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Destination France

Good, bad or ugly, everyone has an opinion about France and the French: chic, smart, sexy, rude, racist, bureaucratic, or bitchy as hell. Throw the odd urban protest, strike and political scandal into the mix, not to mention a presidential wedding (p47), the funeral of an iconic 20th-century fashion designer (p47) or superstars Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt plumping for a house in Provence to rear their brood, and the international media is agog too.

This is, after all, Europe's fabled land of good food and wine (p69 and p77), of royal châteaux and restored farmhouses, of iconic landmarks known the world over (p98) and hidden landscapes few know. Savour art and sweet romance in the shining capital on the River Seine. See glorious pasts blaze forth at Versailles. Drink till dawn in a banana-ripening warehouse on the Atlantic Coast (p651). Listen to jazz and blues in Paris (p191). Travel south for Roman civilisation and the sparkling blue Med. Ski the Alps. Sense the subtle infusion of language, music and mythology in Brittany brought by Celtic invaders. Smell ignominy on the beaches of Normandy and battlefields of the Somme. And know that this is the tip of that iceberg the French call culture.

Yes, this is a timeless land whose people exude a natural *joie de vivre* and *savoir faire*. Yes, this is the country that entices more travellers into its lovely lair than any other: 82 million visitors in 2007 (4% more than the previous year) ranked it the world's top tourist destination for yet another year.

France's lure in fact, rather like French café society, has never been so strong: vibrant during the days of Jean-Paul Sartre et al who put the world to rights between folkloric clouds of tobacco smoke, since the 1 February 2007 smoking ban, it sparkles like new. Strictly *non fumeur* (nonsmoking) is what this coffee-sipping, Champagne-quaffing, positively seductive society is about these days. Even French wine is slowly becoming in again.

France, moreover, has a new breed of president – personality-driven, American-style – who has hogged the media ever since his arrival at the Élysée Palace in 2007. Not only did Nicolas Sarkozy rewrite the presidential rule book with his divorce and subsequent seduction of an Italian multimillionaire singer during his first few months in office, he also set out a ruthlessly ambitious political agenda for himself, epitomised perhaps by his gargantuan plans for Paris: he wants to develop its surroundings to create a vast metropolitan Greater Paris. Ten of the world's top architects are on the case.

Gargantuan ambition likewise marked the start of France's six-month turn at the presidential helm of the EU in 2008: faced with an economically depressed Europe grappling with soaring fuel prices and living costs, all eyes were on the French president. Sarkozy's goals: to help Europe move forward despite Ireland's rejection of the Lisbon Treaty, broker a European deal on climate change, cut VAT on restaurant bills and oil, and work on immigration which, interestingly, has long been one of the hottest potatoes in his own multicultural country (p55). Unfortunately, his big talk on better defence was belittled in July 2008 when a French soldier accidentally fired a round of live bullets instead of blanks during a military show near Carcassonne, prompting the chief of the country's army to quit in shame and the country to gasp in shock.

Good, bad or physically too short, everyone has an opinion on the sparky Sarkozy. He says the lunch-loving play-hard French, many of whom until recently only worked a 35-hour week (see p50), must change if their country is to move forward economically. Naturally, they don't all agree. *Non fumeur*, yes, but still plenty of sparks ahead.

FAST FACTS

Population:	63.4 million
Area:	551,000 sq km
GDP (end second quarter 2008):	€411.93 billion
GDP per capita (2007):	US\$33,470
GDP growth (2007):	2.1%
Annual inflation (2007):	1.5%
Unemployment (end second quarter 2008):	7.9%
Highest point: Mont Blanc (4807m)	
Internet domain:	fr
Annual alcohol consumption (per person):	wine 78.9L, beer 41L, cider 6.9L, spirits 9.1L

Getting Started

Some parts of France are tried-and-tested, bona fide 'dream destinations' and as such require planning weeks, if not months, in advance in order to snag the best room in the house: be it a castle, a tree house or a golden stone *mas* (farmhouse).

Other areas scarcely score a sentence in newspaper travel sections and as such are perfect for travellers happy to fly by the seat of their pants with no itinerary or advance booking to speak of. Whatever your budget – France allows you to spend a farthing or a fortune – travel is straightforward and generally free of bad surprises.

