16/A26 motorway (Exit 13). All road vehicles are carried through the tunnel in shuttle trains running between the two terminals. Terminals and shuttles are well-equipped for disabled passengers. Passenger Terminal buildings contain a variety of shops, restaurants, bureaux de change and other amenities. The journey takes about 35 minutes from platform to platform and around one hour from motorway to motorway. There are up to four passenger shuttles per hour at peak times, 24 hours per day and services run every day of the year. Motorists pass through customs and immigration before they board, with no further checks on arrival. Fares are charged according to length of stay and time of year and whether or not you have a reservation. The price applies to the car, regardless of the number of passengers or size of the car. Promotional deals are frequently available, especially outside the peak holiday seasons. Tickets may be purchased in advance from travel agents, or from Eurotunnel Customer Services in France or the UK with a credit card. For further information, brochures and reservations, contact Eurotunnel Customer Services UK, Customer Relations Department, Saint Martin's Plain, Cheriton, Folkestone, Kent CT19 4QD (tel: (08705) 353 535; website: www.eurotunnel.com). For further information about departure times of shuttles at the French terminal, contact Eurotunnel Customer Information in Coquelles (tel: France +33 (3) 2100 6543).

Travel - Internal

AIR: Air France flies between Paris (from both Orly and Charles de Gaulle airports) and around 45 cities and towns. It also connects regional airports. For information, contact Air France (tel: (08) 2082 0820 (omit the 0 when dialling from abroad) or (0845) 359 1000 (within the UK only); website: www.airfrance.com). Details of independent airlines may be obtained from the French Government Tourist Office (see Top Things To Do).



SEA: State-run car ferries known as 'BACs' connect the larger islands on the Atlantic coast with the mainland; they also sail regularly across the mouth of the Gironde. The island of Corsica is served by ferries operated by the Société Nationale Maritime Corse-Méditerranée (SNCM), BP 90, 13472 Marseille Cedex 2 (tel: (0825) 888 088; website: www.sncm.fr). Services run from Marseille, Toulon and Nice to Ajaccio, Propriano, Porto Vecchio and Bastia on the island.

RAIL: French Railways (SNCF) operate a nationwide network with 34,200km (21,250 miles) of line, over 12,000km (7500 miles) of which has been electrified. The TGV (Train à grande vitesse) runs from Paris to Brittany and southwest France at 300kph (186mph) and to Lyon and the southeast at 270kph (168mph). The SNCF is divided into five systems (East, North, West, Southeast and Southwest). The transport in and around Paris is the responsibility of a separate body, the RATP, at 54 quai de la Rapée, 75599 Paris (tel: (08) 9268 7714; website: www.ratp.fr). This organisation provides a fully integrated bus, rail and métro network for the capital. Rail tickets: There are various kinds of tickets (including Family and Young Person's Tickets) offering reductions which can usually be bought in France. In general, the fares charged will depend on what day of the week and what time of the day one is travelling; timetables giving further details are available from SNCF offices. It is essential to validate (composter) tickets bought in France by using the orange automatic date-stamping machine at the platform entrance. There is a range of special tickets on offer to foreign visitors; they usually have to be bought before entering France and some are only available in North America; others are unique to Australia and New Zealand. There are also special European Rail and Drive packages. For more information, contact your local French Government Tourist Office (see Top Things To Do). France Railpass: This pass is valid for three to nine days and offers travel on high-speed TGV services, Corail services and overnight Corail trains across France. A Saverpass can be booked when two to five people travel together. Available from Rail Europe (tel: (08708) 371 371; website: www.raileurope.co.uk). Motorail (car sleeper): Services are operated from Boulogne, Calais, Dieppe and Paris to all main holiday areas in both summer and winter. Motorail information and booking is available from Rail Europe (tel: (0870) 830 2000; website: www.raileurope.co.uk); see Travel - International section.

ROAD: Traffic drives on the right. France has over 9000km (5600 miles) of motorways (autoroutes), some of which are free whilst others are toll-roads (autoroutes à péage). Prices vary depending on the route, and caravans are extra. There are more than 28,500km (17,700 miles) of national roads (routes nationales). Motorways bear the prefix 'A' and national roads 'N'. Minor roads (marked in yellow on the Michelin road maps) are maintained by the départements rather than by the Government and are classed as 'D' roads. It is a good idea to avoid travelling any distance by road on the last few days of July/first few days of August and the last few days of August/first few days of September as during this time, the bulk of the holiday travel takes place and the roads can be jammed for miles. A sign bearing the words Sans Plomb on a petrol pump shows that it dispenses unleaded petrol. The Bison Futé map provides practical information and is available from the French Government Tourist Office. Bus: Information on services may be obtained from local tourist offices. Local services outside the towns and cities are generally adequate. Car hire: Available from international companies. A list of agencies can be obtained at local tourist offices (Syndicats d'Initiative or Offices de Tourisme). Fly-drive arrangements are available through all major airlines. French Railways (SNCF) also offer reduced train/car hire rates. Caravans: These may be imported for stays of up to six months. There are special requirements for cars towing caravans which must be observed; eg cars towing caravans are prohibited from driving within the boundaries of the périphérique (the Paris ring road). Contact the French Government Tourist Office for details. Regulations: The minimum age to drive a car in France is 18 and 15 for a motorcycle under 125cc. The minimum age for hiring a car in France ranges from 21 to 25 depending on the company; some companies may also include additional charges for drivers under 25. The maximum age limit is generally 70. Speed limits are 50kph



(31mph) in built-up areas, 90kph (56mph) outside built-up areas, 110kph (68mph) on dual carriageways separated by a central reservation, and 130kph (81mph) on motorways. Visitors who have held a driving licence for less than two years may not travel faster than 80kph (56mph) on normal roads, 100kph (62mph) on dual carriageways and 110kph (68mph) on motorways. The police fine motorists on the spot for driving offences such as speeding. Radar traps are frequent; drivers caught travelling at more than 25km/h above the limit can have their license confiscated on the spot. Random breath tests for drinking and driving are common. Seat belts must be worn by all front- and rear-seat passengers. Under-10s may not travel in the front seat. *Priorité à droite*: particularly in built-up areas, the driver must give way to anyone coming out of a side-turning on the right. The *priorité* rule does not apply at most roundabouts the driver should give way to cars which are already on the roundabout with the signs *vous n'avez pas la priorité* or *cédez le passage*; but watch for signs and still exercise great caution. All roads of any significance outside built-up areas have right of way, known as *Passage Protégé*, and will normally be marked by signs consisting either of an 'X' on a triangular background with the words '*Passage Protégé*' underneath, or a broad arrow, or a yellow diamond. A red warning triangle must be carried for use in the event of a breakdown. All headlamp beams must be adjusted for rightside driving by use of beam deflectors or (on some cars) by tilting the headlamp bulbholder. For further details on driving in France, a brochure called *The Traveller in France* is available from French Government Tourist Offices and must be ordered by telephone (see *Top Things To Do*). It contains a section on motoring. Documentation: A national driving licence is acceptable. An international sign, distinguishing your country of origin (eg GB sticker or plate), should be positioned clearly on the vehicle. EU nationals taking their own cars to France are strongly advised to obtain a Green Card. Without it, insurance cover is limited to the minimum legal cover in France; the Green Card tops this up to the level of cover provided by the car owner's domestic policy. The car's registration document must also be carried. UK registered vehicles displaying Euro plates (circle of 12 stars above the national identifier on a blue background) no longer need a GB sticker when driving in EU countries.

URBAN: Urban public transport is excellent. There are comprehensive bus systems in all the larger towns. There are also tramways, trolleybuses and an underground in Marseille; trolleybuses, an underground and a funicular in Lyon; and a tramway and automated driverless trains in Lille. There are tramway services in St Etienne and Nantes and trolleybuses in Grenoble, Limoges and Nancy. The systems are easy to use, with pre-purchase tickets and passes. Good publicity material and maps are usually available. Paris: The RATP (*Régie Autonome des Transports Parisiens*) controls the underground (*métro*), rail (RER) and bus services in and around Paris. The public transport network is split into several different fare zones and a single ticket will allow travel on any of the systems within that zone (although interchange is only permitted on the *métro* and RER, and not on buses). Other useful transport links provided by the RATP include: Orlybus and Roissybus (special airport buses), Orlyval (rail service linking RER stations of Antony and Orly airport) and Montmartre funicular (special railway connecting the foot of Montmartre to the top, near the *Sacré-Coeur* church). For the Orlybus and Roissybus travellers need a special ticket which is on sale on buses and airport terminals. *Métro*: This was built during the Paris Exhibition in 1900. Its dense network of 14 lines in the central area makes the *métro* the ideal way to get about in Paris. Trains run from approximately 0530-0115. Rail: RER (fast suburban services) operate five main lines connecting most areas of the capital. There is also an extensive network of conventional suburban services run by French Railways (SNCF), with fare structure and ticketing integrated with the other modes of public transport. Bus: A comprehensive network operates within the city. Services include PC buses that run around the outskirts of Paris; Noctambus services which run through the night; Balabus services which run between La Défense and the Gare du Lyon, navigating around La Seine and major tourist attractions; Montmartrobus services that run from Pigalle to Mairie du XVIII Jules Joffrin via Montmartre; sightseeing tourist buses, *l'Opentour* (tel: (33) 0142 1200; website: [STUTTAFORD VAN LINES COUNTRY GUIDE](http://www.paris-</p></div><div data-bbox=)



opentour.com) and Paris Trip (tel: (01) 4266 5656; website: www.paris-trip.com). Eurolines offers a long-distance bus service covering 87 French cities and towns. Buses are comfortable and fitted with ABS, air conditioning, televisions and lavatories. Special tickets: Disneyland Passeport offers a combined ticket price of RER travel and entrance fee to the theme park at a reduced rate. Paris Visite Pass offers superb value for money with a choice of unlimited travel on the entire RATP network (métro, RER, bus etc) for a period of one to five days. A variety of discounts are available with the pass such as reduced prices at over 70 museums, monuments, cinemas, restaurants and shops in Paris and Ile de France. Paris transport tickets can be bought in the UK from Allo France (tel: (08702) 405 903; website: www.allofrance.co.uk). All other tickets can be purchased from the RATP Tourist Office at 54 quai de la Rapée, 75599 Paris (tel: (1) 4468 2020 or (08) 9268 7714 (within France only); website: www.ratp.fr) or from 50 of the métro stations, all mainline railway stations and certain banks. Children under four years of age travel free on buses and underground, while children between four and 11 years travel half price. Taxi: Day and night rates are shown inside each cab. There are extra charges on journeys to and from racecourses, stations and airports and for luggage. Private car: Parking is now prohibited in many areas of the centre. Otherwise there are parking meters or parking time is restricted to usually 15 minutes in waiting bays, although the driver must remain in the vehicle (zone bleue). Car parks charging a fee are plentiful all over Paris and on the outskirts. Limousines are available from various companies. Fines are given for illegal parking. Note: Travellers must always carry a valid identification document with them as they can be checked at any time; when walking down a street or driving.

EDITOR'S CHOICE: NAVIGABLE WATERWAYS: There are almost 9000km (5600 miles) of navigable waterways in France, and all of these present excellent opportunities for holidays. The main canal areas are the north (north and northeast of Paris) where most of the navigable rivers are connected with canals; the Seine (from Auxerre to Le Havre, but sharing space with commercial traffic); the east, where the Rhine and Moselle and their tributaries are connected by canals; in Burgundy, where the Saône and many old and picturesque canals crisscross the region; the Rhône (a pilot is recommended below Avignon); the Midi (including the Canal du Midi, connecting the Atlantic with the Mediterranean); and Brittany and the Loire on the rivers Vilaine, Loire, Mayenne and Sarthe, and the connecting canals. Each of these waterways offers a magnificent variety of scenery, a means of visiting many historic towns, villages and sites and an opportunity to learn much about rural France, at a very leisurely pace. Cruising boats may be chartered with or without crews, ranging in size from the smallest cabin cruiser up to converted commercial barges (péniches), which can accommodate up to 24 people and require a crew of eight. Hotel boats, large converted barges with accommodation and restaurant, are also available in some areas, with a wide choice of price and comfort. For further information, contact the national or regional tourist board.

8 ACCOMMODATION

EDITOR'S CHOICE: CHATEAUX HOLIDAYS: Château & Country, an association of owners of castles (see Accommodation Information), interested in preserving the French heritage, publishes a list of châteaux offering accommodation suitable for families.

HOTELS: Room and all meals, ie full-board or pension terms, are usually offered for a stay of three days or longer. Half-board or demi-pension (room, breakfast and one meal) terms are usually available outside the peak holiday period. Hotels charge around 30 per cent extra for a third bed in a double room. For children under 12, many chains will provide another bed in the room of the parents for free. Logis de France are small- or medium-sized, inexpensive and often



family-run hotels which provide good, clean, basic and comfortable accommodation with a restaurant attached. Hotels in Paris: Hotel bookings can be made in person through tourist offices at stations or at the Paris Tourist Office. Guides: Regional lists of hotels are available, as well as the Logis de France guide and various chain/association guides from the French Government Tourist Office (see Top Things To Do) and bookshops. The Tourist Office publishes guides to hotels in Paris and the Ile-de-France, available free of charge. Grading: Hôtels de Tourisme are officially graded into five categories according to the quality of the accommodation, which are fixed by government regulation and checked by the Préfecture of the Départements: 4-star: Deluxe. 3-star: First class. 2-star: Standard. 1-star: Budget. Logis de France are subject to a specific code usually above basic requirements for their grade and are inspected regularly to ensure that they conform to the standards laid down.

SELF CATERING: Gîtes de France are holiday homes (often old farmhouses) in the country, all of which conform to standards regulated by the non-profitmaking National Federation. Villas, Houses and Apartments Rental: Villas and houses can be rented on the spot. Local Syndicats d'Initiative can supply a complete list of addresses of local rental agencies. Tourists staying in France for over one month may prefer to live in an apartment, rather than in a hotel.

CAMPING/CARAVANNING: There are 7000 campsites throughout France. A few have tents and caravans for hire. Prices vary according to location, season and facilities. All graded campsites will provide water, toilet and washing facilities. Touring caravans may be imported for stays of up to six consecutive months. There are 100 British companies offering camping holidays in France. The French Government Tourist Office has a full list of tour operators who run all types of tours, including camping and special interest holidays.

YOUTH HOSTELS: There are hundreds of these in France, offering very simple accommodation at very low prices. There are hostels in all major towns. Stays are usually limited to three or four nights or a week in Paris. Hostels are open to all members of the National Youth Hostel Association upon presentation of a membership card. Lists are available from national youth hostel organisations.

Note: Visitors are usually asked to pay a tourism tax (variable or flat-rate) which is fixed by the local authority and values from €0.15 to €1.07 per person per day, according to the quality and standard of the accommodation. Where the tourism tax is a variable percentage, children under four years are exempt and children under 10 are charged half the rate. This tax is collected by the owner of the accommodation and will be included in the hotel bill or rent.

