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FRANCE


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Nantes
Dijon
Tours
SWITZ.
FRANCE
Limoges
Lyons
Bay of Biscay
Mont Blanc 4807m
Grenoble
ITALY
Bordeaux
Massif Central
Avignon
Nice
MONACO
Bayonne
Toulouse
Côte d'Azur
Cannes
Marseilles
ANDORRA
Pyrenees
Corsica
SPAIN
MEDITERRANEAN SEA
Ajaccio

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1 CONTACT ADDRESSES

Location: Western Europe.

Note: For information on French Overseas Departments, Overseas Territories and Overseas Collectivités Territoriales, consult the French Overseas Possessions section. See also the individual sections on French Guiana, Guadeloupe, Martinique, New Caledonia and Réunion.

Direction du Tourisme
(French Government Tourist Office)
2 rue Linois, 75740 Paris, CEDEX 15, France
Tel: (1) 44 37 36 00. Fax: (1) 44 37 36 36.
Web site: http://www.tourisme.gouv.fr

Maison de la France
(Tourist Information Agency)
20 avenue de l'Opéra, 75041 Paris, CEDEX 01, France
Tel: (1) 42 96 70 00. Fax: (1) 42 96 70 11. E-mail: admin@france.com
Web site: http://www.franceguide.com

Embassy of the French Republic
58 Knightsbridge, London SW1X 7JT
Tel: (020) 7201 1000. Fax: (020) 7201 1004.
E-mail: press@ambafrance.org.uk
Web site: http://www.ambafrance.org.uk

French Consulate

2 GENERAL

(Visa Section)
6A Cromwell Place, PO Box 57, London SW7 2EW
Tel: (020) 7838 2050 or (09001) 887 733 (visa information service; calls cost 60p per minute) or 7838 2051 (visa applicaitons in progress). Fax: (020) 7838 2046 or (09001) 669 932 (visa application forms by fax; calls cost 60p per minute). Opening hours: 0900-1000 and 1330-1430 (closed on French and British public holidays).
Consulate General also in: Scotland (tel: (0131) 225 7954; fax: (0131) 225 8975).

French Embassy
(Cultural Section)
23 Cromwell Road, London SW7 2EL
Tel: (020) 7838 2055. Fax: (020) 7838 2088.
E-mail: francealc@ambafrance.org.uk
Web site: http://www.francealacarte.org.uk
Opening hours: 0900-1300 and 1400-1800 Monday to Friday.

Maison de la France
(French Government Tourist Office)
178 Piccadilly, London W1D 9AL
Tel: (09068) 244 123 (information line; calls cost 60p per minute). Fax: (020) 7493 6594. E-mail: info@mdlf.co.uk
Web site: http://www.franceguide.com

The following deal with specific regions of France (trade enquiries only):

Picardie Tourist Information
Tel: (020) 7836 2232 (brochure line). Fax: (020) 7240 8999. E-mail: picardie@thehatfactory.com
Web site: http://www.picardiepauses.co.uk

Normandy Tourist Board
Tel: (0117) 986 0386. Fax: (0117) 986 0379. E-mail: normandy@imaginet.fr
Web site: http://www.normandy-tourism.org

British Embassy
35 rue du Faubourg St Honoré, 75383 Paris, CEDEX 08, France
Consular section: 18 bis rue d'Anjou, 75008 Paris, France
Tel: (1) 44 51 31 00 or 44 51 33 01 (visa section). Fax: (1) 44 51 32 88 or 44 51 31 28 (consular section) or 44 51 31 28 (visa section).
Web site: http://www.amb-grandebretagne.fr
All post should be addressed to the main British Embassy.
Consulates General in: Bordeaux, Lille, Lyon and Marseille.

Embassy of the French Republic
4101 Reservoir Road, NW, Washington, DC 20007
Tel: (202) 944 6000. Fax: (202) 944 6040 or 944 6148 (consular section). E-mail: info@amb-wash.fr or visas-washington@amb-wash.fr
Web site: http://www.info-france-usa.org
Consulates General in: Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, Miami, New Orleans, New York (tel: (212) 606 3689 or (recorded information) 606 3688) and San Francisco.

French Government Tourist Office
444 Madison Avenue, 16th Floor, New York, NY 10022
Tel: (212) 838 7800 or (1 410) 286 8310. Fax: (212) 838 7855.
Web site: http://www.francetourism.com

Embassy of the United States of America
2 avenue Gabriel, 75008 Paris, France
Consular section: 2, rue St Florentin, 75008 Paris, France
Tel: (1) 43 12 22 22 or 43 12 48 40 (US citizens services). Fax: (1) 42 61 61 40 (American services) or 43 12 46 08 (consular public enquiries).
Web site: http://www.amb-usa.fr
Consulates General in: Marseille and Strasbourg. Consular Agency in: Nice.

Embassy of the French Republic
42 Sussex Drive, Ottawa, Ontario K1M 2C9
Tel: (613) 789 1795. Fax: (613) 562 3704. E-mail: consulat@amba-ottawa.fr or presse@amba-ottawa.fr
Web site: http://www.ambafrance-ca.org
Consulates General in: Montréal, Québec, Toronto, Monckton and Vancouver.

French Government Tourist Office
Suite 490, 1981 Avenue McGill College, Montréal, Québec H3A 2W9
Tel: (514) 288 2026. Fax: (514) 845 4868. E-mail: mfrance@attcanada.net
Web site: http://www.franceguide.com

Canadian Embassy

35 avenue Montaigne, 75008 Paris, France
Tel: (1) 44 43 29 00 or 44 43 29 16 (immigration and visas). Fax: (1) 44 43 29 93 (immigration and visas).
Web site: http://www.amb-canada.fr
Honorary Consulates in: Lyon, Nice, St Pierre (St Pierre et Miquelon), Monaco and Strasbourg.

Country dialling code: 33.

General

Area: 543,965 sq km (210,025 sq miles).

Population: 58,416,500 (1998).

Population Density: 107.4 per sq km.

Capital: Paris. Population: 2,115,757 (1999).

