



# FRANCE

TOP SIGHTS, AUTHENTIC EXPERIENCES

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## Welcome to France

*Vineyards, lavender fields and romantic châteaux... France woos travellers with iconic landmarks and seduces with its unfalteringly familiar culture, woven around cafe terraces, village-square markets and lace-curtained bistros with the plat du jour chalked on the board.*

France is a land of languid moments imbued with soul. French *art de vivre* (art of living) transforms simple, everyday rituals into unforgettable moments, be it a coffee 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.

Food is of enormous importance to the French: breakfasting on warm croissants from the *boulangerie* (bakery), stopping off at Parisian bistros, and market shopping are all second nature – and it would be rude to refuse.

The *terroir* (land) of France weaves a varied journey from Brittany and Normandy's cliffs and sand dunes to the piercing blue sea of the French Riviera. 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 cart-wheeling down Europe's highest sand dune, France does not disappoint. Its great outdoors is thrilling, with endless opportunities and adventure. *Allez!*

“French art de vivre (art of living) transforms simple, everyday rituals into unforgettable moments”





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# Plan Your Trip

## France's Top 12

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## Paris

### *Romance and culture in the City of Light*

The cloud-piercing Eiffel Tower, Arc de Triomphe, gargoyled Notre Dame cathedral, lamplit bridges spanning the Seine...Paris (p35) has countless famous landmarks and the French capital more than lives up to its hype. Think sweeping vistas across grand boulevards, world-class art museums, monuments evoking glorious histories, buzzing cafe pavement terraces and a bevy of city bistros. Take the time to absorb, embrace and enjoy. Left: View from Notre Dame's Gargoyles Gallery (p45); Right: Street dining, St-Germain (p69)

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## Loire Valley

### *Châteaux plucked straight from a fairy tale*

If it's pomp and architectural splendour you're after, this regal valley is the place to linger. Flowing for more than 1000km, the Loire (p79) is one of France's last *fleuves sauvages* (untamed rivers) and its banks provide a 1000-year snapshot of French high society. Climb the stairway to the rooftop of Château de Chambord, admire art at Château de Chenonceau, and wander the gardens of Château de Villandry. Top: Château de Villandry (p88); Bottom: Château de Chambord (p82)

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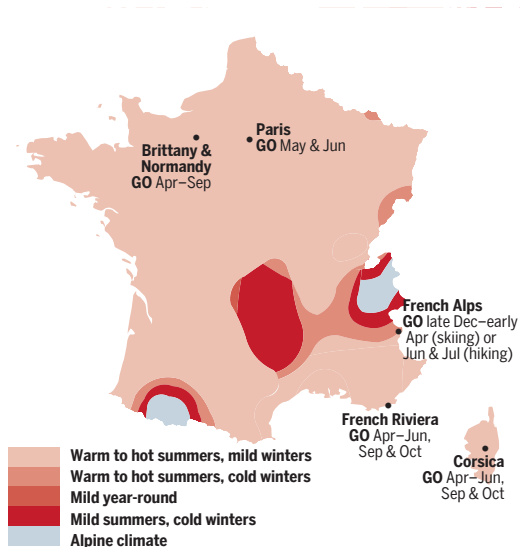


# Plan Your Trip

## Need to Know



### When to Go



### High Season (Jul & Aug)

- Queues at big sights and on roads, especially August.
- Christmas, New Year and Easter all busy.
- Late December to March is high season in ski resorts.
- Book accommodation and tables in the best restaurants well in advance.

### Shoulder (Apr–Jun & Sep)

- Hotel rates drop in the south and other hot spots.
- Spring brings warm weather, flowers, local produce.
- Autumn's *vendange* (grape harvest) is reason to visit.

### Low Season (Oct–Mar)

- Prices up to 50% less than high season.
- Sights, attractions and restaurants open fewer days.
- Hotels and restaurants in quiet rural regions are closed.

### Currency

Euro (€)

### Language

French

### Visas

Generally not required for stays of up to 90 days (or at all for EU nationals); some nationalities need a Schengen visa (p307).

### Money

ATMs at every airport, most train stations and on every second street corner in towns and cities. Visa, MasterCard and Amex widely accepted.

### Mobile Phones

European and Australian phones work, but only American cells with 900 and 1800 MHz networks are compatible; check with your provider before leaving home. Use a French SIM card to make cheaper calls with a French number.

### Time

Central European Time (GMT/UTC plus one hour)



## Daily Costs

### Budget: less than €130

- Dorm bed: €18–30
- Double room in a budget hotel: €90
- Admission to many attractions first Sunday of month: free
- Lunch *menus* (set meals): less than €20

### Midrange: €130–220

- Double room in a midrange hotel: €90–190
- Lunch *menus* in gourmet restaurants: €20–40

### Top End: over €220

- Double room in a top-end hotel: €190–350
- Top restaurant dinner: *menu* €65, à la carte €100–150

## Useful Websites

**France.fr** ([www.france.fr](http://www.france.fr)) Official country website.

**France 24** ([www.france24.com/en/france](http://www.france24.com/en/france)) French news in English.

**Paris by Mouth** ([www.parisbymouth.com](http://www.parisbymouth.com)) Dining and drinking; one-stop site for where and how to eat in the capital with plenty of the latest openings.

**David Lebovitz** ([www.davidlebovitz.com](http://www.davidlebovitz.com)) American pastry chef in Paris and author of several French cook books; insightful postings and great France-related articles shared on his Facebook page.

**French Word-a-Day** (<http://french-word-a-day.typepad.com>) Fun language learning.

**Lonely Planet** ([www.lonelyplanet.com/france](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/france)) Destination information, hotel bookings, traveller forum and more.

## Opening Hours

Opening hours vary throughout the year. We list high-season opening hours, but remember that they often decrease in shoulder and low seasons.

**Banks** 9am to noon and 2pm to 5pm Monday to Friday or Tuesday to Saturday

**Bars** 7pm to 1am

**Cafes** 7am to 11pm

**Clubs** 10pm to 3am, 4am or 5am Thursday to Saturday

**Restaurants** Noon to 2.30pm and 7pm to 11pm six days a week

**Shops** 10am to noon and 2pm to 7pm Monday to Saturday

## Arriving in France

**Aéroport de Charles de Gaulle** (p76; Paris) Trains, buses and RER suburban trains run to Paris' city centre every 15 to 30 minutes from 5am to 11pm, after which night buses kick in (12.30am to 5.30am). It's a €55/50 flat fare for a 30-minute taxi ride to right-/left-bank central Paris.

**Aéroport d'Orly** (p76; Paris) Linked to central Paris by Orlyval rail then RER or bus every 15 minutes between 5am and 11pm. Or T7 tram to Villejuif–Louis Aragon then metro to the centre. The 25-minute journey by taxi costs €35/30 to right-/left-bank central Paris.

## Getting Around

Transport in France is comfortable, quick, usually reliable and reasonably priced.

**Train** State-owned SNCF (p314), France's rail network, is first class, with extensive coverage and frequent departures.

**Car** Away from cities and large towns (where it's hard to park) a car comes into its own. Cars can be hired at airports and train stations. Drive on the right. Be aware of France's potentially hazardous 'priority to the right' rule.

**Bus** Cheaper and slower than trains. Useful for remote villages not serviced by trains.

**Bicycle** Certain regions – Loire Valley, Brittany, Provence's Luberon – beg to be explored on two wheels, with dedicated cycling paths, some along canal towpaths or between fruit orchards and vineyards.