WHEN TO GO

Revel in French pleasures any time, although many swear spring is best. In the hot south sun-worshippers bake from June to early September (summer) while winter-sports enthusiasts soar down snow-covered mountains mid-December to late March (winter). Festivals (p950) and gastronomic temptations (p82) around which to plan a trip abound year-round.

School holidays – Christmas and New Year, mid-February to mid-March, Easter, July and August – see millions of French families descend on the coasts, mountains and other touristy areas. Traffic-clogged roads, sky-high accommodation prices and sardine-packed beaches and ski slopes are downside factors of these high-season periods. Many shops take their *congé annuel* (annual closure) in August; Sundays and public holidays (p951) are dead everywhere.

The French climate is temperate, although it gets nippy in mountainous areas and in Alsace and Lorraine. The northwest suffers from high humidity, rain and biting westerly winds, while the Mediterranean south enjoys hot summers and mild winters.

HOW MUCH?

Two-course midrange
lunch/dinner menu
€18/30

Munch-on-the-move
baguette sandwich
€3.50-6

Half-/full-day bicycle hire
€10/15

Cinema ticket in the
provinces/Paris
€7.50/9.50

Public transport ticket
€1.50

COSTS & MONEY

Accommodation is the biggest cost: count on minimum €60 a night for a double room in a midrange hotel and €140 plus for a top-end hotel. Backpackers staying in hostels and living on cheese and *baguette* can survive on €60 a day; those opting for midrange hotels, restaurants and museums will spend upwards of €120. For discount cards, see p948.

TRAVELLING RESPONSIBLY

Since our inception in 1973, Lonely Planet has encouraged our readers to tread lightly, travel responsibly and enjoy the magic independent travel affords. International travel is growing at a jaw-dropping rate, and we still firmly believe in the benefits it can bring – but, as always, we encourage you to consider the impact your visit will have on both the global environment and the local economies, cultures and ecosystems.

Shopping at France's bounty of local food markets (every village and town has at least a weekly one), staying at *chambres d'hôtes* (B&Bs) and *fermes auberges* (farms; p940), entertaining the kids with green activities rather than huge theme parks, spurning domestic flights for the train (p975) and trading in four wheels for two (p969) to get around are ways of minimising your impact and travelling sustainably within France.

Green-themed boxes in most chapters provide destination-specific pointers for travelling responsibly and a top-pick listing of green activities is on opposite.

See Climate Charts (p946)
for more information.

TOP 10



GREEN PICKS

Go slow, go green and buzz sustainable with our pick of environmentally sweet travel experiences; see destination chapters for more ideas on taking your foot off the accelerator.

- 1 Try the self-service bike-rental schemes in Paris (p201), Lyon (p516), Marseille (p819), Montpellier (p774), Rouen (p271), Caen (p292), Dijon (p464), Amiens (p259), Toulouse (p746) and Orléans (p422)
- 2 Build a castle using 13th-century technologies at the Chantier Médiéval de Guédelon (p479)
- 3 Behave like a Breton: cycle past otherworldly megaliths (p341), hike on the Island of Terror (p327) or bask on Île de Batz (p323)
- 4 Revel in ravishing gardens: Monet's inspiration in Giverny (p278), subterranean Jardin des Boves in Arras (p250), Menton's Mediterranean paradises (p898), Monaco's Jardin Exotique (p903) and those at Villa Grecque Kérylos in Beaulieu-sur-Mer (p898) and Villa Rothschild in St-Jean Cap-Ferrat (p897)
- 5 Experience France's first organic village (p894)
- 6 Paddle along emerald-green waterways at the Maison Flore in France's 'Green Venice' (p660)
- 7 Follow the footsteps of pilgrims from Le Puy-en-Velay (p602) to St-Jean Pied de Port (p704); or do it by donkey like Robert Louis Stevenson in the Parc National des Cévennes (p786)
- 8 Bliss out in mud at a Biarritz spa (p696)
- 9 Celebrate traditional mountain life during the eco-festival, Les Phonies Bergères (p723)
- 10 Retrace dinosaur steps at the Réserve Géologique (p856) in Digne-les-Bains

A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE

Forget the Louvre or the local *musée des beaux arts* (fine-arts museum). Our alternative art spaces are for culture vultures who can't hack another queue or have 'been there, done that'.

