

# Welcome to France

*France seduces travellers with its unfalteringly 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 art and architecture. It seduces with iconic landmarks, rising stars and a cultural repertoire that is staggering in volume and diversity. And this is where the beauty of *la belle France* lies: when superstars such as Made-moiselle Eiffel, royal Versailles and the celebrity-ridden French Riviera have been ticked off, there's ample more to thrill. France is, after all, the world's top destination. Some 85 million visitors flock to the land of the Gauls each year to feast on its extraordinary wealth of museums, galleries, ateliers (artist workshops) and hands-on cultural experiences.

## Gastronomy

Food is of enormous importance to the French and the daily culinary agenda takes no prisoners: breakfasting on warm croissants from the *boulangerie*, stopping off at Parisian bistros, and market shopping are 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. Be it flipping crêpes in Brittany or clinking 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 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

The *terroir* (land) of France weaves a varied journey from northern France's cliffs and sand dunes to the piercing blue sea of the French Riviera and Corsica's green 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, Writer

France has been home for decades yet I still feel on holiday – French *art de vivre* (art of living) is just too good. From my Haute-Savoie house on Lake Geneva's southern shore, the Jura's dark-green hills 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: art museums in Lyon and Paris, alpine hiking and skiing, 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 is amazing.

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