Geography: France, the largest country in Europe, is bounded to the north by the English Channel (La Manche), the northeast by Belgium and Luxembourg, the east by Germany, Switzerland and Italy, the south by the Mediterranean (with Monaco as a coastal enclave between Nice and the Italian frontier), the southwest by Spain and Andorra, and the west by the Atlantic Ocean. The island of Corsica, southeast of Nice, is made up of two départements. The country offers a spectacular variety of scenery, from the mountain ranges of the Alps and Pyrenees to the attractive river valleys of the Loire, Rhône and Dordogne and the flatter countryside in Normandy and on the Atlantic coast. The country has some 2900km (1800 miles) of coastline.

Government: Republic since 1792. Head of State: President Jacques Chirac since 1995. Head of Government: Prime Minister Lionel Jospin since 1997.

Language: French is the official language, but there are many regional dialects. Basque is spoken as a first language by some people in the southwest, and Breton by some in Brittany. Many people, particularly those connected with tourism in the major areas, will speak at least some English.

Religion: Approximately 81% Roman Catholic with a Protestant minority. Almost every religion has at least some adherents.

Time: GMT + 1 (GMT + 2 from last Sunday in March to Saturday before last Sunday in October).

Electricity: 220 volts AC, 50Hz. 2-pin plugs are widely used; adaptors recommended.

Communications:

Telephone: Full IDD is available. Country code: 33. Outgoing international code: 00. Card-only telephones are common, with pre-paid cards bought from post offices and tabacs. International calls are cheaper between 2230-0800 Monday to Friday, and from 1400 Saturday to 0800 Monday. Calls can be received from all phone boxes showing the sign of a blue bell.

Mobile telephones: Dual band in most areas. Roaming agreements exist. The use of mobile telephones is prohibited at petrol stations.

Fax: Services are widely available; many hotels have facilities.

Internet/E-mail: Public access is available at cybercafés. Roaming agreements exist. Local ISPs include wanadoo (web site: http://www.wanadoo.fr).

Post: Stamps can be purchased at post offices and tabacs. Post normally takes a couple of days to reach its destination within Europe. Post office opening hours: 0800-1900 Monday to Friday; 0800-1200 Saturday.

Press: There are many daily newspapers, the most prominent being Le Monde, Libération, France-Soir and Le Figaro. Outside the Ile-de-France, however, these newspapers are not as popular as the provincial press. International newspapers and magazines are widely available, particularly in the larger cities.

BBC World Service and Voice of America frequencies: From time to time these change.

BBC:
MHz9.4106.19512.100.648

Voice of America: MHz15.489.7701.1970.792

3 PASSPORT

	Passport Required?	*Visa Required?*	*Return Ticket Required?*
British	Yes	No	2
Australian	Yes	No	2
Canadian	Yes	No	2
USA	Yes	No	2
OtherEU	1	No	2
Japanese	Yes	No	2

Note: France is a signatory to the 1995 Schengen Agreement. For further details about passport/visa regulations within the Schengen area see the introductory section How to Use this Guide.

PASSPORTS: Passport valid for 3 months beyond length of stay required by all, except 1. nationals of EU countries, Andorra, Liechtenstein, Monaco, San Marino and Switzerland holding valid national identification cards.

VISAS: Required by all except the following for a period not exceeding 3 months:
(a) nationals of countries referred to in the chart and under passport exemptions above;
(b) nationals of Argentina, Bermuda, Bolivia, Brazil, Brunei, Chile, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Estonia, Guatemala, Honduras, Hungary, Iceland, Israel, Korea (Rep. of), Latvia, Lithuania, Malaysia, Malta, Mexico, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Singapore, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Uruguay, Vatican City and Venezuela;
(c) transit passengers continuing their journey by the same or first connecting aircraft provided holding valid onward or return documentation and not leaving the airport. Nationals of some

countries always require a transit visa, even when not leaving the airport (contact the relevant Embassy or Consulate for further details).

Note: 2.: Visitors are advised to hold return or onward tickets and proof of financial means, although this is not an absolute requirement.

Types of visa and cost: A uniform type of visa, the Schengen visa, is issued for tourist, business and private visits. Short-stay: £15-£20 for 1-30 days (single- or multiple-entry); £17-£29 for 31-90 days. Circulation (multiple-entry): £29-£90 for 1-3 years. Transit: £5-£8 (single-, double- or multiple-entry).

Note: Prices change with the prevalent exchange rate, so visitors are advised to check the exact price before travelling. Payment is accepted in cash and Pounds sterling only.

Validity: Short-stay visas are valid for 6 months from date of issue for single- or multiple entries of maximum 90 days per entry. Transit visas are valid for single- or multiple entries of maximum 5 days per entry, including the day of arrival. Visas cannot be extended; a new application must be made each time.

Application to: Consulate (or Consular section at Embassy); see address section. Travellers visiting just one Schengen country should apply to the Consulate of that country; travellers visiting more than one Schengen country should apply to the Consulate of the country chosen as the main destination or the country they will enter first (if they have no main destination).

Application requirements: (a) Passport valid for at least 3 months longer than validity of the visa with one blank page to affix visa stamp. (b) Up to 3 application forms. (c) Up to 3 passport-size photos. (d) Evidence of sufficient funds for stay. (e) Letter from employer, accountant, school or university. (f) Return ticket to country of residence. (g) In certain cases, travellers may require evidence of hotel reservations, a certificate of board and lodging to be obtained by your french host from the local town hall, means of support or proof of official invitation from host or company. (h) Evidence of medical insurance. (i) Fee; payable in cash only. (j) A letter from the applicant's employer, the last three payslips or a letter from the applicant's bank manager/solicitor if self-employed. (k) For business travellers: a letter of invitation from a french company.

Note: Postal applications are only acceptable for nationals of some countries and regions; consult the Consulate (or Consular section at the Embassy) for further information.

Working days required: For most nationals, 1-3 days. However, stateless persons, refugees and nationals of the following countries should allow at least 28 days for processing: Afghanistan, Algeria, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, Iran, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, North Korea, Palestine, Rwanda, Sudan, Surinam, Syria, Yemen. Nationals of certain countries who are resident in the UK can obtain visas at the time of application.

Temporary residence: A Work Permit may have to be obtained in France. For full details, enquire at the Consulate (or Consular section at the Embassy).

