

Welcome to France

France seduces travellers with its unflatteringly familiar culture, woven around cafe terraces, village-square markets and lace-curtained bistros with their plat du jour chalked on the board.

Cultural Savoir Faire

France is about world-class architecture and art, outstanding museums, Roman temples and Renaissance châteaux. It seduces with iconic landmarks known the world over, and rising stars yet to be discovered. The country's cultural repertoire is staggering in volume and diversity. And this is where the beauty of *la belle France* lies: when super stars such as Mademoiselle Eiffel, royal Versailles and the celebrity French Riviera have been ticked off, there's still plenty more to thrill. (France is, after all, the world's top tourist destination with more than 80 million visitors a year.)

Gastronomy

Food is of enormous importance to the French and each region has its own specialities alongside French classics. The daily culinary agenda takes no prisoners: breakfasting on warm croissants from the *boulangerie*, stopping in at Parisian bistros, and shopping at the market are all second nature to the French – and it would be rude to refuse. But French gastronomy goes far deeper than just eating well. Its experiential nature means there is always something tasty to observe, learn and try, wherever you are – be it flipping crepes in Brittany or chinking Champagne flutes in ancient Reims cellars, the culinary opportunities are endless.

Art de Vivre

The rhythm of daily life – dictated by the seasons in the depths of *la France profonde* (rural France) – exudes an intimacy that gets under your skin. Don't resist. Rather, live the French lifestyle. Embrace the luxury of simple everyday rituals being transformed into unforgettable moments, be it a coffee and croissant in the Parisian cafe where Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir met to philosophise, a stroll through the lily-clad gardens Monet painted, or a walk on a beach in Brittany scented with the subtle infusion of language, music and mythology brought by 5th-century Celtic invaders.

Outdoor Action

And then there is the *terroir* (land) and the varied journey it weaves from northern France's cliffs and sand dunes to the piercing blue sea of the French Riviera and Corsica's verdant oak forests. Outdoor action is what France's lyrical landscape demands – and there's something for everybody. Whether you end up walking barefoot across wave-rippled sand to Mont St-Michel, riding a cable car to glacial panoramas above Chamonix, or cartwheeling down Europe's highest sand dune, France does not disappoint. Its great outdoors is thrilling, with endless opportunities and the next adventure begging to be had. *Allez!*



Why I Love France

By Nicola Williams

France has been home for two decades yet I can't shake off that uncanny feeling I'm on holiday – French *art de vivre* (art of living) is just too good and I'm mad about it. From my Haute-Savoie house on Lake Geneva's southern shore, the dark green hills of the Jura and *un café* in the wisteria-draped village bar are my wake-up call. Weekends of endless possibilities punctuate the gentle rhythm of village life: ravishing art museums in Lyon and Paris, hiking and skiing in the Alps, paddle boarding on the glittering lake, road trips to Beaujolais and Burgundy and other regions so different they could be another country. France's sheer variety never ceases to amaze me.

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