



France

Cathedrals and castles, cafés and cheeses, and a way of life built around a good meal.

AT A GLANCE

Facts to know

CAPITAL

Paris

POPULATION

About 69 million

OFFICIAL LANGUAGE

French

CURRENCY

Euro

AREA

About 552,000 km² in Europe (about 640,000 km² with the five overseas regions)

GOVERNMENT

Semi-presidential republic (the Fifth Republic, since 1958)

HIGHEST MOUNTAIN

Mont Blanc, about 4,800 m, on the border with Italy

LONGEST RIVER

The Loire, about 1,000 km

NEIGHBOURS

Belgium, Luxembourg, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Monaco, Andorra and Spain in Europe; Brazil, Suriname and the Netherlands (on Saint Martin) overseas

DRIVES ON THE

Right

CALLING CODE

+33

A 45-minute trip to France

Everything you need is in this pack. No preparation beyond printing. Adapt the timing to your group.

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| 0 to 5 min | Welcome. Show the map page and find France together. Ask: who has been there, or knows someone from there? |
| 5 to 15 min | Read the facts at a glance, then three moments from the story: 52 BC: Vercingetorix surrenders at Alesia; 1815: Napoleon is defeated at Waterloo; 2024: Paris hosts the Olympic Games. |
| 15 to 25 min | At the table: talk about Baguette and Croissant. Idea: bring a small taste (bread, cheese, fruit, tea) if your kitchen can help. |
| 25 to 30 min | Say it like a local: practise "Bonjour" (Hello, good day), "Bonsoir" (Good evening), "Au revoir" (Goodbye). Everyone says them together. |
| 30 to 40 min | Quiz: read the questions aloud, or play the big-screen version at https://worldstroll.com/countries/france/group . No scores needed. |
| 40 to 45 min | Talk about it (questions page), then stamp or sign everyone's passport page. |

You will need

- This printed pack (one per table, or one each)
- Pens for the quiz
- Optional: a world map or globe, a small tasting, music from the country

France and its cities



- Paris (Île-de-France): The Eiffel Tower, The Louvre, Cafés and boulevards
- Marseille (Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur): The Old Port, Bouillabaisse, Notre-Dame de la Garde
- Lyon (Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes): Gastronomy and bouchons, The Festival of Lights in December, The Lumière brothers and early cinema
- Toulouse (Occitanie): Pink brick buildings, Airbus, Cassoulet
- Nice (Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur): The Promenade des Anglais, Its winter carnival, Salade niçoise
- Bordeaux (Nouvelle-Aquitaine): Wine, Place de la Bourse and its water mirror, 18th-century stone buildings
- Strasbourg (Grand Est (Alsace)): The European Parliament, Its Gothic cathedral, Christmas

markets

- Lille (Hauts-de-France): Flemish architecture, A giant flea market every September, Waffles and beer
- Avignon (Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur): The Palace of the Popes, The Pont d'Avignon, Its summer theatre festival
- Reims (Grand Est (Champagne)): Reims Cathedral, Champagne cellars, The coronation of kings
- Rennes (Brittany): Half-timbered houses, Galettes and crêpes, Trips to Mont-Saint-Michel

A short history of France

From Roman Gaul to the modern republic, France has been at the centre of European history, and many of its turning points still shape the world today.

52 BC **Vercingetorix surrenders at Alesia**

The Gaulish chief Vercingetorix led a great revolt against Julius Caesar but surrendered after the siege of Alesia. Gaul became part of the Roman world for the next five centuries.

AD 800 **Charlemagne is crowned emperor**

On Christmas Day in the year 800, Pope Leo III crowned the Frankish king Charlemagne emperor in Rome. His empire covered much of western Europe.

1066 **William of Normandy conquers England**

William, Duke of Normandy, won the Battle of Hastings and became king of England. For centuries afterwards French was the language of the English court.

1163 **Work begins on Notre-Dame**

The cornerstone of Notre-Dame de Paris was laid. The great Gothic cathedral took about two centuries to complete.