ACCOMMODATION INFORMATION: Fédération Nationale de l'Immobilier 129 rue du Faubourg St-Honoré, 75439 Paris, France Tel: (1) 4420 7700. Website: www.fnaim.fr Fédération Nationale des Gîtes de France 59 rue de St Lazare, 75439 Paris, France Tel: (1) 4970 7575. Website: www.gites-de-france.fr Fédération Française de Camping et Caravaning 78 rue de Rivoli, 75004 Paris, France Tel: (1) 4272 8408. Website: www.ffcc.fr French Youth Hostels Federation (FUAJ) FUAJ Centre National 27 rue Pajal, 75018 Paris, France Tel: (1) 4489 8727. Website: www.fuaj.org Fédération Nationale des Logis de France 83 avenue d'Italie, 75013 Paris, France Tel: (1) 4584 8384. Website: www.logis-de-france.fr Union des Métiers et des Industries de l'Hôtellerie 22 rue d'Anjou, 75008 Paris, France Tel: (1) 4494 1994. Website: www.umih.fr Paris Tourist Office 127 avenue des Champs-Élysées, 75008 Paris, France Tel: (8) 9268 3000. Website: www.parisinfo.com or www.paris-on-line.com Châteaux & Country 25 rue Jean Giraudoux, 75116 Paris, France Tel: (1) 4720 1827. Website: www.chateau-accueil.com

Introduction



As the world's most popular tourist destination, France manages to be all things to all people. For city slickers, Paris is one of the world's truly great cities, with a myriad of attractions and diverse eating and drinking experiences. The large cities of Lyon and Marseille are not far behind Paris with their own copious charms, both offering alternatives and complements to the Parisian experience. Outside of the big three, there are many more cities worth exploring and every town and village seems to have something to offer, with even the smallest town usually boasting a couple of worthwhile churches and a civic museum, as well as the bountiful culinary traditions that the country is rightly famed for. Beyond urban France, there is a diverse range of scenery, with everything from towering Alpine peaks in the southeast and rugged sea cliffs on the Atlantic coast, through to sweeping beaches in the west and south and some of Europe's wildest areas, like the wild Camargue in the south. Any list of French attractions **is, by virtue of the country's rich and eclectic nature, bound to be incomplete.** **Note:** The enclave of Monaco has its own section in the World Travel Guide, as do the French Overseas Departments and many of the other French Overseas Possessions; see the relevant sections for details.

Paris & Ile-de-France

PARIS: Paris is one of the world's great cities: with a practically endless amount of things to do, it rewards repeated and extended visits. Despite the massive size of the city, Paris is also an easily navigable destination as the city centre itself is relatively compact and all areas of Paris are connected by a highly efficient public transport system, with the famous Paris Metro, an attraction in itself. Paris boasts more than 80 museums and around 200 art galleries. La Carte is a pass providing free admission to about 60 national and municipal museums in the Paris area. The périphérique and boulevard circulaire ring roads roughly follow the line of the 19th-century city walls and within them are most of the well-known sights, shops and entertainments. Beyond the ring roads is an industrial and commercial belt, then a broad ring of suburbs, mostly of recent construction. Central Paris contains fine architecture from every period in a long and rich history, together with every amenity known to science and every entertainment yet devised. The oldest neighbourhood is the Île-de-la-Cité, an island on a bend in the Seine where the Parisii, a Celtic tribe, settled in about the third century BC. The river was an effective defensive moat and the Parisii dominated the area for several centuries before being displaced by the Romans in about 52 BC. The island is today dominated by the newly renovated cathedral of Notre-Dame. Beneath it is the Crypte Archéologique, housing well-mounted displays of Paris' early history. Having sacked the Celtic city, the Gallo-Romans abandoned the island and settled on the heights along the Rive Gauche (Left Bank), in the area now known as the Latin Quarter (Boulevards St Michel and St Germain). The naming of this district owes nothing to the Roman city: when the university was moved from the Cité to the left bank in the 13th century, Latin was the common language among the 10,000 students who gathered there from all over the known world. The Latin Quarter remains the focus of most student activity (the Sorbonne is here) and there are many fine bookshops and commercial art galleries. The Cluny Museum houses some of the finest medieval European tapestries to be found anywhere, including 'The Field of the Cloth of Gold'. At the western end of the Boulevard St Germain is the Orsay Museum, a superb collection of 19th- and early-20th-century art located in a beautifully restored railway station. Other Left Bank attractions include the Panthéon, the Basilica of St Séverin, the Palais and Jardin du Luxembourg, the Hôtel des Invalides (containing Napoleon's tomb), the Musée Rodin and St-Germain-des-Prés. Continuing westwards from the Quai d'Orsay past the Eiffel Tower and across the Seine onto the Right Bank, the visitor encounters collection of museums and galleries known as the Trocadéro, a popular meeting place for young Parisians. A short walk to the north is the Place Charles de Gaulle, known to Parisians as the Étoile, and to tourists as the site of the Arc de Triomphe. It is also at the western end of that most elegant of avenues, the Champs-Élysées (Elysian Fields), which is once again famous for its cafes, commercial art galleries and sumptuous shops, rather than the dowdy airline offices and fast-food joints that took it over for much of the 1980s and



early 1990s. At the other end of the avenue, the powerful axis is continued by the Place de la Concorde, the Jardin des Tuileries and, finally, the Louvre. The Palais du Louvre has been extensively reorganised and reconstructed, the most controversial addition to the old palace being a pyramid with 673 panes of glass, which juxtaposes the ultra-modern with the classical facade of the palace. The best time to see the pyramid is after dark, when it is illuminated. The Richelieu Wing of the palace was inaugurated in 1993, marking the completion of the second stage of the redevelopment programme. In 1996, a labyrinth of subterranean galleries, providing display areas, a conference and exhibition centre, design shops and restaurants was opened. North of the Louvre are the Palais Royal, the Madeleine and l'Opéra. To the east is Les Halles, a shopping and commercial complex built on the site of the old food market. It is at the intersection of several métro lines and is a good starting point for a tour of the city. There are scores of restaurants in the maze of small streets around Les Halles; every culinary style is available at prices to suit every pocket. Further east, beyond the Boulevard Sébastopol, is the postmodern Georges Pompidou Centre of Modern Art (also known as the 'Beaubourg'). It provides a steady stream of surprises in its temporary exhibition spaces (which, informally, include the pavement outside where lively and often bizarre street-performers gather) and houses a permanent collection of 20th-century art. East again, in the Marais district, are the Carnavalet and Picasso Museums, housed in magnificent town houses dating from the 16th and 18th centuries, respectively. Still further east, the magnificent Bibliothèque François Mitterrand, one of the world's most spectacular libraries, can be reached via a new métro connection (ligne 14) whose beautiful high-tech trains alone (they are constructed mainly of glass) are worth the trip. One of the best-known districts in Paris, Montmartre, became almost unbearably popular and crowded after the success in 2001 of the Hollywood blockbuster, Moulin Rouge. A funicular railway operates on the steepest part of the Montmartre hill, taking people to the outlandish Sacré-Coeur: a love-it or hate-it chocolate box architectural creation. Local entrepreneurs have long capitalised on Montmartre's romantic reputation as an artist's colony and if visitors today are disappointed to find it a well-run tourist attraction, they should bear in mind that it has been exactly that since it first climbed out of poverty in the 1890s. The legend of Montmartre as a dissolute cradle of talent was carefully stage-managed by Toulouse-Lautrec and others to fill their pockets and it rapidly transformed a notorious slum into an equally notorious circus. An earlier Montmartre legend concerns St Denis. After his martyrdom, he is said to have walked headless down the hill. The world's first Gothic cathedral, St Denis, was constructed on the spot where he collapsed. Just north of Belleville (a working-class district that produced Edith Piaf and Maurice Chevalier) at La Villette, is one of Paris' newer attractions, the City of Science and Technology. The most modern presentation techniques are used to illustrate both the history and the possible future of man's inventiveness; season tickets are available. One of the great pleasures of Paris is the great number of sidewalk cafes, now glass-enclosed in wintertime, which extends people-watching to a year-round sport in any part of the city. There are as many Vietnamese and Chinese restaurants as there are French cafes. North African eating places also abound, and dozens of American Tex-Mex eateries are scattered throughout the city. Bric-a-brac or brocante is found in a number of flea markets (marché aux puces) on the outskirts of town, notably at the Porte de Clignancourt. There are several antique centres (Louvre des Antiquaires, Village Suisse, etc) where genuine antique furniture and other objects are on sale. Amongst the larger department stores are the Printemps and the Galeries Lafayette near the Opéra, the Bazar Hôtel de Ville (BHV) and the Samaritaine on the Right Bank and the Bon Marché on the Left Bank. The remains of the great forests of the Île-de-France (the area surrounding Paris) can still be seen at the magnificent châteaux of Versailles, Rambouillet and Fontainebleau on the outskirts of Paris. The capital's nightlife has never looked healthier. The 'beautiful people' may have moved on to Menilmontant, but the bustling streets of Bastille are still a nocturnal playground for far more than just tourists. Menilmontant itself rewards visitors prepared to venture beyond the guidebooks to discover the vibrant, hip, twenty-something scene.



Disneyland Resort Paris: The Disneyland Resort Paris, now open year-round, lies to the east of the capital, a complete vacation destination located at Marne-la-Vallée, 32km (20 miles) from Paris. Disney's first European venture has become one of the continent's most popular attractions. The site has an area of 1943 hectares (5000 acres), one-fifth the size of Paris, and includes hotels, restaurants, a campsite, shops and a golf course, and has as its star attractions the Disneyland Paris Theme Park and Walt Disney Studios. Inspired by previous theme parks, Euro Disneyland features all the famous Disney characters plus some new attractions especially produced to blend with its European home. The site is easily accessible by motorway, regional and high-speed rail services, and by air.

Brittany

Brittany is a region of France that boasts a fiercely independent culture that dates back to its Celtic past. Brittany comprises the départements of Côtes d'Armor, Finistère, Ille-et-Villaine and Morbihan. Fishing has long been the most important industry and the rocky Atlantic coastline, high tides and strong, treacherous currents demand high standards of seamanship. At Finistère (finis terrea or Land's End), the Atlantic swell can drive spouts of water up to 30m (100ft) into the air. The coastal scenery is particularly spectacular at Pointe du Raz and Perros-Guirec. The Gauls arrived on the peninsula in about 600 BC. Little is known about their way of life or why they constructed the countless stone monuments to be found throughout Brittany cromlechs, altars, menhirs and dolmens (Carnac is the supreme example of this). They were displaced by the Romans during the reign of Julius Caesar who, in turn, were displaced by Celts arriving from Britain in AD 460. The Celts named their new land Britannica Minor and divided it into the coastal area, l'Ar Mor (the country of the sea), and the inland highlands, l'Ar Coat (the country of the woods). The two areas in Brittany are still referred to as l'Armor and l'Argoat. The Celts were master stonemasons, as may be seen by the many surviving calvaires, or elaborately carved stone crosses. Brittany emerged from the Dark Ages as an independent duchy. A series of royal marriages eventually brought Brittany into France and, by 1532, the perpetual union of the Duchy of Brittany with France was proclaimed. Despite the rugged coastline, it is possible to enjoy a conventional beach holiday in Brittany. The Emerald Coast, a region of northern Brittany centred on Dinard, has many fine **bathing beaches. The beach resorts are often named after little-known saints:** St Enogat, St Laumore, St Brill, St Jacut, St Cast, and so on. There are also bathing beaches in the bay of St Brieuc, including Val André, Etables and St Quay. Brittany's main attractions are her wild beauty and the unique Breton culture. In general, coastal areas have retained a more characteristically Breton way of life than the hills inland, though much of the coastline is blighted by the holiday homes which seem to occupy every possible space. Elaborate Breton head-dresses are still worn in some parts, the style varying slightly from village to village. Breton religious processions and the ceremonies of the pardons that take place in a number of communities at various times of the year may have changed little since Celtic times. In the region around Plouha, many of the inhabitants still speak Breton, a language evolved from Celtic dialects, and Celtic music and cultural performances are also popular. The coast from Paimpol consists of colossal chunks of rock, perilous to shipping, as the many lighthouses suggest. The very pleasant villages and beaches of Perros-Guirec, Trégastel or Trébeurden contrast with the wild and rocky shoreline. Near the base of the peninsula, at Aber Vrac'h and Aber Benoit, the ocean is caught and churned up in deep, winding chasms penetrating far inland. Further along the coast is the huge and sprawling port of Brest, possessing one of Europe's finest natural harbours which has a 13th-century castle. The canal running from Brest to Nantes makes a very pleasant journey either by hired boat or walking or on horseback, although not all of the route is navigable by water. The interior consists of wooded hills and farms, buttes (knolls) with fine views, short rivers and narrow valleys. Many of the so-called mountains are merely undulating verdant dunes, barely 300m (1000ft) high. They are nonetheless remnants of the oldest mountain chain on the planet. Breton architecture is perhaps more humble than in



other parts of France, being more akin to that of a village in England or Wales. Inland, there are several impressive castles and many walled towns and villages. The churches are small and simple. For the most part, Brittany benefits from the warmth of the Gulf Stream all year round, but the tourist season runs from June to September. The countryside blazes with flowers in the spring, attracting many varieties of birdlife. The city of Rennes, the ancient capital of Brittany, is a good base from which to explore the highlands; sights include the Palais de Justice, the castle, the Musée des Beaux-Arts and the Musée de Bretagne, which seeks to preserve and foster all things Breton. Some of Brittany's most productive farms are close to the northern shore. Fertilised with seaweed, they produce fine potatoes, cabbage, cauliflower, artichokes, peas, string beans and strawberries. The quality of locally produced ingredients lends itself to the simple Breton cuisine, which brings out natural flavours rather than concealing them with elaborate sauces. Raw shellfish (including oysters), lobster, lamb and partridge are particularly good. The salt meadows of lower Brittany add a distinctive flavour to Breton livestock and game. Crêpes (pancakes) are a regional speciality and there are two distinct varieties: a sweet dessert crêpe served with sugar, honey, jam, jelly or a combination (eg suzette); and the savoury sarrasin variety, made from buckwheat flour and served with eggs, cheese, bacon or a combination of several of these (the crêpe is folded over the ingredients and reheated). They can be bought ready-made in the local shops. Little or no cheese is produced in Brittany, but some of the finest butter in the world comes from here it is slightly salted, unlike the butter from the other regions of France. Cider is frequently drunk with food, as well as wine. The popular wine, Muscadet, comes from the extreme southern point of Brittany, at the head of the Loire Estuary, near Nantes. It is a dry, fruity white wine that goes very well with shellfish, especially oysters.

