

France

An everyday guide to expatriate life and work.

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Quick facts¹

Capital: Paris

Population: Around 67 million

Major language: French

Major religion: Christianity

Currency: Euro

Time zone: GMT+1 (GMT+2 from the end of March to the end of October)

Emergency number: 112 (general emergencies), 15 (specialized emergency medical services), 18 (fire), and 17 (police)

Electricity: 220 volts, 50Hz. European two-pin plugs are standard.

Drive on the: Right

¹<http://www.expatarrivals.com/france/essential-info-for-france>

From the iconic Eiffel Tower to the scenic wine regions of Bordeaux, or the dazzling French Riviera, it's easy for expats to have romantic notions of moving to France.

As the cultural heart of Europe, the country has been at the forefront of the art and fashion worlds for decades, if not centuries. A society extremely proud of its heritage, the French are known for their elegance and love of the finer things in life. As well as all this, expats can look forward to a sophisticated transport network and an excellent healthcare system, consistently ranked as one of the best in the world. The pleasant climate and highly regarded education sector

also make France an ideal location for those with children.

France has so much to offer expats, but understanding the culture and social rules governing daily life can be a challenge for new arrivals. Thankfully, this guide will walk expats through what they need to know about making the most of life in this exciting destination, including tips on social and business etiquette, and overviews of the climate, education, transport and healthcare systems, and more.

Overview

Getting started

Climate and weather

France's climate is highly variable, ranging from the warm and sunny southern and Mediterranean coasts to the snowy mountains of the Alpine regions. Overall, expats can look forward to a climate that is moderate and agreeable, but they are bound to encounter four distinct seasons. France experiences moderate rainfall throughout the year, with May and June being the wettest months.¹

¹<http://www.expattarrivals.com/france/weather-in-france>

Visas

As France is a Schengen-member state, nationals of appointed countries can enter for short stays without having to apply for a visa. Those nationals not from a visa-waiver country will need to apply for a Schengen visa before arriving in the country.¹

EU nationals don't need a work permit to find employment in France. For non-EU nationals planning on living and working there, the process will be a lot more complicated, as they will need to apply for a long-stay visa. This visa is primarily granted to those going to France to work, study or reunite with family.²

Accommodation

From quaint Parisian apartments to glamorous countryside châteaux, expats certainly have a wide range of options when it comes to accommodation in France. Housing varies from region to region, with apartments and studios prevalent in the large cities, and iconic French châteaux, farm cottages and stone houses are more readily available in rural areas. Living quarters tend to be smaller than some expats may be used to, but housing is usually clean and comfortable.

It's best to employ the services of a real estate agent to assist in the property search, especially if one has limited knowledge of French. In order to secure a rental property, the tenant will need proof of income. A deposit of around a month's rent is expected for an unfurnished property, but a much larger deposit may be required to secure a furnished place. Utilities may be included with the monthly rental if living in an apartment but, in some cases, tenants may be expected

to make their own arrangements to have their utilities (such as electricity, gas, water and internet) connected.³

Schools

The French education system adheres to high standards and expats will have a wide variety of options, including public, private, bilingual and international schools.

Schooling in France is compulsory for children from the age of six to 16. Education is highly centralized, with public schools and most private schools following the national curriculum. Attendance at a public school is based on catchment areas and these schools are free to French citizens and expats who can show proof of residence.

Some public schools have a Section Internationale (international section), which offers a curriculum geared towards teaching French to non-Francophone students before integrating them in the French system. This is a great compromise for those planning on living in France long-term and wanting to fully integrate their children into French society.

Alternatively, there are many well-respected international schools in France, which are mostly concentrated in the large metropolitan centers. These schools either uphold the teaching language and curriculum of an expat's home country, of which British and American are the most common, or subscribe to the International Baccalaureate curriculum and teach in English.⁴

¹ <https://www.schengenvisainfo.com/>

² <http://www.expattarrivals.com/france/visas-for-france>

³ <http://www.expattarrivals.com/france/accommodation-in-france>

⁴ <http://www.expattarrivals.com/france/education-and-schools-in-france>



Culture

Expats moving to France will find themselves absorbed into a proud society that values respect and proper behavior. From the language to the iconic architecture and decadent food, French culture is world-renowned and associated with elegance and sophistication. While many expats may be well-acquainted with aspects of the French way of life, there are many nuances that can make navigating French etiquette confusing for new arrivals.