- 1 Cité de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine, Paris – new and esoteric (p152)
- 2 Musée Rodin, Paris – city soul soother amid sculptures by *The Thinker*'s creator (p151)
- 3 Château de Vaux-le-Vicomte, near Paris – less visited due to access and size (p217)
- 4 Maison de l'Outil et de la Pensée Ouvrière, Troyes – tools, tools and more tools, with videos and demos of how they were used (p366)
- 5 Galerie David d'Angers, Angers – sculptures on display in a converted church (p449)
- 6 Musée de l'Objet, Blois – playful modern-art museum (p426)
- 7 Musée d'Art Contemporain, Rochechouart – contemporary art (p614)
- 8 Fondation Alexandra David-Néel, Digne-les-Bains – inspiration of adventurers (p856)
- 9 Musée Bartholdi, Colmar – Lady Liberty, eat your heart out! (p395)
- 10 Musée de l'Impression sur Étoffes and Musée du Papier Peint, Mulhouse – textile printing (p400) and the history of wallpaper (p400)

LIVE DANGEROUSLY

OD on adventure with daredevil France. For more adrenalin-pumping activities, see p943.

- 1 Scale Europe's highest sand dune (p685)
- 2 Sail subterranean waters (p647)
- 3 Drive a Porsche on an ice piste (p566) or fly down the Vallée Blanche off-piste (p532)
- 4 Learn avalanche survival in the Alps (p525)
- 5 Embark on a surf safari (p685)
- 6 Trek Corsica's mythical GR20 (p915)
- 7 Splash out on white-water sports in the Dordogne (p607), Gorges du Verdon (p97) or Parc National des Pyrénées (p721)
- 8 Go volcanic (p591)
- 9 Paraglide the thermals above Puy de Dôme (p592) or hang-glide off Ménez-Hom (p329)
- 10 Kitesurf, mush, skijor or sledge in a snake glist (p530)

DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

- valid travel insurance (p952).
- ID card or passport and visa if required (p958).
- driving licence, car documents and car insurance (p973).
- sunglasses, hat, mosquito repellent and a few clothes pegs for the hot south.
- a brolly for wet 'n' soggy Brittany, neighbouring northern climes and Paris.
- an adventurous appetite, a pleasure-seeking palate and a thirst for good wine (p77).

TRAVEL LITERATURE

See p59 for 'frog v Rosbif' books, p29 for French history titles and p58 for a cultural focus.

- *Yellow Studio* (Stephen Romer) – Thwarted, unrequited French love is the powerful inspiration behind this dramatic collection of poems by one of Britain's best contemporary poets, at home in France since the 1981.
- *This Night's Cruel Work* (Fred Vargas) – Paris, the Pyrenees and a Normandy village are among the places this award-winning French crime writer takes readers to in her latest spellbinding detective novel.
- *The Man who Married a Mountain* – (Rosemary Bailey) By the author of *Life in a Postcard: Escape to the French Pyrenees*, this elegant piece of travel writing scales the Pyrenees with 19th-century mountaineers.
- *Another Long Day on the Piste* (Will Randall) – Refreshingly different from the 'renovate a farmhouse' norm, this one dissects in hilarious detail a season spent in a ski resort in the French Alps.
- *A Motor-Flight Through France* (Edith Wharton) – A timeless classic, this book follows the Whartons as they embark on a trio of pioneering automobile trips in belle-époque France.

INTERNET RESOURCES

French Government Tourist Office (www.francetourism.com) Official tourist site.

Lonely Planet (www.lonelyplanet.com)

Maison de la France (www.franceguide.com) Main tourist-office website.

Météo France (www.meteo.fr, in French) For details of nationwide weather conditions.

Motorist Information (www.bison-fute.equipement.gouv.fr, in French) Road conditions, closures and school-holiday schedule.

SNCF (www.sncf.com) France's national railways website.