1429 **Joan of Arc frees Orléans**

During the Hundred Years' War, a young peasant woman, Joan of Arc, helped the French army end the English siege of Orléans. She later became a national heroine and a saint.

1682 **The court moves to Versailles**

King Louis XIV, the 'Sun King', moved his court and government from Paris to his enormous new palace at Versailles.

1789 **The storming of the Bastille**

On 14 July 1789 crowds in Paris stormed the Bastille prison, a symbol of royal power. The French Revolution had begun, and 14 July is now the national day.

- 1804** **Napoleon crowns himself emperor**
On 2 December 1804, in Notre-Dame de Paris, Napoleon Bonaparte crowned himself Emperor of the French.
- 1815** **Napoleon is defeated at Waterloo**
Napoleon's final defeat, at Waterloo in present-day Belgium, ended his rule. He spent his last years in exile on the island of Saint Helena.
- 1889** **The Eiffel Tower opens**
Gustave Eiffel's iron tower was built for the Paris world's fair of 1889, held a hundred years after the Revolution. Many Parisians first thought it was ugly.
- 1944** **The D-Day landings in Normandy**
On 6 June 1944 Allied troops landed on the beaches of Normandy. Paris was liberated that August.
- 1958** **The Fifth Republic begins**
A new constitution, shaped by General Charles de Gaulle, created a strong president. France is still governed under this Fifth Republic.
- 1994** **The Channel Tunnel opens**
A rail tunnel under the sea finally linked France and England, running from near Calais to near Folkestone.
- 1998** **France wins the World Cup at home**
France hosted the football World Cup and won it for the first time, beating Brazil 3 to 0 in the final near Paris.
- 2002** **The euro replaces the franc**
Euro notes and coins replaced the French franc in everyday life.
- 2024** **Paris hosts the Olympic Games**
Paris hosted the Summer Olympics for the third time, after 1900 and 1924. That December, Notre-Dame reopened after the fire of 2019.

What people eat in France

Every French region has its own dishes, from butter and cream in Normandy to olive oil and herbs in Provence. A festive French meal, listed by UNESCO in 2010, follows a set order: an apéritif (a drink before the meal), then a starter (in France called the 'entrée'), a main course of meat or fish with vegetables, cheese, and finally dessert, often followed by coffee.

Baguette

All of France

The long, crusty stick of bread bought fresh every day from the local boulangerie. A traditional baguette is made only from flour, water, salt and yeast or leaven.

Croissant

Paris, inspired by Vienna

A flaky, buttery crescent of layered dough, eaten at breakfast with coffee.

Crêpes

Brittany

Very thin pancakes, eaten sweet with sugar, butter, jam or chocolate. In Brittany, savoury versions made with buckwheat flour are called galettes.

Quiche lorraine

Lorraine, northeast France

A savoury tart of shortcrust pastry filled with smoked bacon and a creamy egg custard. Purists say the original has no cheese.

Ratatouille

Nice, Provence

A slow-cooked stew of summer vegetables: aubergine, courgette, peppers, onion and tomatoes, with garlic, olive oil and Provençal herbs.

Croque monsieur

Paris cafés

A hot toasted sandwich of ham and melted cheese, usually Gruyère, sometimes covered with béchamel sauce. With a fried or poached egg on top it becomes a croque madame.

French onion soup (Soupe à l'oignon gratinée)

Paris

A rich soup of slowly browned onions in beef stock, topped with toasted bread and melted cheese and browned under the grill.

Boeuf bourguignon

Burgundy

Beef stewed for hours in red Burgundy wine with bacon, mushrooms and small onions, until it is tender enough to cut with a spoon.

Coq au vin

Burgundy

Chicken braised slowly in red wine with mushrooms, bacon and onions. Once it was a way to make a tough old rooster tender.

Bouillabaisse

Marseille, Provence

A fish stew first made by Marseille fishermen from rockfish they could not sell, flavoured with saffron, fennel and olive oil.