Normandy

Normandy is a region dominated by farming, with mile upon mile of unbroken farmland, which eventually gives way in the west to the waters of the English Channel. Normandy contains five **départements**: Seine Maritime, Calvados, Manche, Eure and Orne, with all but the last two touching on the sea. Its southern border is the River Couesnon which has, over the years, shifted its course as it flows over almost flat country, gradually moving south of Mont-Saint-Michel, one of Europe's best-known architectural curiosities. Mont-Saint-Michel and its bay are on UNESCO's World Heritage List. The tides are phenomenal: at their peak, there is a difference of about 15m (50ft) between the ebb and the flow, the height of a five-storey building. The sands in the bay are flat and, when the tides are at their highest, the sea runs in over a distance of some 24km (15 miles), forming a wave about 70cm (2ft) deep. The sandbank changes from tide to tide and, if the legend of the sea entering the bay at the speed of a galloping horse is perhaps a slight exaggeration, the danger of quicksand is real enough. The present Abbey of Saint-Michel was built in the eighth century by Bishop Aubert; his skull bears the mark of the finger of Saint Michel, the archangel Michael. Cabourg is the Balbec in Proust's novels. Maupassant and Flaubert included Norman scenes in their novels and Monet, Sisley and Pissarro painted scenes of the coast and the countryside. Deauville with its beach, casino, golf course and race track is the social capital of the area. Bayeux is worth a visit for the fantastic tapestry there is nothing like it in the world. The landing beaches and World War II battlefields are remembered by excellent small museums in Arromanches (the landings) and Bayeux (battle of Normandy). There is also a peace museum in Caen, with its beautiful Romanesque church and ruins of an enormous castle, founded by William the Conqueror. Other monuments worth visiting include the 14th-century Church of St-Etienne, the Church of St-Pierre (Renaissance) and the Abbaye aux Dames. There is also a museum of local crafts from the Gallo-Roman period to the present. The cross-Channel terminus and port of Dieppe has attractive winding streets and a 15th-century castle, housing the Musée de Dieppe. There are some beautiful châteaux in Normandy, particularly along the route between Paris and Rouen. They include the Boury-en-Vexin, Bizy-Vernon, Gaillon, Gaillard-les-Andelys, Vascoeuil and Martinville. Along the same route are found a number of other sites



classed monument historique; the Claude Monet House and garden in Giverny, the Abbey de Mortemer (Lisors) and the village of Lyon-la-Fôret. All of these merit a detour. The ancient capital of Rouen features restored ancient streets and houses, including the Vieille Maison of 1466 and the place du Vieux-Marché, where Jeanne d'Arc was burnt in 1432. There is a magnificent 13th-century cathedral (the subject of a series of paintings by Monet), as well as many fine museums and churches, including St Ouen and St Maclou. The cloister of St Maclou was a cemetery for victims of the Great Plague. The old port of Honfleur, with its well-preserved 18th-century waterfront houses, is also well worth a visit. Normandy is a land of farmers and fishermen and is one of the finest gastronomic regions of France. Exquisite butter, thick fresh cream and excellent cheeses, including the world-famous camembert, pont l'évêque and liverot, are all produced here. Both crustaceans and saltwater fish abound; sole Normande is one of the greatest dishes known to the gastronomic world. There is also lobster from Barfleur, shrimp from Cherbourg and oysters from Dive-sur-Mur. Inland one finds duck from Rouen and Nantes, lamb from the salt meadows near Mont-Saint-Michel, cream from Isigny, chicken and veal from the Cotentin, and cider and calvados (apple brandy) from the Pays d'Auge.

Nord, Pas de Calais & Picardy

Northern France is made up of the départements of Nord/Pas de Calais (French Flanders) and Somme-Oise Aisne (Picardy). Amiens, the principal town of Picardy, has a beautiful 13th-century cathedral, which is one of the largest in France. The choirstalls are unique. The nearby Quartier Saint-Leu is an ancient canal-side neighbourhood. Beauvais is famous for its Gothic Cathedral of St-Pierre (incorporating a ninth-century Carolingian church) which would have been the biggest Gothic church in the world, if it had been completed. Its 13th-century, stained-glass windows are particularly impressive. There is also a fine museum of tapestry. Compiègne is famous for its Royal Palace, which has been a retreat for the French aristocracy from the 14th century onwards, and where Napoleon himself lived with his second wife, Marie-Louise. There are over 1000 rooms within the palace and the bedrooms of Napoleon and his wife, preserved with their original decorations, are well worth viewing for their ostentatiously lavish style. Surrounding the town and palace is the Forest of Compiègne, where the 1918 Armistice was signed, and which has been a hunting ground for the aristocracy for hundreds of years a wander through its dark and tranquil interior is an exceptionally pleasant experience. The town also has a fine Hôtel de Ville (town hall) and a Carriage Museum is attached to the Palace. The château of Chantilly now houses the Musée Condé and there are impressive Baroque gardens to walk around, as well as a 17th-century stable with a 'live' Horse Museum. The town of Arras, on the River Scarpe, has beautiful 13th- and 14th-century houses and the lovely Abbey of Saint Waast. There are pretty old towns at Hesdin and Montreuil (with its ramparts and citadel). Boulogne is best entered by way of the lower town with the 13th-century ramparts of the upper town in the background; the castle next to the Basilica of Notre Dame is impressive. Le Touquet is a pleasant all-year-round coastal resort town with 10km (6 miles) of sandy beaches. The port of Calais, of great strategic importance in the Middle Ages, is today noted for the manufacture of tulle and lace, as well as being a busy cross-Channel ferry terminus. Calais and its surrounds are also very popular for their large shopping malls, which are particularly popular with British visitors, who often travel across the English Channel specifically for a shopping trip. The further north one goes, the more beer is drunk and used in the kitchen, especially in soup and ragoûts. Wild rabbit is cooked with prunes or grapes. There is also a thick Flemish soup called hochepot which has virtually everything in it but the kitchen sink. The cuisine is often, not surprisingly, sea-based matelotes of conger eel and caudière (fish soup). Shellfish known as coques, 'the poor man's oyster', are popular too. The marolles cheese from Picardy is made from whole milk, salted and washed down with beer. Flanders, although it has a very short coastline, has many herring dishes, croquelots or bouffis, which are lightly salted and smoked. Harengs salés and harengs fumés are famous and known locally as gendarmes ('policemen').



Champagne & Ardennes

The chalky and rolling fields of Champagne might have remained unsung and unvisited, had it not been for an accident of history. Towards the end of the 17th century, a blind monk, tending the bottles of mediocre wine in the cellars of his abbey at Hautvillers, discovered that cork made a fine stopper for ageing his wine. After the first fermentation, cork kept air - the enemy of ageing wine - from his brew. But it also trapped the carbon dioxide in the bottle and when he pulled the cork it 'popped'. At that moment, some say, the world changed for the better. 'I am drinking the stars,' he is said to have murmured as he took the first sip of champagne the world had ever known. This northeastern slice of France is composed of the départements of Ardennes, Marne, Aube and Haute Marne. On these rolling plains, many of the great battles of European history have been fought, including many in World Wars I and II. The Ardennes was once known as the 'woody country' where Charlemagne hunted deer, wild boar, small birds and game in the now vanished forests. The area has three **main waterways**: the Seine, the Aube and the Marne. The Marne Valley between Ferté-sous-Jouarre and Epernay is one of the prettiest in France. Forests of beech, birch, oak and elm cover the high ground, vines and fruit trees sprawl across the slopes, and corn and sunflowers wave in the little protected valleys. The valleys form a long, fresh and green oasis, dotted with red-roofed villages. In 496, Clovis, the first king of France, was baptised in the cathedral in Rheims. From Louis VII to Charles X, the kings of France made it a point of honour to be crowned in the city where the history of the country really began. Rheims and its cathedral have been destroyed, razed, and rebuilt many times over the centuries. The Church of St-Rémi, even older than the cathedral, is half Romanesque, half Gothic in style. The most remarkable feature is its great size, comparable to that of Notre-Dame-de-Paris. Beneath the town and its suburbs, there are endless caves for champagne. Epernay is the real capital of champagne, the drink. Here, 115km (72 miles) of underground galleries in the chalk beneath the city store the wine for the delicate operations required to make champagne. These include the blending of vintages, one of the most important tasks in the creation of champagne. It is left to age for at least three years. Aside from champagne as the world knows it, there is an excellent blanc de blanc champagne nature, an unbubbly white wine with a slight bite and many of the characteristics of champagne. The perfect Gothic style of the Cathedral of St-Étienne in Châlons-sur-Marne has preserved the pure lines of its 12th-century tower. Nearby, the little town of St-Ménéhould, almost destroyed in 1940, has contributed to the gastronomic world recipes for pigs' feet and carp but, historically, it is known for the fact that the postmaster, in 1791, recognised Louis XVI fleeing from Paris with his family and reported him. Before the annexation of Franche-Comté and Lorraine, Langres was a fortified town. Its Gallo-Roman monuments, its 15th- and 17th-century mansions and its religious architecture make it well worth a visit. Troyes, ancient capital of the Champagne area, has a beautifully preserved city centre with a Gothic cathedral, dozens of churches and 15th-century houses and a system of boulevards shaped like a champagne cork. The city also boasts the Musée d'Art Moderne in the old Bishops' Palace - a private collection of modern art, including works by Bonnard, Degas and Gauguin. Troyes is becoming increasingly popular as a base for exploring Aube en Champagne, an area that is less saturated with tourists than the more popular champagne areas around Rheims and Epernay. There are beautiful lakes in the Champagne-Ardenne region, the largest being Lac du Der-Chantecoq. The Forêt d'Orient has a famous bird sanctuary. There is no school of cooking founded on the use of champagne, but locally there are a few interesting dishes that include the wine. Châlons-sur-Marne has a dish that involves cooking chicken in champagne. It goes well in a sauce for the local trout; kidneys and pike have also been fried in champagne.

Lorraine, Vosges & Alsace



This part of France is made up of two historic territories, Alsace and Lorraine, in which there are **six départements**: Vosges, Meurthe-et-Moselle, Meuse, Moselle, Bas-Rhin, Haut-Rhin and the territory of Belfort. These territories have seen sawed from French to German control during conflicts between the two countries for centuries. The major cities of the area are Strasbourg, Metz, Nancy and Colmar. Strasbourg, by far the largest and most important, has been for centuries what its name suggests: a city on a highway; the highway being the eastwest trade (and invasion) route and the northsouth river for commerce. Today, it is the headquarters of the European Parliament and the European Court of Human Rights, but it is rich in historic monuments and architecture and possesses a magnificent cathedral. Metz, a Gallo-Roman city, is situated in a strategic position as a defence point and is also a crossroads of trade routes. It contains some elegant medieval walls, arches and public buildings, but its pride is the Cathedral of St-Étienne. Nancy is best known for its perfectly proportioned Place Stanislas, gracefully surrounded with elegant wrought-iron gates. The history of Lorraine is excellently documented in the town's museum. A visit to Colmar can be a pleasant glimpse into the Middle Ages, and it is one of the most agreeable cities in Alsace, as well as being capital of the Alsatian wine country. The narrow, winding, cobbled streets are flanked by half-timbered houses, painstakingly restored by the burghers of the city. The 13th-century Dominican Convent of Unterlinden, now a museum, contains some important works from the 15th and 16th centuries, including the exquisite Grünewald triptych. Colmar is a perfect place from which to set out along the Route du Vin (Wine Route) stopping at many of the appealing towns along the way to taste the local wine. Turckheim, just outside Colmar, has some of the best-preserved array of 15th- and 16th-century houses in the district and a town crier takes visitors through the streets at night to recall the atmosphere of old. The town of Eguisheim, with its Renaissance fountain and monument in the village square, is also a charming Alsatian town with many historic houses and wine cellars open to the public for wine-tasting. Kayersberg (the birthplace of Dr Albert Schweitzer, whose house has been turned into a museum with mementos of his work and life) also has some castle ruins on a hill overlooking the town and a picturesque stream that meanders through the town. A particularly popular town with tourists is Riquewihir, with its 13th- and 14th-century fortifications and belfry tower and its many medieval houses and courtyards. St Hippolyte is another picturesque wine-tasting town at the foot of the Haut-Koenigsbourg Castle, a sprawling and impressive medieval castle where Jean Renoir filmed *La Grande Illusion*. Self-steer boats are readily available for canal cruising in a number of locations. There are also regularly scheduled Rhine river and canal tours daily all summer; several hotel boats ply these waterways as well. Sightseeing helicopters and balloons make regular flights, weather permitting. Several ancient steam trains make regular circuits including Rosheim/Ottrat (on the wine route); at Andolsheim, a steam train runs along the Canal d'Alsace between Cernay and Soultz. Throughout Alsace there are artisans' workshops, including glass and wood painting at Wimmenau and pottery in Betschdorf where studios and shops are open to the public. Organised walking tours that include overnight stops and meals en route are arranged from Colmar and Mulhouse. Bicycle trails are marked along the Rhine, where bicycles are readily available for hire. Belfort, a major fortress town since the 17th century, commands the Belfort Gap, or Burgundy Gate, between the Vosges and the Jura mountains. Dominating the routes from Germany and Switzerland, it became famous during the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-71 when it withstood a 108-day siege. This is commemorated by a huge stone statue, the Lion of Belfort, by Bartholdi, the creator of the Statue of Liberty. The 'route du vin' lies between the Rhine and a low range of pine-covered mountains called the Vosges. The flat, peaceful plain is covered with orchards and vineyards. Lovely, rural villages dot the landscape, their church spires piercing the horizon. The wines of Alsace have a long history; the Alsatian grapes were planted before the arrival of the Romans. It has never been clearly understood where they originated; unlike other French wines, these depend more on grape type than soil or processing. Almost exclusively white with a fruity and dry flavour, they make an excellent accompaniment to the local food. Beer also goes well with Alsatian food, and as might be expected, good beer is brewed in both the Alsace and the



Lorraine areas. There are famous and popular mineral water sources in Contréville and Vittel (also a spa town). They were well known and appreciated by the Romans and today are the most popular in France. One of the food specialties of Alsace is truite bleue, blue trout, which is simply boiled so fresh as to be almost alive when tossed into the water. The swift rivers provide gamey trout and they can be fished by visitors if permits are obtained (at any city hall). The cooking is peppery and hearty and quite unlike that of any other French region. Munster, a strong winter cheese, is usually served with caraway seeds. Lorraine and Alsatian tarts are made with the excellent local fruits: mirabelles (small, yellow plums), cherries, pears, and so on. Each of these fruits also makes a world-renowned eau-de-vie, a strong white alcohol liqueur drunk as a digestive after a heavy meal. Lorraine is famous for quiche lorraine made only in the classical manner: with cream, eggs and bacon. Nancy has boudin (blood sausage), although this is found in all parts of France.

Burgundy & Franche-Comté

Burgundy begins near Auxerre, a small medieval town with a beautiful Gothic cathedral, and extends southward to the hills of Beaujolais just north of Lyon. The départements are the Yonne, Côte d'Or, Nièvre and the Saône-et-Loire. Driving through this region, one seems to be **traversing a huge carte des vins**: Mersault, Volnay, Beaune, Aloxe Corton, Nuits-Saint-Georges, Vosne-Romanée and Gevrey-Chambertin. This vast domain of great wines was an independent kingdom for 600 years, at times as strong as France itself, enjoying its heyday in the 15th century. Throughout a stormy history, however, Burgundy's vineyards survived thanks in large part to the knowledge, diligence and good taste of its monks. Several of the orders owned extensive vineyards throughout the region, among them the Knights of Malta, Carthusians, Carmelites and, most importantly, the Benedictines and Cistercians. As a result, the 210km (130 mile) length of Burgundy is peppered with abbeys, monasteries and a score of fine Romanesque churches, notably in Fontenay, Vézelay, Tournus and Cluny. There are also many fortified châteaux. Dijon, an important political and religious centre during the 15th century, has several fine museums and art galleries, as well as the Palais des Ducs, once the home of the Dukes of Burgundy. There are also elegant restored town houses to be visited, dating from the 15th to the 18th century, and a 13th-century cathedral. The towns of Sens and Macon both possess fine churches dating from the 12th century. The region of Franche-Comté is shaped like a fat boomerang and is made up of the départements of Doubs, Jura, Haute Saône and Territoire de Belfort. The high French Jura Mountains, rising in steps from 245 to 1785m (805-5856ft), run northsouth along the FrenchSwiss border. To the west is the forested Jura plateau, the vine-clad hills and eventually the fertile plain of northern Bresse, called the Finage. The heights and valleys of the Jura are readily accessible and, in the summertime, beautifully green, providing pasture land for the many milk cows used in the production of one of the great mountain cheeses: Comté. There are many lovely (and romantically named) rivers in this region Semouse, Allance, Gugeotte, Lanterne, Barquette, Durgeon, Colombine, Dougeonne, Rigotte and Romaine (named by Julius Caesar). They weave and twist, now and then disappearing underground to reappear again some miles away. All these physical characteristics combine to make Franche-Comté an excellent region for summer vacations and winter sports.