Itineraries

CLASSIC ROUTES

A WHIRLWIND ROMANCE

France's soulful **capital** (p108) seduces: the **Eiffel Tower** (p152) is the peak of romance. Pop the question Gothic-style in **Hôtel St-Merry** (p168). Nip north to chink glasses on **Champagne's wine route** (p360), or west to the **Loire Valley** (p416) and its châteaux: see love blossoming at **Villandry** (p440); a drama of passion and betrayal unfold at **Chenonceau** (p436); or meet your lover on the double-helix staircase at **Château de Chambord** (p429). Don't miss Brittany's haunting **Île d'Ouessant** (p327). Oysters, for which **Cancale** (p316) is famed, are an aphrodisiac. Tempting to lonely hearts and lovers is **Belle Île** (p344), with its caves and beaches steeped in legend. Shouting 'yes' from a huge **sand dune** (p685) or in the **surf** (p685) on the Atlantic Coast is not a bad idea. Or smooching atop **Mont Aigoual** (p785) or paragliding above **Puy de Dôme** (p592). **Provence** (p803) and the **Côte d'Azur** (p859) are love at first sight. Tying the knot aboard a **St-Tropez** (p887) yacht or in a lavender field is old hat. Try in a **Matisse chapel** (p867) or **Van Gogh landscape** (p829); or between **kitesurfs** (p892).

One Week / Paris to Provence

Paris to Provence – 2000km-odd in all – in a whirlwind week is a love affair with old-fashioned romance. But it's not all red roses and fairy-tale castles. Thrills abound for those with a passion for the unconventional.



TIMELESS CLASSICS

Two Weeks / Paris to Nice

There's no better place to kick off a whistle-stop tour of classic French sights than Paris, where the **Eiffel Tower** (p152), the **Arc de Triomphe** (p154), **Notre Dame** (p145) and the **Louvre** (p139) all warrant a postcard home. Stroll the banks of the Seine and the gardens of **Versailles** (p211), then flee the capital for Renaissance royalty at **Châteaux de Chambord** (p429) and **Chenonceau** (p436). Or skip the Loire and spend a couple of days in Normandy marvelling at Rouen's **Cathédrale Notre Dame** (p268), the **Bayeux Tapestry** (p279), **Mont St-Michel** (p302) and the **D-Day landing beaches** (p283).

Venture south through the **Bordeaux wine region** (p669). Surfers can ride waves in **Biarritz** (p694), and the faithful or faithfully curious will like world-famous **Lourdes** (p715). Otherwise, it's straight to **Carcassonne** (p777) and its city walls; Roman **Nîmes** (p760), with a trip to the **Pont du Gard** (p766); and the papal city of **Avignon** (p836), with its **nursery-rhyme bridge** (p837). Finish on the Côte d'Azur, not missing Grace Kelly's **Monaco** (p900), a flutter in **Monte Carlo Casino** (p905), a portside aperitif in **St-Tropez** (p887), a strut in **Cannes** (p877) and a stroll in **Nice** (p861).

Paris to Nice, with a few short detours along the way, is a breathtaking 2000km that can be done in a jam-packed fortnight, but definitely merits as much time as you can give it.



PORT TO PORT

Two Weeks / Calais to Marseille

Step off the boat in **Calais** (p235) and there's 40km of stunning cliffs, sand dunes and windy beaches – not to mention great views of those white cliffs of Dover across the Channel – on the spectacular **Côte d'Opale** (p243). Speed southwest, taking in a fish lunch in **Dieppe** (p271), a cathedral-stop in **Rouen** (p266) or a picturesque cliffside picnic in **Étretat** (p275) on your way to your overnight stop: the pretty Normandy seaside resort of **Honfleur** (p295), **Deauville** (p292) or **Trouville** (p292).

Devote day two to the **D-Day landing beaches** (p283) and abbey-clad **Mont St-Michel** (p302). In Brittany, flop in an old-fashioned beach tent in **Dinard** (p314) then follow fairy-tale forest trails around **Huelgoat** (p325) to art-rich **Camaret-sur-Mer** (p330).

A long drive south along the Atlantic Coast rewards with chic **La Rochelle** (p661) and its lavish seafood and oyster feasts, from where it is simply a matter of winning your way through the **Médoc** (p678) to bustling **Bordeaux** (p669). Next morning, continue south through **Toulouse** (p735) and **Carcassonne** (p777) to the Med. **The Camargue** (p833) – a wonderful wetland of flamingos, horses and incredible bird life – is a unique patch of coast to explore before hitting gritty **Marseille** (p805), immediately east.

The Atlantic to the Mediterranean in two weeks – 2500km in all – rewards with stunning vistas, superb coastal motoring and sensational seafood. Activities abound in, on and out of the sea – and there's always Corsica for the truly coast crazy.