Cassoulet

Castelnaudary, Languedoc

A hearty bake of white beans with pork, sausage and duck or goose confit. It is named after the clay pot it is cooked in.

Choucroute garnie

Alsace

Sauerkraut cooked with white wine and served with sausages, smoked pork and potatoes, a sign of Alsace's position next to Germany.

Tarte Tatin

Lamotte-Beuvron, Centre-Val de Loire

An upside-down apple tart: the apples are caramelised in butter and sugar, covered with pastry and baked, then the tart is turned out so the apples are on top.

Camembert

Normandy

A soft, creamy cheese made from cow's milk with a white, bloomy rind, sold in a round wooden box.

Champagne

Champagne region, around Reims and Épernay

The famous sparkling wine, made in the Champagne region of northeast France. Many of the great champagne houses have cellars in Reims that are open for tours.

GOOD MANNERS

At the table

- In France the 'entrée' is the starter, not the main course. The main course is the 'plat principal'.
- Cheese is served after the main course and before dessert.
- Keep both hands on the table during the meal, not in your lap.
- At someone's home, wait for the host to start eating, and never make a toast with water.
- Meals are not rushed. Relax, enjoy the conversation and ask for the bill when you are ready.

Crêpes

Very thin pancakes, eaten sweet with sugar, butter, jam or chocolate. In Brittany, savoury versions made with buckwheat flour are called galettes.

Ingredients

- 250 g plain flour
- 3 eggs
- 500 ml milk
- 50 g butter, melted, plus a little for the pan
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- A pinch of salt

Method

1. Put the flour, sugar and salt in a bowl and make a well in the middle.
2. Add the eggs and whisk, slowly pouring in the milk until the batter is smooth and runny, like single cream.
3. Stir in the melted butter and let the batter rest for about an hour.
4. Heat a lightly buttered frying pan over medium heat. Pour in a small ladle of batter and tilt the pan so it covers the bottom thinly.
5. Cook for about a minute until golden underneath, flip and cook the other side for a few seconds.
6. Fill with sugar and lemon, jam or chocolate spread, fold and serve warm.

Quiche lorraine

A savoury tart of shortcrust pastry filled with smoked bacon and a creamy egg custard. Purists say the original has no cheese.

Ingredients

- 1 sheet of shortcrust pastry (about 250 g)
- 200 g smoked bacon lardons
- 3 eggs
- 200 ml crème fraîche
- 200 ml milk
- A pinch of nutmeg
- Salt and black pepper

Method

1. Heat the oven to 200°C. Line a tart tin of about 24 cm with the pastry and prick the base with a fork.
2. Bake the empty pastry for about 10 minutes, then lower the oven to 180°C.
3. Fry the lardons in a dry pan until lightly golden, then drain them on kitchen paper.
4. Whisk the eggs, crème fraîche, milk, nutmeg and pepper. Add only a little salt, because the bacon is salty.
5. Scatter the lardons over the pastry and pour in the egg mixture.
6. Bake for 30 to 35 minutes, until the filling is set and golden. Serve warm with a green salad.

Ratatouille

A slow-cooked stew of summer vegetables: aubergine, courgette, peppers, onion and tomatoes, with garlic, olive oil and Provençal herbs.

Ingredients

- 1 large aubergine, cut into cubes
- 2 courgettes, sliced
- 2 peppers (red and yellow), cut into strips
- 1 onion, sliced
- 4 ripe tomatoes, chopped
- 3 garlic cloves, chopped
- 5 tablespoons olive oil
- A few sprigs of thyme, a bay leaf and some basil
- Salt and pepper

Method

1. Fry the aubergine in some of the olive oil until soft and lightly browned, then set it aside.
2. Do the same with the courgettes, then with the peppers.
3. In a large pot, soften the onion in the rest of the oil, then add the garlic and the tomatoes.
4. Put all the vegetables back in the pot with the thyme and bay leaf, and season with salt and pepper.
5. Cover and simmer gently for about 30 minutes, stirring now and then.
6. Add torn basil before serving, warm or at room temperature.