4 MONEY

Currency: 1 French Franc (FFr) = 100 centimes. Notes are in denominations of FFr500, 200, 100, 50 and 20. Coins are in denominations of FFr20, 10, 5, 2 and 1, and 50, 20, 10 and 5 centimes.

Single European currency (Euro): The Euro is now the official currency of 12 EU member states (including France) although it is currently only used as 'written money' (cheques, bank transactions, credit cards, etc). The first Euro coins and notes will be introduced in January 2002; the French Franc will still be in circulation until July 1 2002, when it will be completely replaced by the Euro. 1 Euro = FFr6.55957.

Currency exchange: Some first-class hotels are authorised to exchange foreign currency. Also look for the French equivalent of the Trustee Savings Bank, 'Crédit Mutuel' or 'Crédit Agricole', which have longer opening hours. Shops and hotels are prohibited from accepting foreign currency by law. Many UK banks offer differing exchange rates depending on the denominations of French currency being bought or sold. Travellers should check with their banks for details and current rates.

Credit cards: American Express, Diners Club,Visa and MasterCard are widely accepted. Check with your credit card company for details of merchant acceptability and other services which may be available.

Travellers cheques: Travellers cheques are accepted almost everywhere. To avoid additional exchange rate charges, travellers are advised to take travellers cheques in French Francs.

Exchange rate indicators
The following figures are included as a guide to the movements of the French Franc against Sterling and the US Dollar:
DateMay '00Aug '00Nov '00Feb '01£1.00=10.9010.6311.0710.43$1.00=7.347.087.657.14
The following figures are included as a guide to the movements of the Euro against Sterling and the US Dollar:
DateOct '99May '00Aug '00Nov '001 Euro=£0.64£0.60£0.62£0.591 Euro=$1.06$0.89$0.93$0.86

Currency restrictions: The import and export of local and foreign currency is unrestricted. Amounts over FFr50,000 have to be declared.

Banking hours: 0900-1200 and 1400-1600 Monday to Friday. Some banks close Monday and some are open Saturday. Banks close early (1200) on the day before a bank holiday; in rare cases, they may also close for all or part of the day after.

5 DUTY FREE

The following goods may be imported into France without incurring customs duty by passengers 17 years arriving from non-EU countries:
200 cigarettes or 50 cigars or 100 cigarillos or 250g of tobacco; 1 litre of spirits more than 22% or 2 litres of alcoholic beverage up to 22%; 2 litres of wine; 50g of perfume and 250ml of eau de toilette; goods up to the value of FFr1200 (FFr600 per person under 15 years of age).

Restricted items: Plants and plant products; meat and meat products from Africa; pharmaceutical products (except those needed for personal use); works of art, collectors' items and antiques.

Abolition of Duty-free Goods within the EU: On June 30 1999, the sale of duty-free alcohol and tobacco at airports and at sea was abolished in all 15 EU member states. Although there are now no limits imposed on importing tobacco and alcohol products from one EU country to another, (with the exceptions of Denmark, Finland and Sweden, where limits are imposed), travellers should note that they may be required to prove at customs that the goods purchased are for personal use only.

6 PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

Jan 1 2001 New Year's Day. Apr 16 Easter Monday. May 1 Labour Day. May 8 1945 Victory Day. May 24 Ascension Day. Jun 4 Whit Monday. Jul 14 Bastille Day. Aug 15 Assumption. Nov 1 All Saints' Day. Nov 11 Remembrance Day. Dec 25 Christmas Day. Jan 1 2002 New Year's Day. Apr 1 Easter Monday. May 1 Labour Day. May 8 1945 Victory Day. May 9 Ascension Day. May 20 Whit Monday. Jul 14 Bastille Day. Aug 15 Assumption. Nov 1 All Saints' Day. Nov 11 Remembrance Day. Dec 25 Christmas Day.

Note: In France the months of July and August are traditionally when the French take their holidays. For this reason, the less touristic parts of France are quiet during these months, while coastal resorts, especially in the south, are very crowded.

7 HEALTH

	Special Precautions	*Certificate Required*
Yellow Fever	No	No
Cholera	No	No
Typhoid and Polio	No	-
Malaria	No	-
Food and Drink	No	-

Rabies is present. For those at high risk, vaccination before arrival should be considered. If you are bitten, seek medical advice without delay. For more information, consult the Health appendix.

Health care: There is a reciprocal health agreement with the UK. On presentation of Form E111 (which must not be more than 12 months old to avoid the possibility of bureaucratic non-acceptance) at an office of the Caisse Primaire d'Assurance Maladie (Sickness Insurance Office), UK citizens are entitled to a refund of 70-80% of charges incurred for dental and medical (including hospital) treatments and around 35-65% of charges incurred for prescribed medicines. Application forms for Form E111 are obtainable from post offices. The standard of medical facilities and practitioners in France is very high but so are the fees, and health insurance is recommended - even for UK citizens.

Travel - International

AIR: The national airline is Air France (AF). Many airlines operate to France, including an increasing number of low-cost airlines from the UK.

Approximate flight times: From London to Paris is 1 hour 5 minutes; to Nice and Marseilles is 2 hours.
From Los Angeles to Paris is 15 hours 5 minutes; from New York is 8 hours (3 hours 45 minutes by Concorde); from Singapore is 15 hours 5 minutes; and from Sydney is 25 hours 5 minutes.