TOUR DE FRANCE

Two Weeks / Strasbourg to Paris

Get set for your race around the country in Strasbourg: stroll canal-clad **Petite France** (p375), marvel at its **cathedral** (p375) and dine in a **winstub** (p383). Moving on to greener climes, pick up the **Route du Vin d'Alsace** (p387) and tipple your way around the **Vosges** (p398) foothills. But keep a clear head for that splendid art-nouveau architecture in **Nancy** (p402), where you should spend at least one night to enjoy romantic **place Stanislas** (p402) illuminated. From Lorraine it is straight to Champagne cellars around **Épernay** (p361), then north to the sobering **Battle of the Somme memorials** (p252) in far northern France.

Then it's the pick of Normandy and Brittany: no time to see everything so choose between **Bayeux** (p279) and its **tapestry** (p279), the **D-Day landing beaches** and **WWII memorials** (p283), **Mont St-Michel** (p302), or mooching megaliths in **Carnac** (p340) in France's Celtic **land of legends** (p306). Then zoom south for more prehistory in the **Vézère Valley** (p630).

The pace hots up in the second week: from the **Dordogne** (p621), wiggle through the **Upper Languedoc** (p782) – through the spectacular **Gorges du Tarn** (p787) – to **Avignon** (p836). Take a break with local café culture then slog like a Tour de France cyclist up **Mont Ventoux** (p848). Speed north next to the majestic city of **Lyon** (p497), from where an **Alpine mountain adventure** (p530) is doable.

The last leg takes in wine-rich Burgundy: **Beaune** (p468), **Dijon** (p457) and **Vézelay** (p485) are the obvious desirable places to stop en route to **Paris** (p108).

This 3000km Tour of France can be done in a fortnight, but warrants mountains more time. As with the world's greatest cycling race, it labours through the Pyrenees and the Alps, and finishes on Paris' Champs-Élysées.



ROADS LESS TRAVELLED

OUTDOOR ACTION

Two Weeks / Chamonix to Cauterets

Kick-start your Alpine adventure in **Chamonix** (p527) at the foot of Europe's highest peak: ride a cable car to the **Aiguille du Midi** (p530) and **Le Brévent** (p531) or a train to the **Mer de Glace** (p531). Skiing the legendary **Vallée Blanche** (p532) and **paragliding** (p534) are daredevil choices. For the truly Alpine-dedicated there are the **Vanoise** (p555) and **Écrins** (p563) national parks to explore.

Hopping across Lake Geneva by boat, the unexplored **Jura** (p570) looms large. This gentle land of cross-country skiing, dog-mushing and cheese dining in **Métabief Mont d'Or** (p578) – not to mention Le Corbusier's **Ronchamp** (p577) chapel – is an oasis of peace.

Or head southwest for week two, breaking the journey in the **Parc Naturel Régional de Chartreuse** (p550), of potent pea-green liqueur fame, or in the cave-riddled **Parc Naturel Régional du Vercors** (p563). Passing through the wild **Cévennes** (p784), walking a stage of Robert Louis Stevenson's **donkey trek** (p786) is doable before hitting the Pyrenees.

In the **Parc National des Pyrénées** (p720), revitalise weary bones with spa waters in **Bagnères de Luchon** (p731) then hit the **Vallée d'Ossau** (p725) and **Vallée d'Aspe** (p721) for a heady cocktail of mountain biking, walking and vulture-spotting. Use **Cauterets** (p727) – from where you can ski in season – as your base.



This highly energetic 1500km tour from the French Alps to the Pyrenees will leave you breathless, especially if you take a few days out to indulge in an adrenaline rush of outdoor activity up, down or on the mountain slopes.

SOMETHING DIFFERENT

One Month / Parisian Sewer to Burgundian Building Site

Forget the Eiffel Tower, St-Tropez and the lavender fields of Provence. This tour ventures out of the ordinary into France's quirkiest sights and sounds – and smells, in the case of the **Paris sewer** (p153) where it starts. Gasp at more skulls than you can imagine in the capital's **catacombs** (p151), then venture north to the spot near **Compiègne** (p260), where WWI officially ended. Top off your day with a subterranean dose of V2 rocket technology in a **bunker** (p241) near St-Omer.

A few drops of Christ's blood in **Fécamp** (p274) on the Normandy coast inspired monks to concoct Benedictine liqueur: visit the **Palais Bénédictine** (p274) and get a free shot – then tell yourself you're not drunk as you tour the 'laboratory of emotions' in Honfleur's wacky **Les Maisons Satie** (p297).

Steering south along the Atlantic Coast, cartwheel down Europe's highest sand dune near **Arcachon** (p685). Afterwards, head east to Quercy and set sail on an underground river in **Gouffre de Padirac** (p647), then nip to Toulouse to tour **Space City** (p740) and see **Airbus planes** (p740) being built.

Learning how silk weavers toiled in the 19th century and walking the tunnels they trod put **Lyon** (p503) in a different light. Returning north, see brickies in costume at the **Chantier Médiéval de Guédelon** (p479) in La Puisaye build a castle using 13th-century tools.

It might well follow a predictable route – enabling it to be mixed-and-matched with other itineraries in this chapter – but that's about it. Covering 2400km in all, one month scarcely does quirky France justice. Take longer if you can.



TAILORED TRIPS

QUICK GETAWAY

Budget airlines (p961) make short breaks easy. For urban souls, sophisticated cities like **Paris** (p108) and **Lyon** (p497) win hands down. Big but not everyone's cup of tea is rough-cut **Marseille** (p805), a heady mix of sea breeze and city grit. Elsewhere along the Med, **Nice** (p861) beckons hard-core punters after sun, sand and sex; **Toulon** (p892) is a slick flit to **St-Tropez** (p887); **Nîmes** (p760) – the stepping-stone alongside student-driven **Montpellier** (p769) to a **Camargue safari** (p833) – combines Roman relics in town with the **Pont du Gard** (p766) out of town; while the **Pyrenees** (p708) tumble into the sea near Spanish-styled **Perpignan** (p794). **Toulouse** (p735), itself a two- or four-day itinerary, is the other Pyrenees launch pad. Fairy-tale castle-clad **Carcassonne** (p777) or the **Loire châteaux** (p431) around **Tours** (p431) vie with the capital for hottest romantic getaway.

In the Alps, **Chamonix' Clubhouse** (p535) – the ultimate in stylish dirty weekends – is a two-hour drive from **Chambéry** (p546) and **Grenoble** (p556), three hours from **Lyon** (p497) and an hour from Geneva (Switzerland). All these cities are first-class stops for **skiing** (p532) and other winter sports.

For an old-fashioned seaside paddle, **Biarritz** (p694), **Dinard** (p314) or **Brest** (p326) are best. **La Rochelle** (p661) is a bridge away from **Île de Ré** (p666); **Poitiers** (p658) neighbours **Green Venice** (p660); **Limoges** (p609) is the place to stockpile crockery; while **Nantes** (p651) and **Bordeaux** (p669) are innovative French cities that surprise and enthrall.

ARTISTS' PALETTE

Provence (p803) and the **Côte d'Azur** (p859) are an art paradise: Matisse lapped up the Mediterranean sunlight and vivacity in **Nice** (p867), designing an exceptional chapel in **Vence** (p877). Picasso set up a studio in **Antibes** (p875); Signac and Seurat found inspiration in **St-Tropez** (p887); while Cézanne spent his career in **Aix-en-Provence** (p819). Westward, Van Gogh painted some of his most famous canvases in **Arles** (p826) and **St-Rémy de Provence** (p830).

The Fauvist-favoured port of **Collioure** (p801) on the Côte Vermeille in Roussillon is an essential stop on any art lover's itinerary; as is Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec's hometown of **Albi** (p746), near Toulouse. Artworks of Moulin Rouge cancan girls and prostitutes the bohemian artist painted in Paris hang in the town's **Musée Toulouse-Lautrec** (p748).

A day trip to Monet's garden-clad home and studio in **Giverny** (p277) is irresistible; it is in Paris' **Musée d'Orsay** (p151), incidentally, that Monet's famous painting of **Rouen cathedral** (p268) hangs. Renoir hung out with his impressionist buddies in and around **Le Havre** (p275) on the serene Normandy coast, and is buried in **Essoyes** (p370) in Champagne.



KID TRAVEL

There is no shortage of things to do *en famille*: in **Paris** (p162), kid-friendly capital extraordinaire, scale the **Eiffel Tower** (p152), sail the **Seine** (p201), romp round the **Jardin du Luxembourg** (great playground; p150), meet **Mona Lisa** (kids must see her once; p139), discover wildlife in the **Musée National d'Histoire Naturelle** (p147), explore the **Palais de la Découverte** (p154), and watch horses dance in **Versailles** (p211) or **Chantilly** (p217). Prioritise the **Cité des Sciences et de l'Industrie** (p158) if you want your children to remember (and love) Paris forever.

Elsewhere, the **Loire Valley's** fairy-tale châteaux (p416) are the stuff of little kids' dreams, as is a visit to Saumur's **Cadre Noir** riding school (p446) and a perfume-creation workshop in **Grasse** (p884). For the vehicle-mad, there's Douarnenez' seafaring **Musée du Bateau** (p333), Clermont-Ferrand's **Vulcania** (p592), car museums in **Lyon** (p505), **Monaco** (razz around the F1 Grand Prix track in a Ferrari; p900) and **Mulhouse** (p399), which also sports the **Cité du Train** (p399). Your kid wants to be an astronaut? Build and launch a shuttle at Toulouse's interactive **Cité de l'Espace** (p736).

The coastlines drum up bags of old-fashioned fun: Cruise Porto's crystalline caves on **Corsica** (p921), meet sharks in Monaco's **Musée Océanographique** (p903), pedal (or be pedalled) and snorkel on car-free **Île de Porquerolles** (p890), party at the **Nice Carnival** (p869), see how oysters grow at an oyster farm in **Brittany** (p316) and ride a mechanical elephant Jules Verne-style on **Île de Nantes** (p654).

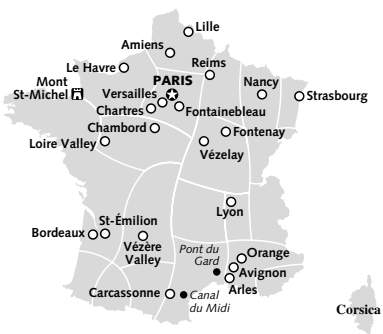
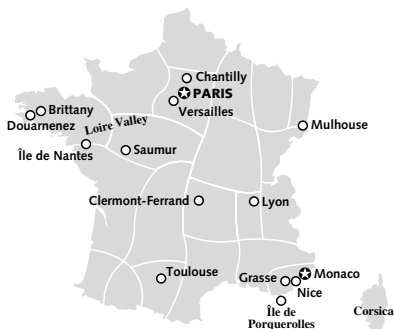
TREASURE TROVE

France flaunts 32 World Heritage Sites (<http://whc.unesco.org>), including the banks of the Seine in **Paris** (p163) and royal palaces at **Versailles** (p211), **Fontainebleau** (p214) and **Chambord** (p429). The cathedral in **Chartres** (p220) makes a fine foray from the capital, as does the Unesco-hallmarked chunk of the **Loire Valley** (p416) between Sully-sur-Loire and Chalonnnes.

Burgundy boasts a medieval Cistercian abbey in **Fontenay** (p472) and Romanesque basilica in fortified **Vézelay** (p485), from where pilgrims head to Santiago de Compostela in Spain. Their paths are World Heritage Sites.

Northern jewels include Strasbourg's **Grande île** (p375); a trio of public squares in **Nancy** (p402) and buildings in **Reims** (p355); **Le Havre** (p275), bombed in WWII and now an ode to postwar architecture; **Amiens cathedral** (p256); and the hulk of a **citadel in Lille** (p230), one of 13 Vauban citadels (p65) to join Unesco's list in 2008. Sea-splashed **Mont St-Michel** (p302) and its bay are priceless.

Southbound, stroll the port city of **Bordeaux** (p669), drink Bordeaux reds from listed **St-Émilion vineyards** (p679) and discover prehistory in the **Vézère Valley** (p630). History oozes out of fortified **Carcassonne** (p777); Roman **Pont du Gard** (p766), **Arles** (p826) and **Orange** (p844); papal **Avignon** (p839); and silk-weaving **Lyon** (p497). Sailing a slow boat along the **Canal du Midi** (p776) is a fine way to whittle away time, as is hiking around **Corsica's** peaks (p915).



The Authors



NICOLA WILLIAMS

A British writer living on the southern (French) side of Lake Geneva in a house with lake and Jura mountain views, Nicola is well and truly spoiled...so much so that she only eats in places that cook up real-McCoy lake fish (most comes from Eastern Europe) and, if the sky is not blue, she refuses to ski. A journalist by trade, she worked in the Baltic region as a newspaper features editor and later as an In Your Pocket city-guide editor for several years before trading in Lithuanian *cepelinai* for Lyonnais *andouillette* in 1997. She has authored numerous titles for Lonely Planet, including first editions of *The Loire*, *Provence & the Côte d'Azur* and *Languedoc-Roussillon*.