Croque monsieur

A hot toasted sandwich of ham and melted cheese, usually Gruyère, sometimes covered with béchamel sauce. With a fried or poached egg on top it becomes a croque madame.

Ingredients

- 8 slices of white sandwich bread
- Soft butter for spreading
- 4 slices of cooked ham
- 150 g Gruyère or Comté cheese, grated
- For the béchamel: 20 g butter, 20 g flour, 250 ml milk, a pinch of nutmeg

Method

1. Heat the oven to 200°C.
2. Make the béchamel: melt the butter, stir in the flour for a minute, then whisk in the milk and stir until thick. Season with nutmeg, salt and pepper.
3. Butter the bread. Put a slice of ham and some cheese between each pair of slices, buttered sides out.
4. Place the sandwiches on a baking tray, spread béchamel on top and cover with the rest of the cheese.
5. Bake for about 10 minutes, then grill for a few minutes until the top is golden and bubbling.

French onion soup

A rich soup of slowly browned onions in beef stock, topped with toasted bread and melted cheese and browned under the grill.

Ingredients

- 1 kg onions, thinly sliced
- 50 g butter
- 1 tablespoon flour
- 150 ml dry white wine
- 1.5 litres beef stock
- 8 slices of baguette
- 150 g Gruyère or Comté cheese, grated
- Salt and pepper

Method

1. Melt the butter in a large pot and cook the onions over low heat for about 40 minutes, stirring often, until soft and deep golden brown.
2. Sprinkle over the flour and stir for a minute.
3. Pour in the wine, let it bubble for a minute, then add the stock. Simmer for 20 minutes and season.
4. Toast the baguette slices.
5. Ladle the soup into ovenproof bowls, float two slices of toast in each and cover with cheese.
6. Grill until the cheese is melted and golden. Take care: the bowls will be very hot.

Useful phrases

Bonjour

bohn-ZHOOR · Hello, good day

Bonsoir

bohn-SWAHR · Good evening

Au revoir

oh ruh-VWAHR · Goodbye

S'il vous plaît

seel voo PLAY · Please

Merci beaucoup

mair-SEE boh-KOO · Thank you very much

Excusez-moi

ex-kew-zay-MWAH · Excuse me

Enchanté

ahn-shahn-TAY · Nice to meet you

Comment allez-vous ?

koh-mahn tah-lay-VOO · How are you? (polite)

Parlez-vous anglais ?

par-lay voo ahn-GLAY · Do you speak English?

Je ne comprends pas

zhuh nuh kohm-prahn PAH · I don't understand

C'est combien ?

say kohm-BYAN · How much is it?

Où sont les toilettes ?

oo sohn lay twah-LET · Where are the toilets?

Une table pour deux

ewn TAH-bluh poor DUH · A table for two

Je voudrais un café

zhuh voo-DRAY an kah-FAY · I would like a coffee

L'addition, s'il vous plaît

lah-dee-SYOHN seel voo PLAY · The bill, please

Bon appétit

bohn ah-pay-TEE · Enjoy your meal

Santé !

sahn-TAY · Cheers!

Au secours !

oh suh-KOOR · Help!

FUN FACTS

Things you might not know

1. As of 2025, France is the most visited country in the world, with about 100 million foreign visitors a year.
2. Thanks to its overseas territories, France uses 12 time zones (13 with its claim in Antarctica), more than any other country.
3. Mainland France is nicknamed 'l'Hexagone' because its shape on the map looks roughly like a hexagon.
4. The Eiffel Tower was meant to be temporary. It was due to be taken down 20 years after the world's fair of 1889.
5. The Statue of Liberty in New York was a gift from the people of France. It was designed by Frédéric Auguste Bartholdi, and Gustave Eiffel designed its iron frame.
6. The radio distress call 'Mayday' comes from the French 'm'aider', meaning 'help me'.
7. The croissant's ancestor is the kipferl, a crescent-shaped pastry from Austria.
8. Marseille, founded by Greek settlers around 600 BC, is the oldest city in France.
9. As of 2025, the Louvre is the most visited museum in the world, with about 9 million visitors a year.
10. The Lumière brothers from Lyon invented the cinematograph and held one of the first paid public film shows in Paris in December 1895.
11. The Tour de France bicycle race was first held in 1903.
12. The metric system, with metres and kilograms, was created in France in the 1790s, during the Revolution.