International airports: Paris-Charles de Gaulle (CDG) (web site: http://www.adp.fr) is 23km (14.5 miles) northeast of the city (journey time - 30 minutes). It is also known as Roissy-Charles de Gaulle. There is a coach to the city every 15 minutes. Buses and trains run to Paris Gare du Nord or Châtelet every 15-20 minutes. An RER/TGV station serves the airport directly; travel time is 35 minutes to Gare du Nord. There are also taxis to the city. Airport facilities include a bank, post office, duty-free shops, restaurants, shops and tourist information.
Paris-Orly (ORY) (web site: http://www.adp.fr) is 14km (9 miles) south of the city. Coaches and buses run to the city every 12 minutes (travel time - 25 minutes) from outside Orly Ouest. Taxis are available. Metro/RER trains run every 15 minutes from Denfert-Rochereau. (travel time - 45 minutes).
Bordeaux (BOD) (Merignac) is 12km (7 miles) west of the city. There are coaches, buses and taxis to the city.
Lille (LIL) (Lesquin) (web site: http://www.lille.aeroport.fr) is 12km (7 miles) southeast of the city. Coaches and taxis are available to the city.
Lyon (LYS) (Lyon-Saint-Exupéry) (web site: http://www.lyon.aeroport.fr) is 25km (15.5 miles) east of the city. Coaches or taxis are available to the city.
Marseille (MRS) (Marseille-Marignane) (web site: http://www.marseille-provence.aeroport.fr) is 30km (19 miles) northwest of the city. Coach service only departs to the city.
Nice (NCE) (Nice-Côte d'Azur) (web site: http://www.nice-aeroport.fr) is 6km (4 miles) west of the city. Buses depart every 20 minutes. Taxis to the city are available.
Nantes (NTE) (web site: http://www.nantes.aeroport.fr) is 20km (13 miles) south of the city. Trains and buses depart frequently to the city.
Strasbourg (SXB) (web site: http://www.strasbourg.aeroport.fr) is 12km (7 miles from the city centre (travel time - 30 minutes). Buses and taxis are available to the city.
Toulouse (TLS) (Blagnac) (web site: http://www.toulouse.aeroport.fr) is 8km (5 miles) northwest of the city. Coaches to the city depart every 20 minutes. Taxis are available to the city.
Facilities at the airports listed above include bank/bureau de change, duty-free shops and restaurant/bar.
There are also small airports with some international flights at Biarritz, Caen, Deauville (St Gatien), Le Havre, Montpellier, Morlaix, Rennes and Quimper.

SEA: The following companies run regular cross-channel ferries (journey times are given in brackets):
P&O Stena Line (tel: (0990) 980 980; web site: http://www.posl.com) from Dover to Calais (1 hour and 15 minutes);
P&O European Ferries (tel: (0990) 980 555; web site: http://www.poportsmouth.com) from Portsmouth to Le Havre (5 hours and 30 minutes during the day and 8 hours at night) and from Portsmouth to Cherbourg (5 hours);
Seafrance (tel: (01304 212 696); web site: http://www.seafrance.com) from Dover to Calais (1 hour and 30 minutes);
Hoverspeed Fast Ferries (tel: (08705 240 241; e-mail: reservations@hoverspeed.co.uk; web site: http://www.hoverspeed.co.uk) from Dover to Calais (35 minutes by Hovercraft or 50

minutes by Seacat); from Folkstone to Boulogne (55 minutes by Seacat), with a train and coach connection to Paris; and from Newhaven to Dieppe (2 hours 15 minutes by seacat);
Brittany Ferries (tel: (09905) 360 360; web site: http://www.brittany-ferries.com) from Plymouth to Roscoff (6 hours), from Portsmouth to St Malo (9 hours), from Portsmouth to Caen (6 hours) and from Poole to Cherbourg (4 hours and 15 minutes);
Condor Ferries (tel: (01534 601 000 (Jersey) or (01481) 729 666 (Guernsey); web site: http://www.condorferries.co.uk) from Poole and Weymouth to St Malo (via Guernsey and Jersey, with toal crossing times being resepectively 5 hours and 40 minutes and 5 hours), and from Portsmouth to Guernsey and Jersey. Guernsey to St Malo takes 2 hours and 40 minutes, and Jersey to St Malo is 1 hour and 10 minutes.
P&O North Sea Ferries (tel: (01482 377 177; e-mail: info.uk@ponsf.com; web site: http://www.ponsf.com) from Hull to Zeebrugge, in Belgium (14 hours and 30 minutes).
These companies offer a variety of promotional fares and inclusive holidays for short breaks and shopping trips. Passenger and roll-on/roll-off ferry links to and from North Africa and Sardinia are provided by Southern Ferries/Société Nationale Maritime Corse-Mediterranée (SNCM) (see Travel - Internal section).

RAIL: International trains run from the channel ports and Paris to destinations throughout Europe. For up-to-date routes and timetables, contact French Railways (SNCF) (tel: (1) 53 90 20 20; web site: http://www.sncf.fr or http://12-25.sncf.fr) or in the UK, Rail Europe (tel: (08705) 848 848; web site: http://www.raileurope.co.uk). The channel tunnel: Eurostar is a service provided by the railways of Belgium, the UK and France, operating direct high-speed trains from London (Waterloo International) to Paris (Gare du Nord) and to Brussels (Midi/Zuid). It takes 3 hours from London to Paris (via Lille). When the high-speed rail link from London through Kent to the tunnel is fully operational (expected 2007 at the earliest), the travel time between the two capitals will be reduced to two and a half hours. The Eurostar trains are equipped with standard-class and first-class seating, buffet, bar and telephones, and are staffed by multi-lingual, highly trained personnel. Pricing is competitive with the airlines, and seats range from Premium First and Business to Standard. Children aged between 4-11 years benefit from a special fare in first class as well as in standard class. Children under 4 years old travel free but cannot be guaranteed a seat. Wheelchair users and blind passengers together with one companion get a special fare. For further information and reservations contact Eurostar (tel: (01233) 617 599 (travel agents) or (0990) 186 186 (public; within the UK) or (01233) 617 575 (public; outside the UK); web site: http://www.eurostar.com); or Rail Europe (tel: (08705) 848 848). Travel agents can obtain refunds for unused tickets from Eurostar Trade Refunds, 2nd Floor, Kent House, 81 Station Road, Ashford, Kent TN23 1PD. Complaints and comments may be sent to Eurostar Customer Relations, Eurostar House, Waterloo Station, London SE1 8SE. General enquiries and information requests must be made by telephone.