OLIVER BERRY

Oliver has been travelling to France since the tender age of two, and over the last decade his writing has carried him from the rural corners of the Lot Valley to the snowy hump of Mont Blanc and the chestnut forests of Corsica. Having worked on several previous editions of the *France* guide, for this edition he plumbed the depths of prehistoric caves in the Vézère Valley, wandered the hallways of obscure Loire châteaux, clambered to the top of dormant volcanoes in the Massif Central and conquered the old mule track in the spectacular Gorges de Spelunca. When he's not out on the road, Oliver lives and works in Cornwall as a writer and photographer.



STEVE FALLON

Steve, who has worked on every edition of France except the first, visited the City of Light for the first time at age 16 with his half-French best friend, where they spent a week drinking vin ordinaire from plastic bottles, keeping several paces ahead of irate café waiters demanding to be paid, and learning French swear words that shocked even them. Despite this inexcusable behaviour, the PAF (border police) let him back in five years later to complete a degree in French at the Sorbonne. Now based in East London, Steve will be just one Underground stop away from Paris when Eurostar trains begin departing from Stratford in 2010. *C'est si bon...*

LONELY PLANET AUTHORS

Why is our travel information the best in the world? It's simple: our authors are passionate, dedicated travellers. They don't take freebies in exchange for positive coverage so you can be sure the advice you're given is impartial. They travel widely to all the popular spots, and off the beaten track. They don't research using just the internet or phone. They discover new places not included in any other guidebook. They personally visit thousands of hotels, restaurants, palaces, trails, galleries, temples and more. They speak with dozens of locals every day to make sure you get the kind of insider knowledge only a local could tell you. They take pride in getting all the details right, and in telling it how it is. Think you can do it? Find out how at lonelyplanet.com.



EMILIE FILOU

Emilie was born in Paris but spent most of her childhood holidays roaming the south of France and the Alps. Bigger summits beckoned when she turned 18 and spent a year in Nepal before going to university. She read geography at Oxford, where she had to endure colouring-in jokes for three years but managed to bag a field trip to Niger for her dissertation on nomadic tribes. More travel in French-speaking Africa, southeast Asia, Australia and New Zealand ensued. She now works as a business and travel journalist in London.



CATHERINE LE NEVEZ

Catherine's wanderlust kicked in when she lived in and road-tripped throughout France aged four and she's been road-tripping here at every opportunity since, completing her Doctorate of Creative Arts in Writing, Masters in Professional Writing, and postgrad qualifications in Editing and Publishing along the way.

Catherine's writing on France includes the previous editions of this book as well as Lonely Planet's *Paris Encounter* and *Provence & the Côte d'Azur* guidebooks, newspaper and radio reportage covering Paris' literary scene, and several hundred Lonely Planet online accommodation reviews nationwide. When not scouting out hidden corners of France, Catherine has followed Lonely Planet travel writing assignments to neighbouring Italy, Germany, Belgium and (across the pond) Ireland, among others.



DANIEL ROBINSON

Over the past two decades, Daniel's articles and guidebooks – published in nine languages – have covered every region of France, but he has a particular fondness for those bits of the Hexagon in which Celtic, Romance and Germanic cultures have mingled for over two millennia. Seeking out enchanting corners of rust-belt France is a long-time hobby, and he takes particular interest in the creativity and panache – and foresighted public-transport initiatives – of dynamic northern cities such as Lille, Nancy and Strasbourg.

Daniel grew up in the United States and Israel and holds degrees from Princeton University and Tel Aviv University. He is based in Tel Aviv and Los Angeles.



MILES RODDIS

Miles studied French at university and spent an idyllic sandwich year in Neuville-sur-Saône, a place quite rightly overlooked by the best guidebooks, including the one in your hand. Living over the Pyrenees in Valencia, Spain, he and his wife, Ingrid, cross the mountains to France for work or fun at least once a year. He has travelled the length of Languedoc, and usually Roussillon too, on seven occasions for Lonely Planet guidebooks, each time returning home several kilos and a case of fine red wine heavier.

Miles has written or contributed to more than 30 Lonely Planet titles including *France*, *Brittany & Normandy* and – most satisfyingly of all – *Walking in France*.

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