Val de Loire

One of France's most famous regions is the Loire Valley, the former playground of the French monarchs, whose traces and grand palaces attract visitors today. The 'centre' of France from Chartres to Châteauroux and from Tours to Bourges includes the départements of Eure-et-Loir, Loiret, Loir-et-Cher, Indre, Indre-et-Loire and Cher. The Central Loire includes the famous Châteaux country, perhaps the region most visited by foreign tourists to France. Through it flows a part of the Loire River, the longest river in France, and considered to be its most capricious,



often reducing to a mere trickle of water in a bed of sand. It has been called a 'useless' great river, because it drives no turbines or mill wheels and offers few navigable waterways. It could be said that the Loire serves only beauty and each of its tributaries has its own character. The Cher is a quiet, slow-moving river, flowing calmly through grassy meadows and mature forests. The château of Chenonceaux stands quite literally on the river; a working mill in the early medieval period when the Cher flowed more vigorously, it was transformed into perhaps the most graceful of all French châteaux, its court rooms running clear from one bank to the other on a row of delicate arches. Chenonceaux's development owed much to a succession of beautiful and powerful noblewomen, and its charm is of an undeniably feminine nature. The Indre is a river of calm reflections. Lilies abound and weeping willows sway on its banks. The château at Azay-le-Rideau was designed to make full use of these qualities and stands beside several small manmade lakes, each reflecting a different aspect of the building. Water is moved to and from the river and between the lakes through a series of gurgling channels. The water gardens and its reflections of the intricately carved exterior more than compensate for the rather dull interior. The Vienne is essentially a broad stream. It glides gracefully beneath the weathered walls of old Chinon, where several important chapters in French history were acted out. The château of Blois, which is - architecturally speaking - one of the finest, is certainly the most interesting in terms of history. It stands in the centre of the ancient town of the same name, towering over the battered stone houses clustered beneath its walls. Chambord, several miles south of the Loire, is the most substantial of the great châteaux. Standing in a moat in the centre of a vast lawn bordered by forests, the body of the building possesses a majestic symmetry. In contrast, the roofscape is a mad jumble of eccentric chimneys and apartments. Some have attributed the bizarre double-helix staircase to Leonardo da Vinci. The five châteaux described above are generally ranked highest amongst the Loire châteaux and form the core of most organised tours. There are, of course, dozens more that can be visited and it is even possible to stay overnight in several of them. The Loire Valley is very warm and crowded with tourists in summer. Besides châteaux, there is much else of interest in the Loire Valley and surrounding districts. There are magnificent 13th-century cathedrals in Chartres and Tours, as well as abbeys and mansions and charming riverside towns and villages. Other places of outstanding interest include Orléans, famous for its associations with Jeanne d'Arc, with a beautiful cathedral, the Musée des Beaux Arts and 16th-century Hôtel de Ville; and Bourges, a 15th-century town complete with old houses, museums and the Cathedral of St-Étienne. The charming little town of Loches, southeast of Tours, has a fine château and an interesting walled medieval quarter. It was in the heartland of the Touraine that the true cuisine of France developed (Touraine was given the name 'the garden of France').

Western Loire

The region of the Western Loire comprises the départements of Loire-Atlantique, Maine et Loire, Mayenne, Sarthe and the Vendée. The Vendée and the Loire-Atlantique share a beautiful and wild coastline with Brittany. There are 305km (190 miles) of sandy beaches. Inland, the mild climate makes for beautiful mature pastures, often made more attractive by clumps of wild camellias and roses. In the Western Loire, La Baule, a summer resort with a fine, seemingly endless beach, is a pleasant town with winding streets and giant pines, excellent hotels, restaurants and a casino. It has an unusually mild microclimate and is exceptionally warm for the region. Le Mans, famous for its racetrack, is an historic old town built on a hill overlooking the west bank of the Sarthe. The 12th-century choir in the Cathedral of Saint-Julian is one of the most remarkable in France. The magnificent 13th- and 14th-century stained glass is also impressive. Most of the Sarthe Valley consists of beautifully wooded hills, divided by the thick hedges that are seasonally draped with wild roses, honeysuckle, or large juicy blackberries. In May or early June, the apple and pear blossoms blend with the hawthorn; the orchards are in bloom and the fields and forests are rich and green. These two months are most attractive and the weather at that time is usually favourable; the autumn is less dry but usually remains



pleasant through October. Nantes, on the coast of the Loire-Atlantique, is a thriving commercial and industrial centre. There is a medieval castle, which also houses the Musée d'Art Populaire, a display of Breton costumes; a 15th-century cathedral; and a naval museum. St-Nazaire, along the coast from Nantes, boasts the Escal Atlantic, a replica of an ocean liner containing interactive exhibits evoking the golden age of ocean travel. Upstream from Nantes, the town of Angers contains some spectacular tapestries. In the castle can be seen St John's Vision of the Apocalypse (14th century) and in the Hôpital St-Jean, Jean Lurcat's Chant du Monde (20th century). The Hôpital itself is very beautiful and there are several museums and art galleries in the town worth a visit, as well as the magnificent castle/fortress and the cathedral. The regional cuisine has the advantages of excellent vineyards, an abundance and variety of fish from the Loire and its tributaries, plentiful butter and cheese, fruits and vegetables and easily available game from the forests. In general, the wines of the Loire all have a clean refreshing taste that makes them ideal for light lunches or as an apéritif.

Aquitaine & Poitou-Charentes

This area of sunshine and Atlantic air in the southwest of France includes the départements of Deux Sèvres, Vienne, Charente-Maritime, Charente, Gironde, Dordogne, Lot-et-Garonne, Landes and Pyrénées Atlantiques, the latter on the Spanish border. The coastline has 270km (170 miles) of beaches and the 30km (20 miles) or so from Hossegor to Hendaye fall within the Basque area and offer some of the best surfing in Europe. North of Bordeaux the region of Guyenne is sometimes referred to as 'west-centre' as if it were a clearly defined part of France, yet a diversity of landscapes and an extraordinary mixing and mingling of races exists here Celts, Iberians, Dutch and Anglo Saxons, to name a few. The linguistic frontier between the langue d'oïl and langue d'oc runs between Poitiers (former capital of the Duchy of Aquitaine) and Limoges, creating a dialect which developed from both. These people have in common the great north-south highway, the important line of communication between the Parisian basin and the Aquitaine basin. Throughout the centuries it **was the route of many invaders**: Romans, Visigoths, Alemanni, Huns, Arabs, Normans, English, Huguenots and Catholics all moved along it. Not far from Poitiers is Futuroscope, which is the domestic answer to Disneyland Resort Paris, offering a huge theme park containing interactive and cinematic exhibits, as well as rides and other entertainment. Biarritz and Bayonne are both resorts on the Aquitaine/Basque coast, close to the Spanish border. Biarritz has been famous as a cosmopolitan spa town since the 19th century, when it was popular with the European aristocracy. There are several sheltered beaches, as well as a casino. Bayonne, a few kilometres up the coast but slightly inland, is a typical Basque town that is worth a visit. There is a 13th-century cathedral and two museums (one of them devoted to Basque culture). Bordeaux is on the Garonne River just above where it joins the Dordogne, the two streams forming an estuary called the Gironde which forms a natural sheltered inland harbour. It is flanked on both sides by vineyards as far as the eye can see. The combination of great wines and great wealth made Bordeaux one of the gastronomic cities of France and the city offers an impressive sight from its stone bridge with 17 arches that crowns the enormous golden horn which forms the harbour. The second-largest city of France in area, the fourth in population, the fifth port, it was described by Victor Hugo with the words: 'Take Versailles, add Antwerp to it, and you have Bordeaux'. The city is the commercial and cultural centre for all of the southwest. Its nightlife scene is fuelled by the large local student community, which, along with its eating and drinking scene and the new budget airline route to Bordeaux, is bringing more and more city-breakers into the city. South of Bordeaux along the coast is a strip of long sandy beaches backed by lagoons, some communicating with the sea, some shut off from it. Just at the back of this is the Landes, covered with growths of scrubby pine. Here in the marshes, the shepherds walk on stilts. The hilly region between the Adour and Garonne rivers comprises the inland part of Gascony, first known as Aquitania Propria and later as Novem Populena. It was inhabited by Vascones, or Basques who, since prehistoric times, had lived in this



area and south of the Pyrénées. In the south, the Basque language has survived to this day, but the northern part of the area became known as Vasconia and then Gascony, a name made famous by the swashbuckling Gascons of literature: Cyrano de Bergerac, d'Artagnan of 'The Three Musketeers' and le vert gallant Henri IV. In the centre of Gascony is the old countship of Armagnac which, like Cognac, provides the world with a magnificent brandy that bears the name of the region. The difference between the two stems from several factors: the type of grape used, the soil, the climate, the method of distilling the wine and the variety of wood used in the maturing casks. Armagnac is still made by local artisans and small farmers. The quality and taste varies much more than Cognac, but it inevitably retains its fine flavour. The Dordogne (and neighbouring Lot) is the area where traces of prehistoric (Cro-Magnon) man abound. The Dordogne River itself, one of the most beautiful of all French rivers, flows swiftly through the region, its banks crowded with old castles and walled towns. In Montignac, the fabulous painted caves of Lascaux are reproduced in the exact proportions and colours of the original, a few miles away. The reproduction was necessary as the original deteriorated rapidly when exposed to the heat and humidity of visitors. A highly interesting and informative museum and zoo of prehistoric artefacts and animals has been created in Le Thot a few miles from Agen. The area around Périgueux is a country of rivers and castles very different from those on the Loire as these are older and, for the most part, fortified defence points against medieval invaders. There are facilities for renting horse and gypsy wagons (roulotte à chevaux) for slow-moving tours of the region. Along with hiking treks, river boating and bicycling tours, it offers a relaxed way to explore this beautiful land. It is possible in Aquitaine and Poitou-Charentes to find pleasant hotels and auberges for an overnight or few days' stay. They range from gîtes and chambre d'hôtes a farm bed & breakfast programme to châteaux hôtels with elegant restaurants. There are no less than 150 chambres d'hôtes stopovers in the Poitou-Charentes region alone, including many on the coast, near beaches and pleasure ports. The area of Poitou-Charentes has lovely mature woodland and an attractive coast where oysters are cultivated. The Charente-Maritime is known as 'the Jade Coast', with Royan to the south (a fine modern resort with 13km/8 miles of fine sand beaches) and La Rochelle to the north. The centre of the département of Charente, amid low, rolling hills covered with copses of trees and vineyards, is a little town of only 22,000 inhabitants, whose name is known all over the world. Here, in an area of some 150,000 acres, the only brandy that can be called Cognac is produced. Use of the name is forbidden for brandy made elsewhere or from other than one of the seven officially accepted varieties of grape. The Valois Château located here is the birthplace of Francis I. The ancient port of La Rochelle, from which many pioneers left to explore the new world, is today a popular vacation and sailing port. La Rochelle is becoming more and more popular, thanks in no small part to new budget airline route to the city from London. The rivers of the region offer quiet scenic walks or boating trips. Close by, the offshore islands of Oléron and Ré are both connected to the mainland by bridges.

Auvergne & Limousin

West of the Rhône are the volcanic highlands of the Massif Central, historically known as Auvergne and consisting today of the départements of Haute-Loire, Cantal, Pays-de-Dôme and Allier. The Limousin region to the west comprises Haute-Vienne, Creuse and Corrèze. Architecturally, Auvergne is rich in châteaux and churches (especially in the Allier and Loire gorges) and is noted for its colourful, rich and mysterious nature. The National Park here offers magnificent walking country a land of water, mountains, plains and extinct volcanoes (the Cantal crater may once have been 30km/20 miles wide). There are 10 spa resorts within its boundaries, as well as many lakes, rivers and forests. The high plateaux of Combrailles, Forez and Bourbonnais are very beautiful. Clermont-Ferrand, which is the political and economic nucleus for the whole of the Massif Central, is a lively and sprawling town and the birthplace of the Michelin tyre empire. Much of the town's architecture (especially in the older parts of the Clermont area) is black, because of the local black volcanic rock. There is a 13th-century Gothic cathedral and a



14th-century Romanesque basilica, as well as several museums. The town makes a very good base for exploring the beautiful areas around it. There are plenty of good hôtels, gîtes d'hôtes, and gîtes de France throughout the region. The cuisine is splendid, including cornet de Murat (pastries), pounti, truffades and the St Nectaire cheeses. At nearby Saint-Ours-les-Roches is the European Volcano Centre, Vulcania, a specially designed exhibition and entertainment centre. The 2000-year-old regional capital of Limousin, Limoges, is an important rail and route crossroad, famous for the production of extremely fine porcelain. The nearby city of Aubusson is noted for its tapestries (a local tradition dating back to the 8th century). Both cities are also famous for their enamel.

Languedoc-Roussillon

The combined territories of Languedoc and Roussillon include five départements: Aude, Gard, Hérault, Lozère and Pyrénées-Orientale. The area has been French since the 13th century and the name languedoc comes from langue d'oc, or language in which 'yes' is oc (as opposed to langue d'oïl the language in which 'yes' is oui). This ancient language is still heard throughout the south of France, on both sides of the Rhône. The Mediterranean coast between Perpignan (the ancient capital of the Kings of Mallorca) and Montpellier now has one of the most modern holiday complexes in Europe, including the resorts of La Grande Motte, Port Leucate and Port Bacarès. Montpellier itself is the city that surveys show most French people would like to live in. With its grand civic spaces, cutting-edge architecture and state-of-the-art tram system, the city offers a vision into the future of urban living. Other attractions include some excellent museums, galleries and a string of fine, good value restaurants. More wine is produced in Languedoc-Roussillon than any other place in the world. The vineyards, started in the Roman era and producing red, white and rosé wine, begin in the Narbonne area, run past Béziers (the wine marketing centre for the region) and on to Montpellier. Once an important seaport which imported spices (its name derives from 'the Mount of Spice Merchants'), the city is an important intellectual and university centre with five fine museums, impressive 17th- and 18th-century architecture and a superb summer music festival. There is a great variety of other attractions in this warm southland. The Roman (and some Gallic) ruins are often magnificent; the Maison Carré, Diana's Temple and the Roman Arena in Nîmes, the Rome of the Gauls, are among the finest examples of Greco-Roman architecture to be found today. The 2000-year-old Pont de Gard is one of humanity's greatest architectural accomplishments and certainly merits a special trip. There is the medieval city of Aigues-Mortes which would still be recognisable to St Louis and his crusaders, for it was from here they embarked for the east; and the crenellated walled city of Carcassonne and towers of Uzès are unmissable. On the coast, Sete is Mediterranean France's largest fishing port and boasts an attractive town centre, complete with canals, beaches and bountiful restaurants and cafes. Nearby, Agde is a smaller fishing port whose main attraction is Le Cap d'Agde, with its wide expanse of unspoiled beaches and large nudist colony. The Canal du Midi, ideal for cruise holidays, is a tranquil waterway, largely abandoned by commerce, that connects the Atlantic with the Mediterranean. It runs through the sleepy village of Castelnaudary, famous for its cassoulet, past the citadel of Carcassonne and on through Montpellier.