ROAD: There are numerous and excellent road links with all neighbouring countries. Eurolines run regular coach services to France from the UK (tel: (08705) 143 219; fax: (01582) 400 694; e-mail: welcome@eurolines.co.uk; web site: http://www.eurolines.co.uk). See above for car ferry information. For documentation and traffic regulations, see the Travel - Internal section. The channel tunnel: All road vehicles are carried through the tunnel in Le Shuttle trains running between the two terminals, one near Folkestone in Kent, with direct road access from the M20, and one just outside Calais with links to the A16/A26 motorway (Exit 13). Each shuttle is made up of 12 single- and 12 double-deck carriages, and vehicles are directed to single-deck or double-deck carriages depending on their height. All vehicles from motorcycles to campers can be accommodated. Passengers generally travel with their vehicles. Heavy goods vehicles are carried on special wagons with a separate passenger coach for the drivers. Terminals and shuttles are well-equipped for disabled passengers. Passenger Terminal buildings contain shops, restaurants, bureaux de change and other amenities. The journey through the tunnel takes about 35 minutes from platform to platform. Shuttles run every 75 minutes, 24 hours per day and three to four

trains run each hour at peak times. Services run every day of the year. By contacting Eurotunnel Customer Information in Coquelle (tel: (3) 21 00 61 00) as they approach the French terminal, motorists can find out when the next shuttle leaves and how busy the service is. Motorists pass through customs and immigration before they board, with no further checks on arrival. Fares are charged according to length of stay and time of year. The price remains constant throughout the day and applies to the car, regardless of the number of passengers or size of the car. Promotional deals are frequently available, especially outside the peak holiday seasons. Tickets may be purchased in advance from travel agents, or from Eurotunnel Customer Services in France or the UK with a credit card. For further information, brochures and reservations, contact Eurotunnel Customer Services UK (tel: 0990 353 535).

Travel - Internal

AIR: Air France flies between Paris (from both Orly and Charles de Gaulle airports) and 45 cities and towns. It also connects regional airports including those in Corsica with those on the mainland. For information, contact Air France (tel: (0) 802 802 802 (from France only) or 802 802 802 (from abroad); web site: http://www.airfrance.fr (in French) or http://www.airfrance.com (in English).

Note: Details of independent airlines may be obtained from the French Government Tourist Office.

SEA/RIVER: There are almost 9000km (5600 miles) of navigable waterways in France, and all of these present excellent opportunities for holidays. Cruising boats may be chartered with or without crews, ranging in size from the smallest cabin cruiser up to converted commercial barges (péniches), which can accommodate up to 24 people and require a crew of eight. Hotel boats, large converted barges with accommodation and restaurant, are also available in some areas, with a wide choice of price and comfort. For further information, contact the national or regional tourist board.
The main canal areas are the north (north and northeast of Paris) where most of the navigable rivers are connected with canals; the Seine (from Auxerre to Le Havre, but sharing space with commercial traffic); the east, where the Rhine and Moselle and their tributaries are connected by canals; in Burgundy, where the Saône and many old and picturesque canals crisscross the region; the Rhône (a pilot is recommended below Avignon); the Midi (including the Canal du Midi, connecting the Atlantic with the Mediterranean); and Brittany and the Loire on the rivers Vilaine, Loire, Mayenne and Sarthe and the connecting canals. Each of these waterways offers a magnificent variety of scenery, a means of visiting many historic towns, villages and sites and, because of the slow pace (8kph/5mph), an opportunity to learn much about rural France.
State-run car ferries known as 'BACs' connect the larger islands on the Atlantic coast with the mainland; they also sail regularly across the mouth of the Gironde. The island of Corsica is served by passenger and roll-on/roll-off ferries operated by the Société Nationale Maritime Corse-**Mediterranée (SNCM), 61 boulevard des Dames, 13002 Marseilles (tel**: (4) 91 56 32 00; fax: (4) 91 56 36 36; web site: http://www.sncm.fr). Services run from Marseilles and Nice to Ajaccio, Propriano and Bastia on the island.

RAIL: French Railways (SNCF) operate a nationwide network with 34,200km (21,250 miles) of line, over 12,000km (7500 miles) of which has been electrified. The TGV (Train à grande vitesse) is running on new high-speed lines from Paris to Brittany and southwest France at 300kph (186mph) and to Lyons and the southeast at 270kph (168mph).
The SNCF is divided into five systems (East, North, West, Southeast and Southwest). The transport in and around Paris is the responsibility of a separate body, the RATP at place **Lachambeaudie, 75012 Paris (tel**: (1) 49 28 49 05) or at place de la Madeleine (tel: (1) 40

06 71 45; web site: http://www.ratp.fr) for general information. This organisation provides a fully integrated bus, rail and métro network for the capital.

Tickets bought abroad: There is a range of special tickets on offer to foreign visitors, which usually have to be bought before entering France; some are only available in North America; others are unique to Australia and New Zealand. There are also special European Rail and Drive packages.

Tickets bought in France: It is essential to validate (composter) tickets bought in France by using the orange automatic date-stamping machine at the platform entrance.

Note: There are various different kinds of tickets (including Family and Young Person's Tickets) offering reductions which can usually be bought in France. In general, the fares charged will depend on what day of the week and what time of the day one is travelling; timetables giving further details are available from SNCF offices.

The blue, white and red tariff calendar: The French Railways' tariff calendar is colour-coded; the colour of a particular period can affect the price of the ticket. The system of special fares, reductions, restrictions and so on is complex, as one would expect from such a highly sophisticated railway network. Enquire at SNCF offices for more details. The following breakdown of the tariff is included as a guide:
Blue (Off-peak): Normally 1000 Monday to 1200 Friday; 2400 Saturday to 1500 Sunday.
White (Standard): Normally 1200 Friday to 2400 Saturday; 1500 Sunday to 1000 Monday, plus some public holidays.
Red (Peak): About 20 days in the year when no reduction is available. Apply to Rail Europe in London (tel: (08705) 848 848 or (08705) 300 003; travel trade only) or any SNCF station for details.

Motorail: (car sleeper) services are operated from Boulogne, Calais, Dieppe and Paris to all main holiday areas in both summer and winter. Motorail information and booking is available from Rail Europe (tel: (08705) 848 848 or (08705) 300 003; travel trade only).

Ancillary services: include coach tours and excursions throughout France, self-drive car hire and bicycle hire.

Skiing holidays: SNCF, in association with the French Association of Resorts Sports Goods Retailers (AFMASS), organise skiing holidays. Packages are marketed only in France, contact SNCF on arrival.