Language

French is the official language of France. Although expats may encounter those who can speak English in tourist areas, such as in Paris, those relocating to the more rural areas are likely to need to learn French if wanting to fully integrate into society. Attempting to at least learn a few key phrases will go a long way to earning the respect of the locals.

Social etiquette and cultural faux pas

Proper etiquette is extremely important in French culture and there are many rules when it comes to manners, some of which expats may find far more formal than what they're used to.

New arrivals should familiarize themselves with the local customs in order to endear themselves to their French hosts and avoid any potentially awkward social situations.

Greetings are important in both social and business environments, and one should always greet another person properly before continuing with any conversation. This includes greeting serving staff at restaurants and store clerks when entering or leaving a shop, and marks a simple sign of respect. In line with this, it's polite to use a person's title when addressing them, "monsieur" (Mr) and "madame" (Mrs).

The bisous (air kissing on both cheeks) is a common greeting in France which may appear over-familiar to many expats. It is usually reserved for people one is familiar with and, even then, locals will always be first to initiate. The number of kisses differs depending on what region of France one is in.

The issue of time in social situations may be a source of confusion for expats. When invited for a meal at someone's house, it's not unusual for people to be fashionably late and arrive 15 to 20 minutes after the set time. That said, if invited to a restaurant or a business function, it's acceptable to arrive at the specified time.¹

As the inventor of haute couture and home to some of the most iconic fashion houses, it goes without saying that the French are fashion-conscious and value style and quality. If invited to a social gathering, the concept of smart-casual may involve dressing a lot more formally than what many expats may be used to.²

Eating

Food is at the heart of French culture and most social occasions revolve around the sharing of a meal. Food is meant to be savored and it's not unusual for a meal to last several hours and consist of many courses. From hearty farm-style fare to sophisticated Parisian delicacies, French cuisine is known for its rich flavors and hearty sauces. Wine and cheese feature prominently in French cooking, as do fresh vegetables such as mushrooms, onions, garlic and leeks.

French cities are synonymous with the café culture and expats will have plenty of choice when it comes to eating out. From the ever-present crêpe stands on city streets to elegant fine-dining establishments, there is something to satisfy every taste and budget.

The French have turned pastry making into an art form and boulangeries and patisseries can be found on just about every street corner, and expats may enjoy sampling the decadent sweet treats and local breads that these establishments are famous for. Fresh food markets are also prevalent in towns and cities and offer a wonderful alternative for those looking to sample the local produce.

Drinking

The French attitude to drinking is one based on restraint and moderation, and although alcohol forms an important part of socializing, being drunk is considered unfashionable. As one of the world's leading wine-producing countries, it goes without saying that wine is deeply intertwined into French culture and is a great source of national pride. The French enjoy socializing over a bottle of wine and it is typically served at most meals.

Holidays

As a predominantly Christian nation, many public holidays in France are related to the Christian faith, while the rest commemorate significant historical events in French history.³

The French cherish their holiday time, and when the opportunity strikes for a long weekend, many indulge. When

¹ <http://www.expatarrivals.com/france/culture-shock-in-france>

² <https://www.livescience.com/39149-french-culture.html>

³ <http://www.officeholidays.com/countries/france/index.php>

a public holiday falls on a Tuesday or Thursday, employees and employers will often faire le pont (bridge the gap), and take/give the day off in-between (the Monday or the Friday, respectively). Additionally, when a public holiday falls on a Sunday, the following Monday is given off.

New Year's Day – 1 January
Easter Monday – March/April
Labor Day (Worker's Day) – 1 May
WWII Victory Day – 8 May
Ascension Day – April/May
Whit Monday – May/June
Bastille Day – 14 July
Assumption of the Virgin Mary – 15 August
All Saints' Day – 1 November
Armistice Day – 11 November
Christmas Day – 25 December

Transport

Expats will find getting around in France easy and hassle-free thanks to its modern and efficient public transport system.

The railway network is dense and highly centralized, with Train a Grande Vitesse (TGV), France's high-speed rail network, linking all major cities. Travelers can also use the Transport Express Regional (TER) for short distances around France, while the Paris Metro is comprehensive and offers the best means of getting around the capital. Buses, while more affordable, offer less comprehensive options for long-distance travel; but all cities have urban bus routes which are easy to navigate.

Driving in French cities can be stressful due to the congestion and lack of parking, and thanks to comprehensive public transport networks, expats can easily get by without having their own vehicle. However, this is not always the case for those living in more rural areas, where a car may be needed. While it's possible to drive in France with a national or international driving permit (depending on one's nationality), expats living in France for more than one year will need a French driving license.⁴

Getting in touch

Telephone

In France, telephone services are a crucial part of the modern lifestyle, with several big companies providing both landline and mobile services. Providers include Orange (formerly France Telecom), Bouygues Telecom, Free Mobile, and SFR. When setting up a landline, you will need to provide your ID and proof of address, which could be a recent electricity bill, a tax bill, or a rental contract.

Internet

Expats will find reliable internet services across France, although connectivity may sometimes be limited in more rural areas. Healthy competition among service providers has meant that expats will have a wide choice of affordable packages available.

Postal Services

The state-owned La Poste is responsible for postal services in France and is generally efficient and reliable. Although postal services are fairly affordable within France, international delivery, especially of packages, is rather expensive. But expats also have the choice of numerous courier companies offering fast and efficient services.⁵

⁴ <https://www.expatica.com/fr/living/transportation/a-guide-to-driving-and-parking-in-france-101102/#driving-licenses>

⁵ <http://www.expatarivals.com/france/keeping-in-touch-in-france>

Employment

The job market

With the seventh largest economy in Europe, and home to a fair share of Fortune 500 companies, France is a leading player on the world economic stage. The most prominent industry sectors in France include hospitality, telecommunications, aerospace and defense, pharmaceuticals, construction, automobile production and banking.

Expats are often drawn by attractive working conditions, which include a 35-hour work week, plenty of holiday time and early retirement. Nevertheless, finding a job in France can be difficult for foreigners, and most who manage to find one do so through intra-company transfers or opportunities within large multinational organizations. Learning French is vital if wanting to succeed in the French job market as knowledge of the language is a requirement for most positions.¹

Income tax

Personal income tax in France is paid on a progressive scale of 0 to 45%. Tax payers are also liable to pay social security, which amounts to around 21%. Determining tax residency in France can be complicated. Generally, one is considered a tax resident if France is the place of their primary residence, they reside in France for more than 183 days in a single year, they derive their main income in France, or France is the country of their most substantial assets.²

Expats should consider employing a registered tax consultant to assist them in navigating the complex French tax system.

Business etiquette

Getting to grips with French culture is vital if expats want to succeed in the business world. The French are very proud of their culture and language and making the effort to understand the subtle nuances of how one should behave in the corporate world is essential. The first step in this process is learning to speak French. Not only is the language a prerequisite for most jobs, but knowing the language marks a great sign of respect and will go a long way to building successful business relationships.

Expats will need to exercise patience as business decision-making can be a drawn-out process as the French are known for their meticulous nature and will carefully analyze every detail of a proposal before making any decisions. Corporate

structures are strictly hierarchical and decisions are made by upper management and carried out by junior staff.

Appearances are important in French culture, and this extends especially into the business world. Expats should dress formally.

The French generally keep their private and professional lives separate, so socializing with colleagues outside of working hours is seldom done in French companies.³

Retirement

France is a popular retirement destination, especially for British retirees in search of sunshine and a more affordable cost of living. The French countryside and coastal towns, in particular, offer foreign retirees an excellent quality of life. Although there are no specific retirement visas available, those wanting to spend their golden years in France can apply for a long-term visa in order to obtain residency there. They'll also need to prove financial self-sufficiency.⁴

Finance

Currency

The official currency in France is the Euro (€ or EUR). One euro is divided into 100 cents.