TALK ABOUT IT

Questions for the group

- Have you ever been to France, or has someone in your family? What do you remember?
- Have you ever tasted Baguette or Croissant? What is a dish you remember from

a trip?

- The Channel Tunnel opens (1994). Do you remember hearing about it? Where were you then?
- France wins the World Cup at home (1998). Do you remember hearing about it? Where were you then?
- Have you seen The Eiffel Tower, in person or in pictures? Which famous place would you most like to see?
- If you could spend one day in any city of France, which would it be and why?

QUIZ

How well do you know France?

Circle the right answer. The answers are on the last page.

1. Which French city is the official seat of the European Parliament?

- A) Strasbourg
- B) Lille
- C) Paris
- D) Lyon

2. At which battle in 1815 was Napoleon finally defeated?

- A) Jena
- B) Marengo
- C) Austerlitz
- D) Waterloo

3. In which city was Charlemagne crowned emperor on Christmas Day in the year 800?

- A) Reims
- B) Rome
- C) Paris
- D) Aachen

4. On a French menu, the 'entrée' is the main course.

- A) True
- B) False

5. What does 'service compris' on a French restaurant bill mean?

- A) Service is included in the price
- B) Table service is not available
- C) Bread is charged extra
- D) A 20% tip is expected

6. Mont-Saint-Michel is an abbey on a mountain peak in the Alps.

- A) True
- B) False

7. On which day of the week is the Louvre closed?

- A) Wednesday
- B) Sunday
- C) Monday
- D) Tuesday

8. Chrysanthemums are a good gift to bring to a dinner host in France.

- A) True
- B) False

9. Which currency did euro notes and coins replace in France in 2002?

- A) The Deutsche Mark
- B) The Spanish peseta
- C) The Italian lira
- D) The French franc

10. A 'boulangerie' is a bakery.

- A) True
- B) False

11. In France it is polite to say 'Bonjour' when you walk into a small shop.

- A) True
- B) False

12. 'Enchanté' means 'excuse me'.

- A) True
- B) False

Quiz answers

1. A) Strasbourg

Strasbourg, on the German border, is the official seat of the European Parliament.

2. D) Waterloo

Napoleon's final defeat came at Waterloo, in present-day Belgium. Austerlitz, Marengo and Jena were among his victories.

3. B) Rome

Pope Leo III crowned Charlemagne emperor in Rome on Christmas Day 800.

4. False

False. In France the entrée is the starter. The main course is the 'plat principal'.

5. A) Service is included in the price

Service compris means service is included in the price: restaurant prices already include a 15% service charge.

6. False

False. Mont-Saint-Michel is a rocky tidal island off the coast of Normandy, in the northwest.

7. D) Tuesday

The Louvre is closed on Tuesday, so plan your visit for another day.

8. False

False. In France chrysanthemums are associated with funerals and graves. Bring wine, chocolates or other flowers.

9. D) The French franc

In 2002 euro notes and coins replaced the French franc.

10. True

True. The boulangerie is where the French buy their daily baguette.

11. True

True. Greet the shopkeeper with bonjour when you arrive and au revoir when you leave.

12. False

False. Enchanté means nice to meet you. Excuse me is 'Excusez-moi'.

France visa page

Name: _____ Date: _____



Next stops

Country: _____	Country: _____	Country: _____
Country: _____	Country: _____	Country: _____

Play the interactive version, collect a stamp in your passport:

<https://worldstroll.com/countries/france>