For all services: Full information is available from French Railways (SNCF). In the UK, timetables, fares, information and bookings can also be obtained through Rail Europe or the French Government Tourist Office (see address section).

Road: France has over 9000km (5600 miles) of motorways (autoroutes), some of which are free whilst others are toll roads (autoroutes à péage). Prices vary depending on the route, and caravans are extra. There are more than 28,500km (17,700 miles) of national roads (routes nationales). Motorways bear the prefix 'A' and national roads 'N'. Minor roads (marked in yellow on the Michelin road maps) are maintained by the départements rather than by the Government and are classed as 'D' roads. It is a good idea to avoid travelling any distance by road on the last few days of July/first few days of August and the last few days of August/first few days of September, as during this time the bulk of the holiday travel takes place and the roads can be jammed for miles. A sign bearing the words Sans Plomb on a petrol pump shows that it

dispenses unleaded petrol. The Bison Futé map provides practical information and is available from the French Government Tourist Office.

Bus: Information on services may be obtained from local tourist offices. Local services outside the towns and cities are generally adequate.

Car hire: A list of agencies can be obtained at local tourist offices (Syndicats d'Initiative or Offices de Tourisme). Fly-drive arrangements are available through all major airlines. French Railways (SNCF) also offer reduced train/car-hire rates.

Caravans: These may be imported for stays of up to six months. There are special requirements for cars towing caravans which must be observed. Contact the French Government Tourist Office for details.

REGULATIONS: Traffic drives on the right. The minimum age for driving is 18. Speed limits are 50kph (31mph) in built-up areas, 90kph (56mph) outside built-up areas, 110kph (68mph) on dual carriageways separated by a central reservation, and 130kph (81mph) on motorways. Visitors who have held a driving licence for less than two years may not travel faster than 80kph (56mph) on normal roads, 100kph (62mph) on dual carriageways and 110kph (68mph) on motorways. Seat belts must be worn by all front- and rear-seat passengers. Under-tens may not travel in the front seat. A red warning triangle must be carried for use in the event of a breakdown. All headlamp beams must be adjusted for rightside driving by use of beam deflectors or (on some cars) by tilting the headlamp bulbholder. France no longer stipulates yellow headlights. Snowchains are widely available, for hire or to buy. The police in France can and do fine motorists on the spot for driving offences such as speeding. Random breath tests for drinking and driving are common. Priorité à droite: particularly in built-up areas, the driver must give way to anyone coming out of a side-turning on the right. The priorité rule no longer applies at most roundabouts - the driver should now give way to cars which are already on the roundabout with the sign vous n'avez pas la priorité; but watch for signs and still exercise great caution. All roads of any significance outside built-up areas have right of way, known as Passage Protégé, and will normally be marked by signs consisting either of an 'X' on a triangular background with the words 'Passage Protégé' underneath, or a broad arrow, or a yellow diamond. For further details on driving in France, a brochure called The Traveller in France is available from French Government Tourist Offices and must be ordered by telephone (see address section). It contains a section on motoring.

Documentation: A national driving licence is acceptable. EU nationals taking their own cars to France are strongly advised to obtain a Green Card. Without it, insurance cover is limited to the minimum legal cover in France; the Green Card tops this up to the level of cover provided by the car owner's domestic policy. The car's registration document must also be carried.

URBAN: Urban public transport is excellent. There are comprehensive bus systems in all the larger towns. There are also tramways, trolleybuses and an underground in Marseilles; trolleybuses, an underground and a funicular in Lyon; and automated driverless trains in Lille, where there is also a tramway. There are tramway services in St Etienne and Nantes and trolleybuses in Grenoble, Limoges and Nancy. The systems are easy to use, with pre-purchase tickets and passes. Good publicity material and maps are usually available.

Paris: RER (fast suburban services). Line A: St Germain-en-Laye to Boissy-St-Leger or Marne-la-Vallée; Line B: Remy-les-Chevreuses to Roissy via Châtelet-les-Halles and the Gare du Nord; Line C: Gare d'Orléans-Austerlitz to Versailles; Line D: Creil to Melun; Line E: Haussmann-St-Lazare to Chelles-Gourney. These lines are divided into fare stages and these vary according to distance, except within the metropolitan area where the same system applies as on the métro. There is

also an extensive network of conventional suburban services run by French Railways (SNCF), with fare structure and ticketing integrated with the other modes of public transport.

Bus: The same tickets are used as on the métro, but bus routes are divided into fare stages (sections). Inside Paris, one ticket covers up to two fare stages and two cover two or three stages or more. The first bus leaves at 0600 and the last bus at 2100, except on certain lines which run until 0300. Timetables are posted at bus stops and in bus shelters. Fares and tickets have been standardised with those of private operators in the suburban areas. 2- to 4- or 7-day passes (Billets de Tourisme) entitle travellers to any number of journeys for the corresponding number of days on all Paris bus and métro lines (first-class on métro and RER/RATP), with the exception of minibuses, special bus services, and RER/SNCF lines. These are available in Paris from the RATP Tourist Office at 54 quai de la Rapée (tel: (1) 44 68 20 20 or (08) 36 68 77 14 (within France only); web site: http://www.ratp.fr) or from 50 of the métro stations, all seven main-line railway stations and certain banks. Carte Orange monthly passes (for which a passport-size photograph is required) are valid for any number of journeys for a calendar month within a given radius on Paris buses, métro and RER, suburban (SNCF) railways and some suburban buses (RATP). These are available at any Paris or suburban railway or métro station, Paris bus stations and certain specially licensed shops. Children under four years of age travel free on buses and underground, while children between 4-12 years travel half-price.

Taxi: Day and night rates are shown inside each cab. There are extra charges on journeys to and from racecourses, stations and airports and for luggage.

Private car: In the centre of Paris there are parking meters; otherwise parking time is restricted (zone bleue). Car parks charging a fee are plentiful all over Paris and on the outskirts.

