



# France

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## Best Places to Eat »

- » Pink Flamingo, Paris (p416)
- » La Crêmerie du Glacier, Chamonix (p449)
- » La Cave à Champagne, Épernay (p436)
- » La Tupina, Bordeaux (p452)

## Best Places to Stay

- » St Christopher's Inn, Paris (p410)
- » Family Home, Bayeux (p427)
- » Ecolodge des Chartrons, Bordeaux (p451)
- » Villa St-Exupéry, Nice (p465)

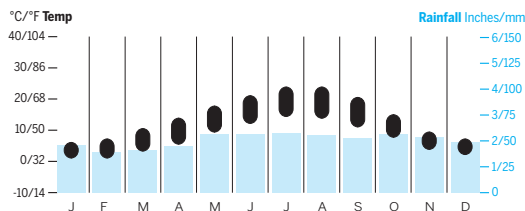
## Why Go?

Few countries provoke such passion as La Belle France. Love it or loathe it, everyone has their own opinion about this Gallic goliath. Snooty, sexy, superior, chic, fascinating, infuriating, arrogant, officious and inspired in equal measures, the French have long lived according to their own idiosyncratic rules, and if the rest of the world doesn't always see eye to eye with them, well, *tant pis* (too bad) – that's the price you pay for being a culinary trendsetter, artistic pioneer and cultural icon.

If ever there was a country of contradictions, this is it: France is a deeply traditional place: castles, châteaux and ancient churches litter the landscape while centuries-old principles of rich food, fine wine and *joie de vivre* underpin everyday life. Yet it is also a country that has one of Europe's most multicultural make-ups, not to mention a well-deserved reputation for artistic experimentation and architectural invention. Enjoy.

## When to Go

### Paris



**Dec–Mar** Don your helmet, grab skis or board and hit the Alps for some serious ski action.

**Apr–Jun** France at its springtime best; the Fête de la Musique (21 June) means free concerts.

**Sep** Cooling temperatures, abundant local produce and the *vendange* (grape harvest).

## Connections

High-speed trains link Paris' Gare du Nord with London St Pancras (with Eurostar) in just over two hours; Gare du Nord is also the point of departure for speedy trains to Brussels, Amsterdam and Cologne. Many more trains make travelling between the French capital and pretty much any city in every neighbouring country a real pleasure. Ferry links from Cherbourg, St-Malo, Calais and other north-coast ports travel to England and Ireland; and ferries from Marseille and Nice provide regular links with seaside towns in Corsica, Italy and North Africa.

Regular bus and rail links cross the French-Spanish border via the Pyrenees, and the French-Italian border via the Alps and the southern Mediterranean coast. For more see p481.

## ITINERARIES

### One Week

Start with a few days exploring Paris, taking in the Louvre, Eiffel Tower, Musée d'Orsay, Notre Dame, Montmartre and a boat trip along the Seine. Then head out to Versailles or Monet's garden at Giverny; or throw yourself into the Renaissance high life at châteaux in the Loire Valley.

### Two Weeks

For the second week explore one or two regions rather than trying to do too much in a whistlestop dash. High-speed TGV trains zip from Paris to practically every province: for prehistoric interest go to the Dordogne; for architectural splendour, you can't top the Loire Valley; for typical French atmosphere, try the hilltop villages of Provence; and for sunshine and seafood, the French Riviera on the sparkling Med is the only place to be.

## Essential Food & Drink

» **Fondue & Raclette** Cockle-warming, cheese dishes in the snowy French Alps.

» **Oysters & White Wine** Everywhere on the Atlantic Coast, although we love culinary Cancale and Saturday morning at Bordeaux market.

» **Bouillabaisse** Marseille's signature two-part fish stew – saffron-scented broth with croutons and *rouille* (garlic chilli-filled mayonnaise) as starter, fish as main.

» **Niçois tapas** Only in Riviera queen Nice and best consumed with drink in hand.

» **Piggy-part cuisine** Big fat *andouillette* (pig-intestine sausage), Côtes du Rhône red, lace-curtained *bouchon* (traditional Lyonnais bistro): the gastronomic capital Lyon.

» **Champagne** Pedalling between vines and tasting in century-old cellars is an essential part of Champagne's bubbly experience.

## AT A GLANCE

- » **Currency** euro
- » **Language** French
- » **Money** ATMs are everywhere
- » **Visas** Schengen rules apply; see p1319

## Fast Facts

- » **Area** 551,000 sq km
- » **Capital** Paris
- » **Country code** ☎33
- » **Emergency** ☎112

## Exchange Rates

Australia	A\$1	€0.74
Canada	C\$1	€0.74
Japan	¥100	€0.87
New Zealand	NZ\$1	€0.56
UK	UK£1	€1.16
USA	US\$1	€0.72

## Set Your Budget

- » **Budget hotel room** up to €70
- » **Two-course evening meal** €15 to €50
- » **Museum entrance** €4 to €8
- » **Glass of wine** €2 to €5
- » **Paris metro ticket** €1.60

## Resources

- » **Paris by Mouth** (<http://parisbymouth.com>) Capital dining and drinking.
- » **France 24** ([www.france24.com/en/france](http://www.france24.com/en/france)) French news in English.
- » **France.fr** ([www.france.fr](http://www.france.fr)) Official country website.