Rhône, Savoie & Dauphiny

This region includes the French Alps and their foothills, and the vast long valleys of the Rhône and Saône rivers. The départements are Loire, Rhône, Ain, Ardèche, Drôme, Isère, Savoie and Haute-Savoie. Lyon, in the deepest part of the Rhône valley, has a proud gastronomic tradition. More and more city-breakers are flocking to the city on gastronomic trips, exploring the city's myriad of eating and drinking opportunities, opportunities that many locals and visiting foodies argue more than match those of Paris. France's second city, Lyon is a major cultural, artistic, financial and industrial centre, with international festivals and trade fairs. The Cathedral of St



Jean is well worth a visit, as are the Roman remains of the city and the Musée de la Civilisation Gallo-Romaine. The French Alps stretch across Savoie and Dauphiny on the border with Italy. Napoleon came this way after escaping from Elba in 1815. Landing with 100 men near Cannes, he intended to march along the coast to Marseille and up the Rhône Valley to Lyon and Paris, but he received reports that the population on that route was hostile and was forced instead to head inland through the mountains. They reached Gap (150km/93 miles from the coast) in four days, Grenoble a few days after and arrived in Paris (1152km/715 miles) from Cannes) in 20 days with a large and loyal army in tow. It is possible to retrace his route, which passes through much beautiful scenery; each stopping place is clearly marked. The Alps have demanded much of France's engineers and some of the roads and railways are themselves tourist attractions. Notable examples include the 9km (6 mile) steam locomotive run from La Rochette to Poncharra (about 40km/24 miles from Grenoble); and the 32km (19 mile) track (electrified in 1903) from Saint-Georges-de-Commiers to la Mira (near Grenoble), with 133 curves, 18 tunnels and 12 viaducts. As in most mountainous regions of the world, white-water boating (randonnées nautiques) can be enjoyed on many of the Alpine rivers. Hiking is popular and well organised, utilising the GR (grandes randonnées or main trails) maps that show where the official marked trails pass. The rivers racing from the Alpine heights into the Rhône provide a great deal of electrical power and good opportunities for trout fishing. The Fédération des associations agréées de Pêche et de Pisciculture de la Drôme in Valence can lead a fisherman to the right spot (HQ in Valence, but branches in 36 cities). Skiing, however, is the principal sport in the French Alps. The best skiing is found, for the most part, west of Grenoble and south of Lake Geneva. All the resorts are well equipped, and provide warm, comfortable lodgings and good food. Some specialise in skiing all year round, but almost all have summer seasons with facilities such as golf courses, tennis courts, swimming pools and natural lakes. At the lake resort of Annecy, there is an unusual Bell Museum with a very fine restaurant attached; international festivals of gastronomy are held throughout the year.

Midi-Pyrénées

The Midi-Pyrénées area, with its magnificent mountain scenery, lies between Aquitaine to the west and Languedoc-Roussillon to the east. It encompasses part of the Causses, the high plateau country and most of Gascony. Included in it are the départements of Lot, Aveyron, Tarn-et-Garonne, Tarn, Gers, Haut-Garonne, Ariège and Hautes Pyrénées. This is a land of plains dotted with hillocks, sandy stretches, moors and pine woods, desolate plateaux cleft by magical grottos, and little valleys covered with impenetrable forests. The northeastern section is a rough, mountainous land, known as the Rouergue. It is situated on the frontier of Aquitaine, formed by the plateau of the Causse, where game and wild birds feed on the thyme and juniper growing wild in the chalky soil. As a result, these little animals and birds develop a delicious and individual flavour. The principal town, Rodez, is severe and beautiful. The crenelated summit of its red tower, one of the marvels of French Gothic architecture, rises above a confusion of narrow streets and small squares. From here, there are views of the high plateaux beyond the Aveyron, a majestically stark landscape of granite outcrops and steep ravines. The villages and farmhouses, built of local rock, often mimic the rock formations to the extent that they are all but invisible to outsiders. To the southeast is Millau, gateway to the Tarn gorges, and to the south lies Roquefort with its windy caves that store the famous ewe's-milk cheese. These damp cold winds are the secret that has created the 'cheese of kings and the king of cheeses'. Auch was the ancient metropole of the Roman Novem Populena, one of the most important towns in Gaul, long rivalling Burdigala (Bordeaux) in importance. The cathedral has two Jesuit towers, choirstalls carved in solid oak and a 16th-century stained glass window. The people of Auch have erected a statue to le vrai d'Artagnan ('the real d'Artagnan'), the famous Gascon musketeer immortalised by Dumas. Cahors, situated on a peninsula formed by the River Lot, has a famous bridge, Pont Valentré, with its six pointed arches and three defensive towers rising 40m (130ft) above the



river. It is the most magnificent fortified river span that has survived in Europe and was begun in 1308. Legend has it that the construction work was plagued with problems and the bridge still remained unfinished after 50 years. Then one of the architects made a pact with the devil and the bridge was finished without another hitch. A small figure of the devil is still visible on the central tower. A fine, very dark red wine bears the name Cahors. It is made from grapes of the Amina variety brought in from Italy in Roman times. Toulouse, one of the most interesting cities of France, is an agricultural market centre, an important university town, an aero-research centre and one of the great cities of French art (it has seven fine museums). After the Middle Ages, the stone quarries in the region were exhausted so the city was built with a soft red brick which seems to absorb the light. As a result, it is called the Ville Rose and is described as 'pink in the light of dawn, red in broad daylight and mauve by twilight'. There are many beautiful public buildings and private dwellings, like the 16th-century Renaissance Hôtel d'Assezat and one known as the Capitole, now used as a city hall. The finest Romansque church in southern France is here. The first Gothic church west of the Rhône was built in Toulouse, the Church of the Jacobins; and the first Dominican monastery was founded in Toulouse by Saint Dominic himself. Toulouse is a vibrant city with much activity, with its long rue Alsace-Lorraine being its axis. It is here in the early evenings that Toulousians and visitors alike sit for an apéritif at one of the large sidewalk cafes. The region was an important part of the Roman Empire, subjected for 800 years to Arabic influence (the Moors holding substantial parts of Spain just across the Pyrénées) and the cuisine has therefore developed from both Roman and Arabic. Toulouse sausage, a long fat soft sausage whose filling must be chopped by hand, is one of the ingredients of the local cassoulet as well as a very popular dish in its own right. Albi is another red-brick city, smaller but no less interesting than Toulouse, located on the River Tarn. The first extraordinary thing about Albi is its brick church. Albi was the centre of violent religious wars (the Albigensian Heretics resisted the Catholic crusaders for decades). The mammoth red-brick Cathedral of Saint-Cécile, towering above all the other buildings of the town, was built as a fortress to protect the cruel bishop who imposed the church on the populace. Inside is a vast hall, subdivided by exquisite stonework embellished with statues. The nearby 13th-century Palace of the Archbishop (also fortified) is now a museum containing the largest single collection of the works of Toulouse-Lautrec. The town of Lourdes has acted as a magnet for the sick in need of miracle cures, ever since the visions of Bernadette Soubirous in the mid 19th century. Apart from the famous grotto, there is a castle and a museum.

Provence

Spectacular weather is one of the major attractions of Provence, whose départements comprise Hautes Alpes, Alpes de Haute Provence, Var, Vaucluse and Bouches du Rhône. The deep blue skies of summer are seldom clouded, although there is some rain in spring and autumn. The only inhospitable element is the mistral, a wind that sometimes roars down the Rhône Valley, often unrelenting for three or four days. When the Romans arrived in Gaul, they were so delighted with the climate of the Bouches du Rhône that they made it a province rather than a colony, which was more usual. The varied flora that has taken root in this land has given it the hues of pewter, bronze, dark green and vibrant green. The sun has baked the dwellings to shades of ochre and rose while the deep red soil has provided tiles that remain red, defying the searing rays of the Midi sunshine. The towns, their architecture, stones and tiles all blend subtly throughout Provence with the majestic plane trees in the streets and squares. Their long heavy trunks of mottled greys and the graceful vaulting of the heavily leafed branches create a peculiar atmosphere not found anywhere else. These are the principal adornments of most of the cities, market towns and villages, casting a deep blue shade on the inhabitants, the mossy fountains, cafe terraces and games of pétanque. The eras of Greek and Roman domination of Provence have left monuments scattered across the countryside. They include walled hill towns, triumphal arches, theatres, colosseums, arenas, bridges and aqueducts. Christianity brought the Palace of



the Popes in Avignon, many churches and hundreds of roadside shrines or 'oratories' which have given the name oradour to many communities along the Rhône. Near Avignon is Orange with its stunning Roman amphitheatre and Roman ruins. Christian art of the highest quality is scattered throughout the area from Notre-Dame-des-Doms in Avignon to Notre-Dame-du-Bourg in Digne in the centre of the lower alps. The pilgrims throughout the territory built wonderful churches typified by graceful semi-circular arches, round rose windows, statues of Christ surrounded by evangelists, saints, the damned in chains and processions of the faithful. These are carved in stone, so worn by the sun and wind they almost have the quality of flesh. Many of the towns and villages are marked by fortified castles and watchtowers to guard against the coming of the Saracens, the Corsairs of the Rhône and marauding bands. For this was the invasion route, by land from the north and by sea from the south. Tarascon, Beauclair, Villeneuve, Gourdon, Entrevaux, Sisteron and many others had their 'close' and tower situated high above the river or overlooking the sea. Marseille was founded by the Greeks (they called it Massalia) and used as a base for their colonisation of the Rhône Valley. Today, it is France's most important commercial port on the Mediterranean and consequently many people, often who have never been, dismiss it as an ugly port city. This does Marseille no justice at all as it actually offers a mass of things to do, a vibrant cosmopolitan ambience and some top-class culinary experiences. **Marseille is France's most energetic city:** a living, throbbing mass of cultures far more melting pot than salad bowl unlike many of the country's other major cities. The TGV Sud line from Paris, and a regular budget airline route from London have both helped to bring the city the recognition it has long deserved. There are many sites of interest the old port, the hilltop church of Notre-Dame-de-la-Garde, several museums, Le Corbusier's Unité d'Habitation, the Hospice de la Vieille Charité and, of course, the Château d'If, one of the most notorious of France's historic island fortresses. Vast oil refineries and depots dominate the sparsely populated salt flats and marshes to the north and west of the city, but the land is not yet dead. It is the perfect habitat for several species of birds found in only a few other places in Eastern Europe, including bustards and nightjars. On the far side of the Rhône is the wild, marshy area known as the Camargue, long used for the breeding of beef cattle and horses, for the evaporation of sea water to make salt and, more recently, for growing rice. The cattle breeders, or cowboys, are armed with lances instead of lassos. Vast flocks of waterbirds nest here in a national bird reserve, among them pink flamingos and snow-white egrets. When, in 123 BC, Consul Sextias Calvinus established a camp beside some warm springs in the broad lower Rhône Valley, it was named Aquae Sextiae today known as Aix-en-Provence. Other interesting ancient sites are the ruined Roman aqueduct at Pont du Gard and the amphitheatre in Arles. This whole region is also fascinating since it was frequently painted by the great Post-Impressionist painters Cézanne and Van Gogh. The combination of gentle light and breathtaking scenery finds echoes throughout the art galleries of the world. Near Arles is Les Baux, a haunting medieval hilltop village. The many olive trees found throughout Provence provide a popular fruit and one of the important staples of the local cuisine, a fine olive oil used extensively in the cooking of local food. Garlic, though not exclusively associated with Provence, is used more here than in any other part of France. It is sometimes called 'the truffle of Provence'. A third element, the tomato, seems to get into most of the delicious Provençal concoctions as well. The cooking here varies from region to region. In the Camargue a characteristic dish is estouffade de boeuf. Marseille is noted for a dish called pieds et paquets ('feet and packages') which consists of sheep's tripe stuffed with salt pork and cooked overnight in white wine with onions, garlic and parsley. Trie à la Niçoise is similar, but nonetheless unique. Perhaps the most typical dish, and one found in most parts of Provence, is tomates provençales, a heavenly concoction with all the Provençal specialities: olive oil, garlic and parsley baked in and on a tomato. This combination can also be applied to courgettes and aubergines. All of these vegetables, along with sweet peppers, are found in the most famous Provençal vegetable ragoût known, for some long lost reason, as ratatouille, this too being well laced with garlic and, of course, cooked in olive oil. Mayonnaise, also, well mixed with Provençal garlic, becomes aioli, which is served with boiled vegetables and/or fish. Gigot (leg of lamb) is a more common local



speciality. Surviving into the era of nouvelle cuisine and still the pride of the Provençal coast is the famous fish stew called bouillabaisse. Like cassoulet in Languedoc, there are several versions, each claiming to be the 'authentic' one. The ingredients are not vastly different having to do with the amount of saffron or the inclusion or exclusion of certain fish. Few wines are grown in Provence, although some are quite good, especially those originating in the Lubéron. The four districts that have been granted recognition are best known for their rosé wines: Cassis, Bandol, Bellet and la Palette. They are all on the coast, except la Palette, which is near Aix.