8 ACCOMMODATION

HOTELS: Room and all meals, ie full-board or pension terms, are usually offered for a stay of three days or longer. Half-board or demi-pension (room, breakfast and one meal) terms are usually available outside the peak holiday period. They are not expensive but adhere to strict standards of comfort. Hotels charge around 30% extra for a third bed in a double room. For children under 12, many chains will provide another bed in the room of the parents free. Logis de France are small- or medium-sized, inexpensive and often family-run hotels which provide good, clean, basic and comfortable accommodation with a restaurant attached. They publish a guide listing all the hotels and the amenities offered. Relais-Châteaux are châteaux hotels. Further information can be obtained from the Union des Métiers et des Industries Hôtelières, 22 rue d'Anjou, 75008 Paris (tel: (1) 44 94 19 94; fax: (1) 42 65 16 21; fnih@imaginet.fr).

Paris: Hotel bookings can be made in person through tourist offices at stations or at the Paris Tourist Office, 127 avenue des Champs-Elysées, 75008 Paris (tel: (1) 49 52 53 54; fax: (1) 49 52 53 10). Further information on hotels and other accommodation in France is available through the Fédération Nationale des Logis de France, 83 avenue d'Italie, 75013 Paris (tel: (1) 45 84 70 00; fax: (1) 45 83 59 66; e-mail: info@logis-de-france.fr; web site: http:///www.logis-de-france.fr).

Guides: Hôtels de Tourisme publishes an annual directory of its members available from the French Government Tourist Office. Regional lists or hotels are available, as well as the Logis de France guide and various chain/association guides from the French Government Tourist Office and bookshops. The Tourist Office publishes guides to hotels in Paris and the Ile-de-France, available free of charge.

Grading: Hôtels de Tourisme are officially graded into five categories according to the quality of the accommodation, which are fixed by government regulation and checked by the Préfecture of the Départements: 4-star L: Luxury. 4-star: Deluxe. 3-star: First class. 2-star: Standard. 1-star: Budget.
Logis de France are subject to a specific code usually above basic requirements for their grade and are inspected regularly to ensure that they conform to the standards laid down.

SELF-CATERING: Gîtes de France are holiday homes (often old farmhouses) in the country, all of which conform to standards regulated by the non-profitmaking National Federation. Contact the Fédération Nationale des Gîtes de France, 59 rue de St Lazare, 75009 Paris (tel: (1) 49 70 75 75; fax: (1) 42 81 28 53; web site: http://www.gites-de-france.fr).
Villas, Houses and Apartments Rental: Villas and houses can be rented on the spot. Local Syndicats d'Initiative can supply a complete list of addresses of local rental agencies. Tourists staying in France for over a month may prefer to live in an apartment, rather than in a hotel. For information about apartments to rent, apply to: Fédération Nationale de l'Immobilier, 129 rue du Faubourg St-Honoré, 75008 Paris (tel: (1) 44 20 77 00; fax: (1) 42 25 80 84; e-mail: fnaim@fnaim.fr; web site: http://www.fnaim.fr).

CHATEAUX HOLIDAYS: An association, Château-Accueil, publishes a list of châteaux offering accommodation suitable for families. Contact the French Government Tourist Office for further information.

CAMPING/CARAVANNING: There are 7000 campsites throughout France. A few have tents and caravans for hire. Prices vary according to location, season and facilities. All graded campsites will provide water, toilet and washing facilities. Touring caravans may be imported for stays of up to six consecutive months. There are 100 British companies offering camping holidays in France. The French Government Tourist Office has a full list of tour operators who run all types of tours, including camping and special interest holidays. The following camping and caravan site is open throughout the year: Paris-Ouest Bois de Boulogne, route du Bord de l'Eau, 75016 Paris.

Note: Cars towing caravans are not allowed to drive within the boundaries of the périphérique (the Paris ring road).

Youth Hostels: There are hundreds of these in France, offering very simple accommodation at very low prices. There are hostels in all major towns. Stays are usually limited to three or four nights or a week in Paris. Hostels are open to all members of the National Youth Hostel Association upon presentation of a membership card. Lists are available from national youth hostel organisations.

9 RESORTS & EXCURSIONS

Tourism is an industry of considerable importance in France and anything more than the briefest sketch of the country's many attractions is beyond the scope of this guide. This section has been divided into a number of sub-sections by region, each containing basic descriptions of regional **cuisine, culture, history and scenery**: Paris & Ile-de-France; Brittany; Normandy; Nord/Pas de Calais & Picardy; Champagne & Ardennes; Lorraine, Vosges & Alsace; Burgundy & Franche-Comté; Auvergne & Limousin; Val de Loire; Western Loire; Aquitaine & Poitou-Charentes; Languedoc-Roussillon; Rhône/Savoie & Dauphiny; Midi-Pyrénées; Côte d'Azur & Provence; Corsica. As a result of historical circumstances interesting places to visit are often situated along

the courses of rivers; for instance the Loire, the Rhône, the Seine or the Dordogne. This, effectively, often provides ready-made itineraries for the visitor.

Note: The enclave of Monaco has its own section in the World Travel Guide, as do the French Overseas Departments and many of the other French overseas possessions; see the relevant sections for details.

