

EUROPE · FOOD · WINE · CITY BREAKS · HISTORY · ARCHITECTURE · WINTER SPORTS

 France

France rewards travellers who look beyond Paris: Renaissance châteaux along the Loire, Mont-Saint-Michel rising from its tidal bay, Alpine trails beneath Mont Blanc, lavender and hill villages in Provence, and vineyards from Champagne to Bordeaux. Eurostar puts Paris less than two and a half hours from London, and TGV trains reach most regions within a morning.

 Before you go, read the UK government's travel advice for France and entry requirements (visas, passport validity). Last updated by FCDO 19 October 2026.

 CAPITAL Paris	 CURRENCY Euro (EUR) £1 ≈ €1.19	 LANGUAGE French	 BEST TIME Apr–Jun, Sep–Oct
 DAILY BUDGET £65–£320 £££ Expensive	 PLUGS Type C, E 230V · adapter needed	 FLIGHT FROM LONDON 1h 10m direct ~£60–£180 return	 TIME ZONE UTC+1 standard time

The world's most visited country is also one of Europe's most varied, with Atlantic surf beaches, Alpine and Pyrenean peaks, Mediterranean coves and a patchwork of wine regions, each with its own cooking. Most first trips pair Paris with one region rather than attempting a grand tour. The Loire, Normandy and Champagne are easy from the capital, while Lyon, Provence and the Côte d'Azur are a morning's TGV ride south. Drivers from Britain often loop through Normandy and Brittany from the Channel ports, or head for the Dordogne's castles and prehistoric caves.

Costs are close to the UK's. Paris hotels are expensive, but a weekday lunch menu, the formule, is good value, and rural chambres d'hôtes undercut hotels. July and August are when the French take their holidays, so the coast, campsites and motorways are packed, while Paris is quieter and some small restaurants close. Spring and early autumn bring mild weather and the grape harvest. Service can feel brisk, but a 'bonjour' before any request makes a real difference. Strikes occasionally disrupt trains and many museums close one day a week, so build some slack into an itinerary.

Top 5 highlights

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SACRED SITE

Mont-Saint-Michel

A Benedictine abbey crowns this tidal island off the Normandy coast, its lanes climbing past ramparts to the Gothic cloister of La Merveille. Stay overnight or arrive late in the afternoon to avoid the crowds, and check the tide times.
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HISTORY

Palace of Versailles

Louis XIV's palace, with the Hall of Mirrors, the State Apartments and around 800 hectares of formal gardens and fountains, is 40 minutes from central Paris on the RER C. Book a timed ticket; the palace closes on Mondays.

3

ARCHITECTURE

Loire Valley châteaux

The Loire's Renaissance châteaux include Chambord, with its double-helix staircase, and Chenonceau, built on arches across the River Cher. Base yourself in Amboise or Tours and cycle sections of the Loire à Vélo route between them.

4

ADVENTURE

Chamonix and Mont Blanc

Western Europe's highest mountain towers over Chamonix. Ride the Aiguille du Midi cable car to 3,842 m for close-up views of the summit, walk the Grand Balcon trails in summer, or ski and snowboard in winter.

5

NATURE

Provence's lavender and Luberon villages

From late June to late July, lavender blooms around Sénanque Abbey and across the Valensole plateau. Combine the fields with the Luberon's hilltop villages, such as Gordes and ochre-red Roussillon, and Apt's Saturday market.

Biggest cities

LARGEST CITY

Paris

≈ 13 million people

Allow at least four days: the Louvre and Musée d'Orsay, Montmartre's lanes, the Marais and an evening walk along the Seine, with day trips to Versailles or Monet's garden at Giverny.

2ND LARGEST CITY

Lyon

≈ 2.3 million people

France's gastronomic capital has bouchons serving quenelles and andouillette, Renaissance Vieux Lyon with its hidden traboules passageways, and Roman theatres on Fourvière hill, two hours from Paris by TGV.

3RD LARGEST CITY

Marseille

≈ 1.9 million people

France's oldest city, founded by Greek sailors around 600 BC, centres on the Vieux-Port; eat bouillabaisse, visit MuCEM, then hike or take a boat to the limestone Calanques.

Ranked by urban-area population where available. Figures are rounded estimates, and sources define city limits differently, so rankings of similar-sized cities can vary.

When to go to France

Best time: **Apr–Jun, Sep–Oct.**

Jan

Feb

Mar

Apr

May

Jun

Jul

Aug

Sep

Oct

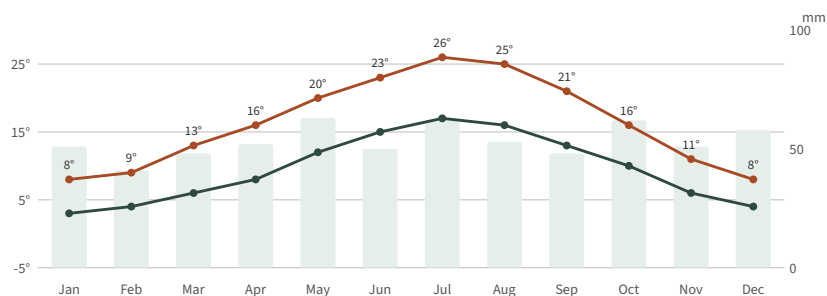
Nov

Dec

■ Best ■ Good ■ Mixed ■ Poor

Average climate in Paris

— High °C — Low °C ■ Rain (mm)



Festivals & events

Jun	Fête de la Musique On 21 June, the longest day, free concerts take over streets, squares and bars in every city and village, from brass bands and choirs to DJs playing until dawn.
Jul	Festival d'Avignon For three weeks in July, Avignon hosts one of the world's great theatre festivals, with productions in the Palais des Papes courtyard and more than a thousand shows in the fringe Off festival.
Nov-Dec	Strasbourg Christmas Market The Christkindelsmärik, dating from 1570, fills Strasbourg's squares around the cathedral from late November with stalls of mulled wine, bredele biscuits and Alsatian crafts.