Côte d'Azur

The Côte d'Azur, or French Riviera, is in the département of the Alpes-Maritimes. It runs along the coast from the Italian border, through Monaco, and continues to a point just beyond Cannes and reaches more than 50km (30 miles) northward into the steep slopes of the Alps, connecting the balmy coastal region with the ideal ski resorts of the lower Alps. This part of the Mediterranean coast has more visitors each year during July and August than any other part of France, although many of the summer visitors are French. The two most famous French resorts, Cannes and Nice, are to be found here, and the area is one of the most renowned resort spots in the world. Over the centuries, it has attracted a lot more than tourists, with artists like Matisse, Picasso, Chagall and Dufy heading here. There is an abundance of palm trees, blue sea and beautiful beaches; sparkling cities and villages are set against backdrops of high green mountains. The weather is wonderful with long, hot and sunny summers. There is plenty of diversion here, especially in the spring, summer and early autumn months. The coastal resort **towns include:** Cannes, made popular as a resort by Lord Brougham in the 19th century when, because of a plague in Nice, he was forced to stop here; Nice, itself, the largest metropolis on the coast, a thriving commercial city as well as a year-round resort (the annual carnival and battle of roses perhaps date back to 350 BC); Napoule Plage, a small and exclusive resort with several sandy beaches, a marina and a splendid view of the rolling green Maure Mountains; Golfe-Juan, now a popular resort town with many expensive mansions and hotels; Juan-les-Pins, with a neat harbour, beaches and pine forests in the hills which protect the village from the winds in both summer and winter; Antibes and Cap d'Antibes, very popular but expensive resorts; Villefranche-sur-Mer, a deep-water port which has been used by pleasure yachts and navies for centuries; St-Jean-Cap-Ferrat, an exclusive and expensive resort consisting of great private mansions and seaside estates; Beaulieu, much less exclusive, yet a fine resort town; and Menton (near the Principality of Monaco), once a fishing village and citrus-fruit-producing area, now a pleasant vacation resort. Despite their reputations, there is no denying that the beaches at Cannes and Nice are poor, and many savvy travellers choose to base themselves at better spots like Antibes, which offers a combination of historic town centre and accessible, good-quality beaches. The Côte d'Azur is an extraordinary playground with every kind of amusement. There are excellent museums, historic places dating from the pre-Christian era to the present day, hills, mountains, lakes and rivers, gorges and alpine skiing trails. The entire area has a generous supply of good, comfortable hotels as well as luxury châteaux, restaurants with every sort of food, and good bars everywhere. One of the greatest museums in the world, the Maeght Foundation, is located in St-Paul-de-Vence. Picasso, Braque, Matisse and Léger museums also feature and there is plenty of beautiful foothill countryside to explore. Resorts further along the coast from Cannes include St-Tropez, a terribly crowded, hard to reach yet fashionable village (popular with the international jet set and their outrageously expensive yachts) and Port Grimaud. The 'Port', as many residents call it, sums up many of the worst parts of the Riviera with ostentatious wealth not making up for a lack of any local input, a dearth of nightlife beyond 'British' pubs and a largely ex-patriate population. Nearby are St-Raphael, at one time a Roman resort, and now a comfortable middle-class vacation town, and its twin resort of Frejus. Grasse, just north of Cannes, is a charming hilltop town famed for its perfume.



Corsica

The island of Corsica is made up of two French départements: Haute Corse (upper Corsica) and Corse du Sud (south Corsica). The 8720 sq km (3367 sq miles) are inhabited by not many more than 250,000 people. It is one of the very few places left in Europe that is not invaded by campers and trailers during the vacation season and its charm lies in this unspoiled and rugged atmosphere. The name Corsica, or Corse, is a modernisation of Korsai, believed to be a Phoenician word meaning 'covered with forests'. The Phoenician Greeks landed here 560 years before the Christian era to disturb inhabitants who had probably originated in Liguria. From that time on, Corsica has been fought for, or over, creating a bloody history probably unparalleled for such a small area. The Greeks were followed by the Romans, then the Vandals, Byzantines, Moors and Lombards. In 1768, Genoa sold Corsica to France and its 2500 years of disputed ownership ended. In spite of its extensive and colourful history, it is of course best known as the birthplace of Napoléon Bonaparte. The island has been described as 'a mountain in the sea', for when approached by sea that is exactly what it looks like. A strange land, the mountains rise abruptly from the western shore where the coast is indescribably beautiful with a series of capes and isolated beachless bays; along its entire length rock and water meet with savage impact. The coastline, unfolded, is about 992km (620 miles) long. Corsica consists of heaths, forests, granite, snow, sand beaches and orange trees. This combination has produced a strange, fiery, lucidly intellectual and music-loving race of people, both superstitious and pious at the same time. The interior is quite undeveloped, with mountains, and dry scrubby land overgrown with brush called maquis (from the local maccia which means 'brush'). It is a dry wilderness of hardy shrubs arbutus, mastic, thorn, myrtle, juniper, rosemary, rock rose, agave, pistachio, fennel, heather, wild mint and ashphodel, 'the flower of hell'. During the German occupation of France (1940-44), resistance fighters were given the name maquis from the association of the wild country in which they hid, much as the savage backlands of Corsica provided at one time comparatively safe shelter for the island bandits. There is a desolate grandeur about the maquis, while, on the other hand, the rugged beauty of Corsica's magnificent mountain scenery is anything but desolate. A considerable amount of forested area remains although, since discovered by the Greeks, it has been frequently raided for its fine, straight and tall laricio pine that seems to thrive only here. They have been known to grow as high as 60m (200ft), perfect for use as masts and are still used as such. Corsica is also rich in cork oaks, chestnuts and olives. There is a Regional Nature Conservation Park on the island. North of the eastern plain are the lowlands, principally olive groves, known as La Balagne, the hinterland of Calvi and l'Île Rousse. To the south is the dazzling white city of Ajaccio, full of Napoleonic memorabilia. The town runs in a semicircle on the calm bay, set against a backdrop of wooded hills. At the foot of the cape at the northern end of the island is the commercial, but none the less picturesque, town of Bastia, with its historic citadel towering over the headland. The old town has preserved its streets in the form of steps connected by vaulted passages, converging on the Vieux Port. The port itself, with a polyglot population, is busy all year round. A little further north, the terraced St Nicholas Beach, shaded by palm trees and covered with parasols and cafe tables, separates the old port from the new. The new port, just beyond, is the real commercial port of the island. Corsican cuisine is essentially simple, with the sea providing the most dependable source of food, including its famous lobster. Freshwater fish abound in the interior and, as is to be expected, the maquis is game country. The aromatic herbs and berries add a particularly piquant flavour to the meat. Among the game available, sanglier and marcassin young and older wild boar turn up in season either roasted, stewed in a daube of red wine, or with a highly spiced local pibronata sauce. Sheep and goats are plentiful. Pigs, fed on chestnuts, are common at the Corsican table and they make an unusually flavoured ham. The extremes of the Corsican climate limit the variety of vegetables available. The Corsicans like hot and strong flavours that use even more herbs than are used in Provence. They like to shock with hot peppers and strong spices. A fish soup called dziminu, like bouillabaise but much hotter, is made with peppers and pimentos. Inland freshwater



fish is usually grilled and the local eels, called capone, are cut up and grilled on a spit over a charcoal fire. A peppered and smoked ham, called prizzutu, resembles the Italian prosciutto, but with an added chestnut flavour. A favourite between-meal snack is figatelli, a sausage made of dried and spiced pork with liver. Placed between slices of a special bread, these are grilled over a wood fire. Red wine is available in abundance, but white and rosé are also produced on the island.

9 SPORT & ACTIVITIES

Watersports: France has over 3000km (1880 miles) of coastline, ranging from the rugged English Channel and Atlantic coasts in the north and west to the sunny shores of the French Riviera (Côte d'Azur) along the Mediterranean in the south. All types of watersports are available, although the warm climate of the Mediterranean provides obvious advantages, with swimming in the sea possible practically all year round. Diving and snorkelling are popular in Porquerolles and Corsica. The colder English Channel and Atlantic waters are popular with sailing enthusiasts, and Biarritz is renowned for good surfing. The Côte d'Azur offers the possibility of sailing to Corsica.

Canal cruises: France is criss-crossed by some 8500km (5313 miles) of canals and rivers, and houseboats can be rented easily. Popular itineraries include the Lorient-Redon route (along the former route of the Brittany invasions); Marne-Strasbourg (through the vineyards of Champagne to the Alsace-Lorraine canals); the Burgundy Canal (a popular wine route); and Bordeaux-Sète (a 500km/313 mile-journey from the Atlantic to the Mediterranean along the Canal du Midi). Boats can be rented from numerous private operators who can also arrange the necessary permits. Most vessels sleep between two and 12 people. The return journey is usually via the same route; one-way trips are possible but involve extra costs.

Fishing: Good fishing regions include Brittany (salmon and trout), Franche-Comté (which has many lakes), Languedoc-Roussillon (mountain fishing), and Midi-Pyrénées (famous for the fario trout). Trips with local fishermen are possible along the Atlantic coast. Popular catches include crayfish, lobster, scallops and, at low tide, crabs, shrimps and mussels. Deep-sea-fishing trips are widely available on the Côte d'Azur. Permits for river fishing can be obtained from local city halls.

Skiing: The French Alps offer excellent skiing with some of the world's best-known resorts. There are over 480km (300 miles) of ski pistes, over 150 ski lifts, innumerable ski schools and quality resort facilities. All the major resorts offer skiing package holidays. The season runs from early December to the end of April. The height of the season is during February and March, which is reflected in the higher prices. SNCF, in association with the French Association of Resorts and Sports Goods Retailers (AFMASS), organises skiing holidays. Packages are only marketed in France; contact SNCF on arrival.

Hiking: There are thousands of miles of carefully marked trails in France. These are known as Sentiers de Grande Randonnée, and are generally marked on maps as well as being recognisable by a red and white logo marked GR. The hiking routes are complemented by an extensive network of gîtes and mountain refuges providing inexpensive but comfortable accommodation. A Guide des Gîtes de France is available from bookshops.

Cycling: French towns and cities are actively promoting the use of bicycles. There are some 28,000km (17,500 miles) of marked cycling paths throughout the country. Bicycles can be hired from many local tourist offices, and French Railways (SNCF) also offers bicycles for hire at some



30 stations. There is an extensive network of pistes cyclables (cycling paths) along the Atlantic coast, all the way down to the Spanish border.

Horse riding: Although popular and available countrywide, one of France's favourite destinations for horseriding is the Camargue where even inexperienced riders can gallop along sandy beaches and through the characteristic marshland. Horses can be hired from numerous stables.

Golf: There are over 200 golf courses. A number of companies are offering themed golf holidays which combine golfing with other activities as well as sightseeing. Popular destinations include the Loire Valley, Burgundy and the French Alps.

Spectator sports: The most popular are rugby and football, which the French follow passionately. Emotions exploded to fever pitch when France won the football World Cup in 1998. The Tour de France cycling race during summer is one of the world's most prestigious cycling races and a favourite spectator event. The French Open at Roland Garros near Paris is one of the four Grand Slam tennis tournaments and attracts all the world's top players as well as drawing huge crowds. Another notable event on the French sports calendar is the 24-hour motor race at Le Mans. The highlight of the horse racing calendar is the Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe held on the first Sunday in October each year. It takes place in Longchamp close to the Bois de Boulogne.

Traditional sports: Traditional boules (also called pétanque), requiring as much dexterity as social skill, is frequently played in public squares. Visitors wishing to join in may find it easier if they speak French.

Wine tours: Tailor-made tours to France's numerous wine-producing regions and domaines (estates) are widely available. There are 10 principal wine regions, each with its own identity based on grape varieties and terroir (soil). Highlights on the wine calendar include the annual appearance of Beaujolais Nouveau (released fresh from the cellars on the third Thursday of November); the Vendanges (grape harvest) festivals in Burgundy during autumn; and champagne tasting in Champagne (with many producers in Reims and Epernay offering free samples). The wines' origins and quality are guaranteed by strict appellation contrôlée laws. In various regions, the most famous wine routes (routes du vin), as well as special sales and auctions, are signposted. Wine tours are frequently combined with cheese tasting. Like the wines, France's 365 cheeses vary according to region and climate. For further information, see Food & Drink in the Social Profile section. An illustrated map with details of cheeses, wines and regional dishes is available from the French National Tourist Office.

For information and detailed brochures/guides on all the sports and activities listed above, **contact the French National Tourist Office (see Contact Addresses section) or see online (website: www.franceguide.com)**. Further details on regional attractions, cultural sites and major tourist resorts can be found in the Resorts & Excursions section.

Entertainment

Food & Drink: With the exception of China, France has a more varied and developed cuisine than any other country. The simple, delicious cooking for which France is famous is found in the old-fashioned bistro and restaurant. There are two distinct styles of eating in France. One is, of course, 'gastronomy' (haute cuisine), widely known and honoured as a cult with rituals, rules and taboos. It is rarely practised in daily life, partly because of the cost and the time which must be devoted to it. The other is family-style cooking, often just as delicious as its celebrated counterpart. Things to know: Almost all restaurants offer two types of meal: à la carte (extensive



choice for each course and more expensive) and le menu (a set meal at a fixed price with dishes selected from the full à la carte menu). At simple restaurants, the same cutlery will be used for all courses. The bill (l'addition) will not be presented until it is asked for, even if clients sit and talk for half an hour after they have finished eating. Many restaurants close for a month during the summer, and one day a week throughout the rest of the year. It is always wise to check that a restaurant is open, particularly on Sunday. Generally speaking, mealtimes in France are strictly observed. Lunch is served from 1200 to 1330, dinner usually from 2000-2130, but the larger the city, the later the dining hour. National specialities: Ratatouille niçoise (stew of courgettes, tomatoes and aubergines, braised with garlic in olive oil). In the north of France (Nord/Pas de Calais and Picardy), fish and shellfish are the star features in menus oysters, moules (mussels), coques (cockles) and crevettes (shrimps) are extremely popular. In Picardy, duck pâtés and ficelle picarde (ham and mushroom pancake) are popular. Alsace and Lorraine are the lands of choucroute (sauerkraut) and kugelhof (a special cake), quiche lorraine and tarte flambée (onion tart). Spicy and distinctive sauces are the hallmark of Breton food, and shellfish is a speciality of the region, particularly homard à l'armoricaine (lobster with cream sauce). Brittany is also famous for producing some of the finest butter in the world. Lyon, the main city of the Rhône Valley, is the heartland of French cuisine, though the food is often more rich than elaborate. A speciality of this area is quenelles de brochet (pounded pike formed into sausage shapes and usually served with a rich crayfish sauce). Aquitaine cuisine (in the south-west of France) is based on goosefat. A reference to 'Périgord' will indicate a dish containing truffles. In the Pyrénées, especially around Toulouse, visitors will find salmon and cassoulet, a hearty dish with beans and preserved meat. Some of the better known cheeses are camembert, brie, roquefort, reblochon and blue cheeses from Auvergne and Bresse. Desserts include: soufflé grand-marnier; oeufs à la neige (meringues floating on custard); mille feuilles (layers of flaky pastry and custard cream); Paris-Brest (a large puff-pastry with hazelnut cream); ganache (chocolate cream biscuit); and fruit tarts and flans. National drinks: Wine is by far the most popular alcoholic drink in France, and the choice will vary according to region. Cheap wine (vin ordinaire) can either be very palatable or undrinkable, but there is no certain way of establishing which this is likely to be before drinking. Wines are classified into AC (Appellation Contrôlée), VDQS (Vin Délimité de Qualité Supérieure), Vin de Pays and Vin de Table. There are several wine-producing regions in the country; some of the more notable are Bordeaux, Burgundy, Loire, Rhône and Champagne. The popular wine Muscadet comes from the extreme southern point of Brittany. Brittany is also famous for its cider. The waiter will usually be glad to advise an appropriate choice. In expensive restaurants, this will be handled by a sommelier or wine steward. If in doubt, try the house wine; this will usually be less expensive. There is also a huge variety of apéritifs available. Typically French apéritifs are Pastis, Ricard or Pernod. The region of Nord Pas de Calais and Picardy does not produce wine, but brews beer and cider. Alsace is said to brew the best beer in France but fruity white wines, such as Riesling, Straminer and Sylvaner, and fine fruit liqueurs, such as Kirsch and Framboise (raspberry), are also produced in this area. Coffee is always served after the meal, and will always be black, in small cups, unless a café au lait (or café crème) is requested. Brandies such as Armagnac and Cognac and liqueurs such as Chartreuse and Genepi (an unusual liqueur made from an aromatic plant) are available. Many of these liqueurs, such as eau de vie and Calvados (apple brandy) are very strong and should be treated with respect, particularly after a few glasses of wine. A good rule of thumb is to look around and see what the locals are drinking. Spirit measures are usually doubles unless a baby is specifically asked for. Legal drinking age: The legal age for drinking alcohol in a bar/café is 18. Minors are allowed to go into bars if accompanied by an adult but they will not be served alcohol. Hours of opening depend on the proprietor but, generally, bars in major towns and resorts are open throughout the day; some may still be open at 0200. Smaller towns tend to shut earlier. There are also all-night bars and cafes in larger towns. Tipping: A 12 to 15 per cent service charge is normally added to the bill in hotels, restaurants and bars, but it is customary to leave small change with the payment; more if the service has been exceptional. Other services such as washroom



attendants, beauticians, hairdressers and cinema ushers expect tips. Taxi drivers expect 10 to 15 per cent of the meter fare.

Nightlife: In major cities such as Paris, Lyon or Marseille, there are lively nightclubs that sometimes charge no entry fee, although drinks are likely to be more expensive. Alternatively, the entrance price sometimes includes a consumption of one drink. Nightclubs are everywhere and in even the remotest corners of France. Their style and music vary widely from one place to another. Nightclubs have a fixed closing time of 0500. As an alternative to a nightclub, there are many late-night bars and cafes. In Paris and the regions, theatres offer a wide variety of shows from great classics to light comedy, from one-man shows to cabaret. Tourist offices publish an annual and monthly diary of events available free of charge. Several guides are also available which give information about entertainment and sightseeing in the capital. Guides for events in Paris are sold at newspaper kiosks (Pariscope, L'official des Spectacles and Zurban). They list all cinema programmes, museums, exhibitions and all other types of shows. Kiosks on the forecourt of the Montparnasse railway station and at Place de la Madeleine offer same day theatre tickets at reduced rates. Travellers can also buy tickets for concerts from FNAC and Virgin sales outlets or from the venue themselves. In the provinces, the French generally spend the night eating and drinking, although in the more popular tourist areas, there will be discos and dances. All weekend festivals in summer in the rural areas are a good form of evening entertainment. There are over 130 public casinos in the country.

Shopping: Special purchases include lace, crystal glass, cheeses, coffee and, of course, wines, spirits and liqueurs. Arques, the home of Crystal D'Arques, is situated between St Omer and Calais. Lille, the main town of French Flanders, is known for its textiles, particularly fine lace. Most towns have fruit and vegetable markets on Saturday. Hypermarkets, enormous supermarkets which sell everything from foodstuffs and clothes to hi-fi equipment and furniture, are widespread in France. They tend to be situated just outside of town and all have parking facilities. For bargain hunters, bric-a-brac or brocante is found in a number of flea markets (marché aux puces) on the outskirts of town, most notably at the Porte de Clignancourt, in Paris. There are several antique centres (Louvre des Antiquaires, Village Suisse, etc) where genuine antique furniture and other objects are on sale. Amongst the larger department stores in Paris are the Printemps and the Galeries Lafayette near the Opéra; the Bazar Hôtel de Ville (BHV) and the Samaritaine on the Right Bank; and the Bon Marché on the Left Bank. Paris has many varied markets including the flower market on the Ile de la Cité and bird, organic and food markets in every quarter. Another Parisian speciality is book markets. Travellers will find booksellers' stalls along the banks of the Seine around the Saint Michel quarter, crammed with all kinds of books plus comics and postcards. In the regions, the town centre often has a number of clothes shops which are just as good as those in Paris. Some have good second hand shops. Shopping hours: Department stores are open Mon-Sat 0900-1830. Some shops close 1200-1430. Food shops open 0700-1830/1930. Some food shops (particularly bakers) open Sunday mornings, in which case they will probably close Monday. Many shops close all day Monday or Monday afternoon. Hypermarkets are normally open until 2100 or 2200.

Business

GDP: US\$1.7 trillion. Main exports: Machinery, equipment, aircraft, plastics, chemicals, iron, steel and beverages. Main imports: Vehicles, crude oil, aircraft, plastics and chemicals. Main trade partners: Germany, Belgium, Italy, Spain, UK, USA and The Netherlands.

Economy: France has the fourth-largest economy in the world, after the USA, Japan and Germany, and has an annual per capita income of US\$23,000. It has a wide industrial and commercial base, covering everything from agriculture to light and heavy industrial concerns,



advanced technology and a burgeoning service sector. France is also Western Europe's leading agricultural nation with over half of its land area devoted to farming. Wheat is the most important crop; maize, sugar beet and barley are also produced in large quantities. The country is self-sufficient in these (which are produced in sufficient surplus for major exports) and the majority of other common crops. The livestock industry is also expanding rapidly. France is famously one of the world's leading wine producers. Despite the widespread belief in some quarters (not least the UK) that French agriculture is inefficient, the sector has regularly turned in good profit margins and a sound export performance. French companies are prominent in many industries, particularly steel, motor vehicles, aircraft, mechanical and electrical engineering, textiles, chemicals and food processing. In advanced industrial sectors, France has one of the world's largest nuclear power industries, which meets nearly three-quarters of the country's energy requirements (coal mining, once important, is in terminal decline), and is a world leader in computing and telecommunications. The service sector is dominated by tourism, which has long been a major foreign currency earner, although financial services have grown rapidly since the early 1990s. Recent economic policy has been characterised by a gradual relinquishing of state holdings in 'strategic' industries and a steady reduction in government spending. Economic growth was 2.3 per cent in 2003. France suffers from a relatively high unemployment rate of 10 per cent, which is climbing again after several years of decline. France was a founder member of the European Community and has benefited greatly from its participation. It was also a founder member of the European Monetary Union and adopted the Euro upon its inception.

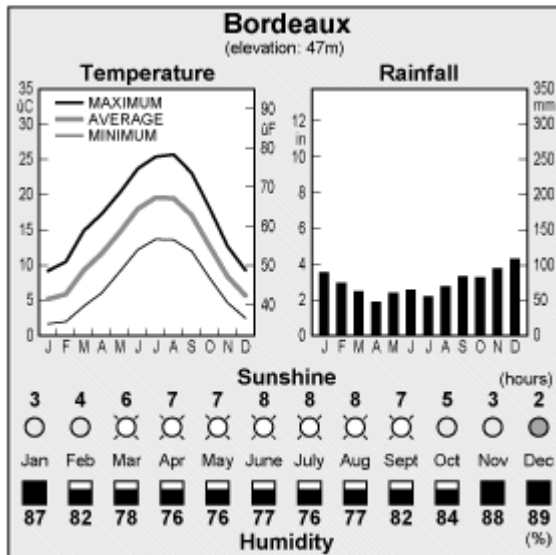
Business Etiquette: Businesspeople should wear conservative clothes. Prior appointments are expected and the use of calling cards is usual. While a knowledge of French is a distinct advantage in business dealings, it is considered impolite to start a conversation in French and then have to revert to English. Business meetings tend to be formal and business decisions are taken only after lengthy discussion, with many facts and figures to back up sales presentations. Business entertaining is usually in restaurants. Avoid the holiday period of mid-July to mid-September for business visits. Office hours: Generally Mon-Fri 0900-1200, 1400-1800.

Conferences/Conventions: Paris is the world's leading conference city, with the total amount of seating available (over 100,000 seats) exceeding that of any rival city. Also in demand are the Riviera towns of Nice and Cannes (the Acropolis Centre in Nice being the largest single venue in Europe); other centres are Lyon, Strasbourg and Marseille. The Business Travel Club (CFTAR) is a government-sponsored association of cities, departments, hotels, convention centres and other organisations interested in providing meeting facilities and incentives; it has over 80 members. Enquiries should be made through the French Government Tourist Office, which has a special department for business travel in several cities; these include London, Frankfurt, Düsseldorf, Milan, Madrid and Chicago.

Commercial Information: Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie de Paris 27 Avenue de Friedland 75382 Paris, Cedex 08, France Tel: (1) 5565 5565. Website: www.cci.fr Centre de Renseignements des Douanes 84 rue d'Hauteville, 75498 Paris, France Tel: (0825) 308 263. Website: www.douane.gouv.fr Assemblée des Chambres Françaises de Commerce et d'Industrie 45 Avenue d'Iéna, 75116 Paris, Cedex 16, France Tel: (1) 4069 3700. Website: www.acfci.cci.fr Maison de la France in the UK, Conference and Incentive Department 178 Piccadilly, London W1J 9AL, UK Tel: (020) 7399 3521. Website: www.franceguide.com



10 CLIMATE



A temperate climate in the north; northeastern areas have a more continental climate with warm summers and colder winters. Rainfall is distributed throughout the year with some snow likely in winter. The Jura Mountains have an alpine climate. Lorraine, sheltered by bordering hills, has a relatively mild climate. Mediterranean climate in the south; mountains are cooler with heavy snow in winter. The Atlantic influences the climate of the western coastal areas from the Loire to the Basque region where the weather is temperate and relatively mild with rainfall throughout the year. Summers can be very hot and sunny. Inland areas are mild and the French slopes of the Pyrénées are renowned for their sunshine record. A Mediterranean climate exists on the Riviera, and in Provence and Roussillon. Weather in the French Alps is variable. Continental weather is present in Auvergne, Burgundy and the Rhône Valley. Very strong winds (such as the Mistral) can occur throughout the entire region.

Required clothing: European, according to season.

11 HISTORY AND GOVERNMENT

History: After the disintegration of the Roman Empire in the fifth century, Gaul was settled by Germanic peoples from the east. After the collapse of the Visigothic Merovingian kingdom, Gaul in the eighth and ninth centuries became the heart of Charlemagne's Frankish empire, which stretched from the Pyrénées to the Baltic. During the following centuries, the area under the control of the French kings gradually increased, although it was not until the reign of Louis VI (1108-37) that royal authority became more than an empty theory in some parts of France, whose rulers were vassals in name only. Among the most powerful of these were the Dukes of Normandy who had, by the mid-12th century, acquired England and western France. In 1328, however, the direct line of the Capetian royal house became extinct: one of the claimants to the throne was Edward III of England. The resulting intermittent conflict, known as the Hundred Years' War, was not resolved until the final English defeat in 1453. The period of French recovery is associated with the reign of the astute Louis XI (1460-83): by the time of his death the area of France was much as it is today. During the late 15th and 16th centuries, France was again



distracted by foreign adventures, including the Italian Wars and several other grandiose pan-European schemes initiated by François I, and internal troubles (the Wars of Religion). This latter conflict was ended by the accession of the gifted Henry IV, a Protestant-turned-Catholic. Henry was assassinated in 1610, but his work of building up the power of the French state was continued under the administrations firstly of Cardinals Richelieu and Mazarin and subsequently the long reign of the 'Sun King', Louis XIV (1643-1715), by which time the country had replaced Spain as the major European power. The 18th century was a period of great colonial expansion, and France again became involved in conflicts with England, this time over their possessions in the New World. The reign of Louis XV (1715-74) was in general a time of great prosperity in France, but the age also witnessed a widening gap between rich and poor. The inequality of the taxation system (in particular the aristocratic and clerical exemption from the *taille* (tax)), the lack of political representation for the increasingly wealthy middle class and the inefficiency and profligacy of central government were but three of the underlying causes of the French Revolution of 1789 which overthrew Louis XVI. One of the great driving issues of the Revolution the equality of the individual before the law proved to be a significant, often decisive source of political contention in Europe for the next century. The Government of the last years of the 18th century was deeply unstable, unpopular and impoverished, and was overthrown in 1799 by a rising army commander named Napoleon Bonaparte. After five years as consul, Napoleon was declared Emperor and embarked on a military campaign to establish a French empire in Europe. Defeat at Trafalgar at the hands of Nelson in 1805 left Britain in command of the sea, but on land Napoléon scored a series of stunning victories over the next seven years, defeating the Prussians, Austrians and Russians. By 1812, the French empire extended beyond France to take in northwest Italy and the Low Countries, while the Confederation of the Rhine, Switzerland, Spain and the Grand Duchy of Warsaw were dependent states. Napoléon's fortunes went into decline after the ill-fated invasion of Russia in April 1812 in which 600,000 men the largest army ever assembled at that time were driven back westwards and destroyed six months later. Napoléon was forced into exile, his armies and empire dismantled by the Austrians and British. He temporarily escaped imprisonment and returned to France, where he was welcomed as a hero. This brief 'Hundred Days' came to an end when Napoléon, his previous military prowess much diminished by time and physical infirmity, was defeated at Waterloo by the Duke of Wellington. With the end of Napoléon, the monarchy was restored and remained until the uprising of 1848 led by radical students and workers. Although the insurrection was crushed within a few months, the monarchy was again overthrown and the Second Republic declared. Four years later, the army intervened and instituted the Second Empire with Louis Napoléon (a nephew of the first Emperor Napoléon) as Emperor, seizing dictatorial power. The Second Empire (1852-70) further expanded France's colonial possessions, while at home the repression was eased during the 1860s. In 1870, the regime obtained a popular mandate by referendum. France now faced a new enemy in the emerging power of Germany. The Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1 ended in defeat for the French and the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine by the Germans. The Third Republic, which was established in France after 1871, maintained an uneasy peace with its new powerful neighbour and sought succour in the Entente Cordiale with Britain. As events proved, the elaborate diplomatic designs of the late-19th and early-20th century in Europe were too fragile to guarantee peaceful co-existence in Europe. The interlocking network of treaties and alliances finally collapsed in August 1914 following the assassination of Grand Duke Ferdinand in Sarajevo. This was the trigger for World War I. Like all the main protagonists, France lost huge numbers of troops to the conflict, as the gap between military technology and tactical thinking led to unprecedented mass slaughter. As one of the eventual victors, France recovered Alsace-Lorraine as a result of the Treaty of Versailles and introduced a new electoral system still under the Third Republic based on proportional representation. The inter-war years saw the election of a series of socialist governments and an increasing preoccupation with Germany and the deteriorating European situation. After the German invasion of Poland in 1939, France which had previously committed itself to an alliance with the Poles declared war on Germany. The Third



Republic collapsed with the German invasion of 1940, after which France endured four years of Nazi occupation. During this period, the country was divided between a northern government under direct German control based in Paris, and the collaborationist Vichy administration, led by World War I leader Marshal Pétain, and based in the southern spa town of the same name. In 1946, two years after liberation from Nazi rule, the Fourth Republic was established, but came to an end in 1958 as a result of the Algerian crisis. Then a French colony, Algeria was wracked by a civil war which caused bitter divisions from top to bottom in French society and ultimately destabilised the government. The Fifth Republic which followed has lasted from 1958 up until the present day. The constitution that underpins it is characterised by the strong executive powers vested in the presidency, typified by the first holder of the office, General de Gaulle, the wartime leader of the anti-Nazi government in exile. The Fifth Republic was itself almost overthrown in 1968 by a radical alliance of students and industrial workers. By way of reaction, conservative presidents and centre-right majorities in the National Assembly governed France throughout the 1970s. But in 1981, the Socialist François Mitterrand won the presidential election, the first time the party's candidate had been victorious. In May 1988, he was re-elected for a second term. Under 'Ton-ton' (Uncle) Mitterrand and his conservative Gaullist successor, Jacques Chirac (see below), the French pursued their customary activist and occasionally maverick foreign policy. Its major commitment is to the European Union, and especially relations with Germany. After some initial uncertainty about the consequences of German reunification in 1991, the Franco-German axis has continued to be the driving force behind the EU's progress towards economic and political harmonisation. France has also been, by and large, a keen proponent of EU expansion. Beyond that, France is still active in almost every other part of the world. This arises from a combination of historical reasons (colonies and a self-image as a nuclear and world power), coupled with a desire to confront a perceived Anglo-American pursuit of global hegemony. French suspicions of the USA are a common feature of the international diplomatic environment. In no case was this more apparent than the 2003 Anglo-American invasion of Iraq, to which the French were the leading opponent. As a permanent member of the UN Security Council, with the power of veto, the French carry decisive influence in that forum and used it to the full. The French position was widely supported by other Security Council members, but has caused a major diplomatic rift with the United States and (to a lesser extent) Britain. The French continue to maintain a significant economic and military presence in some of their former colonies, especially in Africa where there has been a number of military interventions, and substantial influence in many others. The principal economic instrument was the 'Franc Zone' under which many francophone African countries mainly in West Africa linked their currencies to the French Franc. France remains a principal player in events in places as far apart as Rwanda, Algeria and the Pacific island group of New Caledonia. It has also been engaged, in conjunction with other allied forces, in Lebanon, Kuwait (during the Gulf War) and in the Balkans. The intervention in New Caledonia initially a counter-insurgency operation against pro-independence guerrillas later became especially controversial owing to the use of the islands as a base for French nuclear tests in 1995. (The resumption of the tests countermanded an existing moratorium imposed by President Mitterrand and attracted huge public and international criticism. The test programme was ended permanently in January 1996.) The decision to resume testing was one of the first decisions taken by Mitterrand's successor, the centre-right Gaullist Jacques Chirac. Formerly both mayor of Paris and Prime Minister, Chirac had succeeded Mitterrand as president in 1995 after a narrow victory over the Socialist challenger Lionel Jospin. Chirac is now in his ninth year as president after winning the most recent presidential election in 2002, which will keep him in office until 2009. This latter poll was notable for the strong performance of the neo-fascist Front National (FN) leader Jean-Marie le Pen, who came second in the first round of voting (although he lost the second decisively when all other parties, including the left, united to support Chirac). There has always been an extreme right current in post-war French politics, from the Poujadiste movement of the 1950s, through the post-imperial pieds noirs of the 1960s to the present-day FN (formed in 1972) with its focus on crime and immigration shared with other successful



European far-right parties. 2002 also saw the centre-right, operating under the umbrella banner of the Union for a Presidential Majority, regain control of the national Assembly, bringing to an end five years of co-habitation. A new government took office under premier Jean-Pierre Raffarin. Co-habitation the situation where the presidency and the national assembly are in the hands of different parties was virtually unknown in French politics until the Mitterand era. Since then, it has become relatively common: between 1997 and 2002, the national assembly was controlled by Parti Socialiste (PS) under Lionel Jospin. (Jospin later contested the 2002 presidential election for the Socialists, coming a humiliating third behind the national front see above). In 2002, the umbrella grouping Union for a Presidential Majority, secured a majority for the centre-right in the national assembly, bringing co-habitation to an end for the time being. President Chirac, who had thrown his weight firmly behind the proposed European Union constitution, suffered a major setback in May 2005 when voters rejected it in a referendum. he acknowledged that the outcome was to some degree a reflection of voter dissatisfaction with the policies of his government. The vote precipitated profound changes in the government line-up, including the appointment of a new Prime Minister.

Government: The President who has unusually wide executive powers is elected by direct popular vote for a seven-year term. Legislative power is held by a bicameral parliament: the 577-member National Assembly, elected for a five-year term, and the 321-member Senate. Senators are elected for nine years with one third of the seats coming up for re-election every three years.

Travel Advice

Most visits to France are trouble-free but you should be aware of the global risk of indiscriminate international terrorist attacks, which could be against civilian targets, including places frequented by foreigners. This advice is based on information provided by the Foreign & Commonwealth Office in the UK. It is correct at time of publishing. As the situation can change rapidly, visitors **are advised to contact the following organisations for the latest travel advice:** British Foreign and Commonwealth Office Tel: (0845) 850 2829. Website: www.fco.gov.uk US Department of State Website: <http://travel.state.gov/travel>

Top Things To See

As the world's most popular tourist destination, France manages to be all things to all people. Any list of French attractions is, by virtue of the country's rich and eclectic nature, bound to be incomplete. Fall under the romantic charm of Paris famous for its **Eiffel Tower (website: www.tour-eiffel.fr)**, the Notre Dame Cathedral on Ile de la Cité (website: www.cathedraledeparis.com), the Panthéon, the Arc de Triomphe (website: www.monum.fr) leading to Champs Elysées, famous for its cafés, commercial art galleries and sumptuous shops, the Sacré Coeur in the heart of Montmartre and the Louvres Pyramid, the most controversial addition to the Palais du Louvre. For a more modern feel, head for the business quarter of La Défense and enjoy wonderful views from its Grande Arche. Go back in time at the Château de Versailles and enjoy magnificent fireworks in the summer months. Visit one of the numerous Loire valley châteaux (castles) including Blois, Chambord, Chenonceaux, Azay le Rideau and Chinon. Mind the tide when visiting Mont St Michel in Brittany (website: www.mont-saint-michel.net). Enjoy the rugged and unspoilt atmosphere of Corsica, a French island, made up of two French departments, with the picturesque towns of Bastia and Ajaccio, famous for its Napoleonic memorabilia. Discover the recently built Millau bridge, over the Tarn Gorges, designed by British Architect, Norman Foster (website: www.viaducdemillau.com). The 2000-year-old Pont de Gard is one of humanity's greatest architectural accomplishments and merits a special trip. Head south and discover magnificent Roman (and some Gallic) ruins in the Languedoc-Roussillon region; the Maison Carré, Diana's Temple and the Roman Arena in Nîmes,



'the Rome of the Gauls', are among the finest examples of Greco-Roman architecture to be found. See traces of the Greek and Roman domination in Provence where many monuments from that period are still scattered across the countryside. They include walled hill towns, triumphal arches, theatres, colosseums, arenas, bridges and aqueducts. Christianity brought the Palace of the Popes in Avignon, many churches and hundreds of roadside shrines or 'oratories' which have given the name oradour to many communities along the Rhône. Near Avignon is Orange with its stunning Roman amphitheatre and Roman ruins. In Marseille, France's most important commercial port on the Mediterranean, there are many sites of interest the old port, the hilltop church of Notre-Dame-de-la-Garde, several museums, Le Corbusier's Unité d'Habitation, the Hospice de la Vieille Charité and the Château d'If, one of the most notorious of France's historic island fortresses. Visit France's numerous cathedrals, including Rheims, where Clovis, the first French King was baptised, Chartres and Tours.

Tourist Information: Maison de la France (French Government Tourist Office) in the UK178 Piccadilly, London W1J 9AL, UK Tel: (09068) 244 123 (information line; calls cost 60p per minute) or (020) 7399 3520 (travel trade only). Website: www.franceguide.com French Government Tourist Office in the USA 444 Madison Avenue, 16th Floor, New York, NY 10022, USA Tel: (212) 838 7800 or (514) 288 6989 (travel trade only) or 288 1904 (public information service). Website: www.franceguide.com

Top Things To Do

Among Paris' 80 museums and 200 art galleries, visit the Musée d'Orsay, located in a beautifully restored railway station, the Palais du Louvre, the Hôtel des Invalides (containing Napoleon's tomb), the Georges Pompidou Centre of Modern Art, also known as Beaubourg, or Musée Rodin. Relax in the Jardins du Luxembourg in Paris, close to the Latin Quarter (Boulevards St Michel and St Germain), which is the focus of most student activity (the Sorbonne University is here). Discover the future at the City of Science and Technology in la Villette or at Futuroscope in Poitiers. Visit Mickey Mouse at the EuroDisney theme park **in Marne la Vallée (website: www.disneylandparis.com)** Enjoy a wide range of watersports activities at France's 3000km of coastline (ranging from the English Channel, the Atlantic coast in the north and west to the sunny shores of the French Riviera, also known as Côte d'Azur). Famous resorts include: St Enogat and St Jacut on the Emerald coast in Northern Brittany, Etables in the bay of St Brieuc, Perros-Guirec, Trégastel and Trébeurden on the coast from Paimpol, La Grande Motte, Port Leucate and Port Bacarès in Languedoc-Roussillon, Cannes, Nice, St Tropez, Golfe Juan, Juan Les Pins, Antibes and Menton, also famous for its lemon festival, on Côte d'Azur. Enjoy the jetsetting lifestyle of the Côte d'Azur, stroll on the Promenade des Anglais in Nice, famous for its Flower Carnival in January, mingle with celebrities at the Cannes Film Festival held in January-February or visit the perfumeries of Grasse. Sail from/to La Rochelle, a popular sailing port in the Charente Maritime region. Close by, the islands of Oléron and Ré are connected to the mainland by bridges. Enjoy a wide range of winter sports in the French Alps or the Pyrenees. Be pampered at a spa in Biarritz, Contréxeville or Vittel. Go on a pilgrimage to Lourdes, in the south west, famous since the visions of Bernadette Soubirous in the mid 19th century. See a bull fight at the Arènes d'Arles in the south west. Hit the jackpot at the casino of Monaco or the casino of Deauville, also famous for its golf course and race track. Have a go at a traditional game of boules (also called pétanque), played in public squares, especially in the south of France. The game requires as much social skill as manual dexterity and visitors wishing to join in may find it easier if they speak French. Enjoy a wine tour or take part in harvesting the grapes: There are 10 principal wine regions including Alsace, Burgundy, Champagne, Rhône Valley, each with its own identity based on grape varieties and terroir (soil). Highlights on the wine calendar include the annual appearance of Beaujolais Nouveau (released fresh from the cellars on the third Thursday of November); the Vendanges (grape harvest) festivals in Burgundy during autumn;



and champagne tasting in Champagne (with many producers in Rheims and Epernay offering free samples). In various regions, the most famous wine routes (routes du vin), as well as special sales and auctions, are signposted. Wine tours are frequently combined with cheese tasting. In Roquefort, you can visit the windy caves that store the famous ewe's milk cheese. For further information, see Food & Drink in the Social Profile section. An illustrated map with details of cheeses, wines and regional dishes is available from the French National Tourist Office (website: www.franceguide.com). Follow the Tour de France cycling race in the summer (website: www.letour.fr); attend the French Open at Roland Garros near Paris, one of the four Grand Slam tennis tournaments; go to the 24-hour motor race at Le Mans or the Monaco Grand Prix; place your bets on a horse at the Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe, which takes place in Longchamp close to the Bois de Boulogne, held on the first Sunday in October each year. West of the Rhône, discover the colourful and mysterious nature of the volcanic highlands of the Massif Central, historically known as Auvergne. The National Park here offers magnificent walking country a land of lakes, rivers, forests, mountains, plains and extinct volcanoes (the Cantal crater may once have been 30km/20 miles wide). There are 10 spa resorts within its boundaries. On the far side of the Rhône is the wild, marshy area known as the Camargue, long used for the breeding of beef cattle and horses, for the evaporation of sea water to make salt and, more recently, for growing rice. Nature lovers will be delighted to see vast flocks of waterbirds nesting here in a national bird reserve, among them pink flamingos and snow-white egrets.

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OverviewII

It is hard to generalise about France. As Charles de Gaulle, the war time leader of the anti-Nazi government in exile once remarked, 'how could one describe a country which has 365 kinds of cheese?' Yet there is something about this magnificent land which draws millions of francophiles back year after year for a taste of la vie française. Could it be the chic boulevards of Paris, the sparkling ski slopes of the Alps, sunlit vineyards and sun-baked beaches, a dusty game of boules, or coffee and croissants in an undiscovered village? Or perhaps it is a tour of the majestic châteaux of the Loire that appeals, the glamorous jet-set lifestyle of the Mediterranean, or a relaxing picnic in Provence, where the air is fragrant with wild herbs and lavender? Consider also the delights of other lesser-known regions such as Franche-Comté, Gascony or Berry, deep in the green heart of France regions firmly rooted to the land, whose sleepy villages offer visitors a chance to sample the true douceur de vivre of provincial France and the unspoilt and rugged atmosphere of the island of Corsica, described as 'a mountain in the sea'. France's fight for the 'equality of the individual before the law' during its 1789 revolution is still engraved in the French spirit. The revolutionary motto 'Liberty, Equality, Fraternity' is included in the constitution and the French national heritage and the storming of the Bastille on 14 July is still celebrated each year with a mixture of solemn military parade and celebratory dancing and fireworks. Eager to avoid the destruction caused by the two World Wars ever again, France was a founding member of the European Union. It continues to be a driving force behind the EU's progress towards economic and political harmonisation and has been a keen proponent of EU expansion. Beyond that, France is still active in almost every other part of the world. This arises from a combination of historical reasons (its colonies and self-image as a nuclear and world power), coupled with a desire to confront a perceived Anglo-American pursuit of global hegemony.



Communications

Telephone: Full IDD is available. Country code: 33. Card-only telephones are common, with pre-paid cards bought from post offices and tabacs; coin boxes are being phased out throughout the country. International calls are cheaper between Mon-Fri 1900-0800 and all day Sat-Sun. Calls can be received at all phone boxes showing the sign of a blue bell.

Mobile telephone: Roaming agreements exist with most international mobile phone companies. Coverage is excellent. The use of mobile telephones is prohibited at petrol stations.

Internet: Public access is available at Internet cafes in most cities.

Post: Stamps can be purchased at post offices and tabacs. Post normally takes a couple of days to reach its destination within Europe. Post office hours: Mon-Fri 0900-1900, Sat 0900-1200. In smaller towns and villages, post offices may close earlier and for lunch, while in Paris the main office is open 24 hours, but only to send mail in the evenings. The main office is the PTT, 52 Rue du Louvre, Paris.

MEDIA: France enjoys a free press and has more than 100 daily newspapers. Most newspapers are in private hands and are not linked to political parties. State-run Radio France runs services for the domestic audience, French overseas territories and foreign audiences. France's international broadcasters have a significant audience abroad. Radio France Internationale is one of the world's leading international stations and its Arabic-language Radio Monte Carlo Moyen Orient service, available on mediumwave (AM) and FM in many Middle East countries, has a large audience. Press: Daily newspapers include Le Monde, Libération, France-Soir and Le Figaro. The main English-language daily is the International Herald Tribune. Outside the Ile-de-France, however, these newspapers are not as popular as the provincial press. International newspapers and magazines are widely available, particularly in the larger cities. TV: France 2, France 3, France 5 are national, public channels; TF1 and M6 are national, commercial channels; Arte is a cultural channel originally launched by French and German public channels; La Chaîne Info is a rolling news channel; TV5 is an international French-language channel and Canal Plus is a national, subscription channel. International cable and satellite channels are available. Radio: Radio France Internationale (RFI) is an international broadcaster, available via shortwave and numerous FM relays worldwide; Europe 1 is a major commercial, news and entertainment station and RTL is a major commercial station, with a mix of speech and music programmes.