Paris & Ile-de-France

Paris: Paris is one of the world's great cities and is easy to negotiate even on the first visit. The périphérique and boulevard circulaire ring roads enclose a core of 105 sq km (40 sq miles), the heart of which is small enough to walk across in an afternoon. There is an extensive (and cheap) métro network, augmented by an efficient rapid transit system (the RER). The ring roads roughly follow the line of the 19th-century city walls and within them are most of the well-known sights, shops and entertainments. Beyond the ring roads is an industrial and commercial belt, then a broad ring of suburbs, mostly of recent construction.
There are more than 80 museums and perhaps 200 art galleries in Paris. La Carte is a pass providing free admission to about 60 national and municipal museums in the Paris area. Visitors should note that most museums are closed for public holidays and for one day in the working week, usually Monday or Tuesday. Admission is half-price Sunday; concessions are available for those under 25 and persons over 65 years. The tourist office can supply details.
Central Paris contains fine architecture from every period in a long and rich history, together with every amenity known to science and every entertainment yet devised. The oldest neighbourhood is the Ile-de-la-Cité, an island on a bend in the Seine where the Parisii, a Celtic tribe, settled in about the 3rd century BC. The river was an effective defensive moat and the Parisii dominated the area for several centuries before being displaced by the Romans in about 52BC. The island is today dominated by the magnificent cathedral of Notre-Dame. Beneath it is the Crypte Archéologique, housing well-mounted displays of Paris' early history. Having sacked the Celtic city, the Gallo-Romans abandoned the island and settled on the heights along the Rive Gauche (Left Bank), in the area now known as the Latin Quarter (Boulevards St Michel and St Germain). **The naming of this district owes nothing to the Roman city**: when the university was moved from the Cité to the left bank in the 13th century, Latin was the common language among the 10,000 students who gathered there from all over the known world. The Latin Quarter remains the focus of most student activity (the Sorbonne is here) and there are many fine bookshops and commercial art galleries. The Cluny Museum houses some of the finest medieval European tapestries to be found anywhere, including 'The Field of the Cloth of Gold'. At the western end of the Boulevard St Germain is the Orsay Museum, a superb collection of 19th- and early 20th-century art located in a beautifully restored railway station.
Other Left Bank attractions include the Panthéon, the basilica of St Séverin, the Palais and Jardin de Luxembourg, the Hôtel des Invalides (containing Napoleon's tomb), the Musée Rodin and St Germain-des-Prés. Continuing westwards from the Quai d'Orsay past the Eiffel Tower and across the Seine onto the Right Bank, the visitor encounters a collection of museums and galleries known as the Trocadero, a popular meeting place for young Parisians. A short walk to the north is the Place Charles de Gaulle, known to Parisians as the Etoile and to tourists as the site of the Arc de Triomphe. It is also at the western end of that most elegant of avenues, the Champs-Elysées (Elysian Fields), justly famous for its cafés, commercial art galleries and sumptuous shops. At the other end of the avenue, the powerful axis is continued by the Place de la Concorde, the Jardin des Tuileries (where model sailing boats may be rented by the hour) and finally the Louvre.
The Palais du Louvre has recently been extensively reorganised and reconstructed, the most controversial addition to the old palace being a pyramid with 666 panes of glass, which juxtaposes the ultra-modern with the classical façade of the palace. The best time to see the pyramid is after dark, when it is illuminated. The Richelieu Wing of the palace was inaugurated in

1993, marking the completion of the second stage of the redevelopment programme. In 1996, a labyrinth of subterranean galleries, providing display areas, a conference and exhibition centre, design shops and restaurants was opened. The Carrousel and Tuileries Gardens have been re-landscaped as part of an ongoing redevelopment programme in the area.
North of the Louvre are the Palais Royal, the Madeleine and l'Opéra. To the east is Les Halles, a shopping and commercial complex built on the site of the old food market. It is at the intersection of several métro lines and is a good starting point for a tour of the city. There are scores of restaurants in the maze of small streets around Les Halles; every culinary style is available at prices to suit every pocket. Further east, beyond the Boulevard Sebastopol, is the post-modern Georges Pompidou Centre of Modern Art (also known as the Beaubourg). It provides a steady stream of surprises in its temporary exhibition spaces (which, informally, include the pavement outside, where lively and often bizarre street-performers gather) and houses a permanent collection of 20th-century art. The Centre Pompidou is Paris' premier tourist attraction, having surpassed the Eiffel Tower in popularity in its first year. East again, in the Marais district, are the Carnavalet and Picasso Museums, housed in magnificent town houses dating from the 16th and 18th centuries respectively. Still further east, the magnificent Biblothèque François Mitterrand, one of the world's most spectacular libraries, can be reached via a new métro connection (ligne 14) whose beautiful high-tech trains alone (they are constructed mainly of glass) are worth the trip. One of the best-known districts in Paris is Montmartre, which stands on a hill overlooking the Right Bank. A funicular railway operates on the steepest part of the hill, below the Sacré-Coeur. Local entrepreneurs have long capitalised on Montmartre's romantic reputation as an artist's colony and if visitors today are disappointed to find it a well-run tourist attraction, they should bear in mind that it has been exactly that since it first climbed out of poverty in the 1890s. The legend of Montmartre as a dissolute cradle of talent was carefully stage-managed by Toulouse-Lautrec and others to fill their pockets and it rapidly transformed a notorious slum into an equally notorious circus. An earlier Montmartre legend concerns St Denis. After his martyrdom, he is said to have walked headless down the hill. The world's first Gothic cathedral, St Denis, was constructed on the spot where he collapsed. Just north of Belleville (a working-class district that produced Edith Piaf and Maurice Chevalier) at La Villete, is one of Paris' newer attractions, the City of Science and Technology. The most modern presentation techniques are used to illustrate both the history and the possible future of man's inventiveness; season tickets are available. One of the great pleasures of Paris is the great number of sidewalk cafés, now glass-enclosed in wintertime, which extends people-watching to a year-round sport in any part of the city. There are as many Vietnamese and Chinese restaurants as there are French cafés. North African eating places also abound, and dozens of American Tex-Mex eateries are scattered throughout the city. Bric-a-brac or brocante is found in a number of flea markets (marché aux puces) on the outskirts of town, notably at the Porte de Clignancourt. There are several antique centres (Louvre des Antiquaires, Village Suisse, etc) where genuine antique furniture and other objects are on sale. Amongst the larger department stores are the Printemps and the Galeries Lafayette near the Opéra, the Bazaar Hôtel de Ville (BHV) and the Samaritaine on the Right Bank and the Bon Marché on the Left Bank. The remains of the great forests of the Ile-de-France (the area surrounding Paris) can still be seen at the magnificent châteaux of Versailles, Rambouillet and Fontainebleau on the outskirts of Paris.
The Disneyland Paris Resort lies to the east of the capital, a complete vacation destination located at Marne-la-Vallée, 32km (20 miles) from Paris. The site has an area of 1943 hectares (5000 acres), one-fifth of the size of Paris, and includes hotels, restaurants, a campsite, shops and a golf course, and has as its star attraction the Disneyland Paris Theme Park. Inspired by previous theme parks, Euro Disneyland features all the famous Disney characters plus some new attractions especially produced to blend with its European home. The site is easily accessible by motorway, regional and high-speed rail services, and by air. Euro Disney lies between two major international airports, Roissy-Charles de Gaulle and Orly.

Brittany

Brittany comprises the départements of Côtes d'Armor, