



# France

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## Best Places to Eat

- » Frenchie (p355)
- » Nanashi (p356)
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- » Le Bistrot d'Antoine (p409)
- » Le Cheverus Café (p394)

## Best Places to Stay

- » Hôtel Eldorado (p354)
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- » Hôtel Le Boulevardier (p388)
- » Hôtel 7e Art (p411)

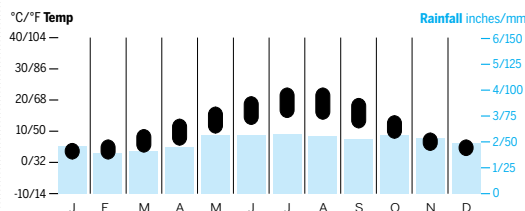
## Why Go?

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, 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) – it'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, chateaux 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 western 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** Hit the French Alps for some serious ski action. Eat truffles.

**Apr–Jun** France at springtime best, *sans* crowds; June's Fête de la Musique 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 (via the Channel Tunnel/Eurostar rail service) 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; ferries from Marseille and Nice provide regular links with seaside towns in Corsica, Italy and North Africa.

Regular bus and rail links cross the France–Spain border via the Pyrenees, and the France–Italy border via the Alps and the southern Mediterranean coast.

## 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 Normandy, Monet's gardens at Giverny, and Versailles; or throw yourself into the Renaissance high life at the chateaux in the Loire Valley.

### Two Weeks

With Paris and surrounds having taken up much of the first week, concentrate on exploring one or two regions rather than trying to do too much in a whistle-stop dash. High-speed TGV trains zip from Paris to every province: for prehistoric and gastronomic interest, head to the Dordogne; for architectural splendour, you can't top the Loire Valley; for typical French atmosphere, try the hill-top villages of Provence; and for sunshine and seafood, head to the French Riviera on the sparkling Med.

## Essential Food & Drink

- » **Fondue and raclette** Warming cheese dishes in the French Alps.
- » **Oysters and white wine** Everywhere on the Atlantic coast, but especially in Cancale and Bordeaux.
- » **Bouillabaisse** Marseille's signature hearty fish stew, eaten with croutons and *rouille* (garlic-and-chilli mayonnaise).
- » **Foie gras and truffles** The Dordogne features goose and 'black diamonds' from December to March. Provence is also good for indulging in the aphrodisiacal fungi.
- » **Piggy-part cuisine** Lyon is famous for its juicy *andouillette* (pig-intestine sausage), a perfect marriage with a local Côtes du Rhône red.
- » **Champagne** Tasting in century-old cellars is an essential part of Champagne's bubbly experience.

## AT A GLANCE

- » **Currency** Euro (€)
- » **Language** French
- » **Money** ATMs everywhere
- » **Visas** Schengen rules apply

## Fast Facts

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

## Exchange Rates

Australia	A\$1	€0.82
Canada	C\$1	€0.77
Japan	¥100	€0.83
New Zealand	NZ\$1	€0.65
UK	UK£1	€1.18
USA	US\$1	€0.78

## Set Your Budget

- » **Budget hotel room** €60–80
- » **Two-course meal** €15–50
- » **Museum entrance** €4–10
- » **Glass of wine** €2–5
- » **Paris metro ticket** €1.70

## Resources

- » **Paris by Mouth** ([www.parisbymouth.com](http://www.parisbymouth.com))
- » **Wine Travel Guides** ([www.winetravelguides.com](http://www.winetravelguides.com))
- » **France 24** ([www.france24.com](http://www.france24.com))
- » **Lost in Cheeseland** ([www.lostincheeseland.com](http://www.lostincheeseland.com))