Money is available in the following denominations:

Notes: 5, 10, 20, 50, 100, 200 and 500 EUR

Coins: 1 and 2 EUR, and 1, 2, 5, 10, 20 and 50 cents

Cost of living

The cost of living can be high for those enjoying an extravagant lifestyle in the major metropolitan areas of Paris, Marseille and Lyon. However, as many expat retirees will attest to, it's relatively easy to enjoy a great lifestyle on a budget.

Accommodation can be the most intimidating expense, especially if choosing to live in a major urban center. The cost of clothing is high in France, thanks to high sales taxes. The cost of groceries is reasonable if shopping at one of the major supermarkets such as Carrefour rather than a local grocer. Outdoor markets are also great places to find a bargain when it comes to buying local produce. Eating out can see costs quickly adding up, but those on a budget can enjoy some charming street food from local vendors.

Major cities have comprehensive transport networks which

¹ <http://www.expatarrivals.com/france/working-in-france>

² <https://www.blevinsfranks.com/tax-resident-france-uk/>

³ <http://www.expatarrivals.com/france/doing-business-in-france>

⁴ <https://internationalliving.com/countries/france/retire/>

are cost-effective and efficient, although if living in a more rural area, expats may need to consider buying a car.

Cost of Living Chart

Prices may vary depending on product and service provider and these are average costs for Paris in August 2023.¹

Accommodation (monthly rent)

Three-bedroom apartment city center EUR 2,894

Three-bedroom apartment outside city center
EUR 2,026

Groceries

Eggs (dozen) EUR 3.62

Milk (1 liter) EUR 1.24

Rice (1kg) EUR 2.16

Loaf of white bread EUR 1.80

Eating out

Big Mac Meal EUR 10 Coca-Cola (330ml) EUR 3.07

Cappuccino EUR 3.78 Bottle of local beer EUR 7

3-course meal for two at a mid-range restaurant EUR 65

Utilities

Mobile Phone Monthly Plan EUR 22.06

Internet (average per month) EUR 29.83

Basic utilities (per month for small apartment) EUR
200.94

Transportation

Taxi rate (per kilometer) EUR 1.86

One-way ticket (local transport) EUR 2.10

Petrol/gasoline (per liter) EUR 1.97

¹ <https://www.numbeo.com/cost-of-living/in/Paris>

Banking

There's a healthy selection of local and international banks in France, all of which uphold high standards and offer modern services. Most have multilingual support staff, and, in heavily expat-favored areas like the French Riviera, there are some local banks that cater specifically to English speakers.

In order to open a bank account, expats will usually need proof of identity, proof of residence and proof of income, a reference letter from a financial institution or employer, and an initial deposit.⁵

⁵ <https://www.expatarrivals.com/europe/france/moving-france>

⁶ <http://www.expatarrivals.com/france/healthcare-in-france>

⁷ <https://www.wnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/france>

Health

France's healthcare system consistently ranks among the best in the world. Both the public and private sectors offer comprehensive coverage, with little difference between the two in terms of quality of care. Staff are well-qualified and medical facilities generally lack the long waiting times many expats may be used to.

The public health insurance system is known as *Sécurité Sociale* and provides basic coverage to those who qualify, including expats. It is funded by tax contributions from salary deductions. In order to take advantage of the system, expats who qualify need to register at their local social security office.

Private Medical Insurance

Although public health insurance covers a substantial portion of medical bills, most of the French population has some form of private health insurance, and it's a good idea for expats to also consider having this. Health insurance is often provided by employers, so it's best to try to negotiate this prior to arrival, especially if moving as part of a corporate relocation.

Emergencies

Emergency services are efficient and staff are highly trained. In case of an emergency, expats should dial 15 if using a landline, or 112 if phoning from a cell phone.

Pharmacies

Pharmacies are plentiful, especially in France's major cities. Over-the-counter medicine can only be sold in a pharmacy, so basic medication like painkillers or flu medicine will not likely be available in a supermarket. Pharmacies can be identified by their large illuminated red or green cross sign.⁶

Health Risks

There are no major health concerns for expats traveling to France.

Vaccinations

There are no required vaccinations for France, but expats should visit a healthcare professional prior to arrival to ensure that all routine vaccinations are up to date. Vaccinations are recommended for hepatitis A, hepatitis B and rabies.⁷