How much does France cost?

SHOESTRING £65 per person / day ≈ €77.37 hostels, street food, buses	MID-RANGE £150 per person / day ≈ €179 3-star hotels, restaurants, some taxis	COMFORTABLE £320 per person / day ≈ €381 4-star+, guided trips, private transfers
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Estimates per person per day, excluding flights. Prices vary by season and city.

Food to try

Coq au vin

Chicken braised slowly in red wine with lardons, mushrooms and small onions, a Burgundian classic best eaten in a traditional bistro in the colder months.

Bouillabaisse

Marseille's fishermen's stew of rockfish in a saffron-scented broth, served in two courses with croutons and rouille; proper versions are pricey and often need ordering ahead.

Galette complète

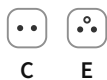
Brittany's buckwheat crêpe folded around ham, egg and grated cheese, eaten in a crêperie with a bowl of dry cider.

Getting around

SNCF's high-speed TGV inOui and budget Ouigo trains link Paris with Lyon in about two hours and Marseille in just over three; book early on SNCF Connect for the cheapest fares. TER regional trains and coaches fill the gaps, and FlixBus and BlaBlaCar Bus run long-distance routes. Hire a car for Provence, the Dordogne and Brittany, bearing in mind that motorways are tolled. Uber works in the larger cities.

Practical information

PLUGS & VOLTAGE



230V — bring a UK-to-C/E adapter

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

Telephone **112** (ambulance, fire, police)

Ambulance: **15**

Fire: **18**

Police: **17**

Deaf and hard of hearing emergency number (SMS, chat, video and fax): **114**

Source: FCDO “Getting help”

DIALLING CODE

+33

TIME ZONE

UTC+1 (standard time)

TAP WATER

Generally safe to drink

DRIVING

On the right

TIPPING

Service is included in French bills by law (service compris). Leave small change or 5–10% for good service, and round up taxi fares.

ETIQUETTE

Always say 'bonjour, madame' or 'bonjour, monsieur' when entering a shop or starting any conversation, and 'au revoir' when leaving. Lunch usually runs from noon to 2pm, and voices stay low in restaurants.

MAIN AIRPORTS

Paris Charles de Gaulle Airport (CDG), Paris; Nice Côte d'Azur Airport (NCE), Nice; Lyon–Saint-Exupéry Airport (LYS), Lyon

Visas & entry for France

Shown for a British passport.

No visa needed

You can travel without a visa to the Schengen area, which includes France, for up to 90 days in any 180-day period. This applies if you travel: as a tourist; to visit family or friends; to attend business meetings, cultural or sports events; for short-term studies or training.

The requirements for working in France are different.

From the UK government's FCDO entry requirements for British passport holders — read the full page for passport validity, permits and exceptions.

Health & vaccinations



See a travel health nurse, GP or travel clinic **6–8 weeks before you go**. Make sure routine UK vaccinations (such as MMR and diphtheria-tetanus-polio) are up to date.

RECOMMENDED FOR MOST TRAVELLERS

Tetanus

SOMETIMES ADVISED — DEPENDS ON YOUR TRIP, ACTIVITIES AND HEALTH

Bat Lyssavirus

Tick-borne encephalitis

YELLOW FEVER CERTIFICATE

No yellow fever certificate is required to enter.

MALARIA

No malaria risk

Source: TravelHealthPro (National Travel Health Network and Centre), checked 21 October 2026. This is a summary, not medical advice.

Public holidays in France

The next 12 months. Banks, offices and some sights may close, and transport and hotels get busy around these dates.

Sun 1 Nov 2026	All Saints' Day
Wed 11 Nov 2026	Armistice Day
Fri 25 Dec 2026	Christmas Day
Fri 1 Jan 2027	New Year's Day
Mon 29 Mar 2027	Easter Monday
Sat 1 May 2027	Labour Day
Thu 6 May 2027	Ascension Day
Sat 8 May 2027	Victory Day
Mon 17 May 2027	Pentecost Monday
Wed 14 Jul 2027	National Day
Sun 15 Aug 2027	Assumption Day

National holidays only. Dates based on lunar calendars can move by a day or two depending on official announcements.

Useful phrases in French

ENGLISH	FRENCH	SAY IT
Hello	Bonjour	bon-ZHOOR
Thank you	Merci	mair-SEE
Please	S'il vous plaît	seel voo PLAY
Excuse me	Excusez-moi	ex-KOO-zay MWAH
How much is this?	C'est combien ?	say kom-BYAN

Know before you go

- Eurostar from London St Pancras reaches Paris Gare du Nord in about two hours twenty minutes. Fares rise steeply closer to departure, so book as soon as your dates are fixed.
- Many big museums close one day a week: the Louvre on Tuesdays, the Musée d'Orsay and Versailles on Mondays. Book timed tickets online, especially for the Louvre.
- Driving a UK car into Paris, Lyon, Strasbourg and other low-emission zones requires a Crit'Air sticker; order it only from the official certificat-air.gouv.fr site, as copycat sites charge more.

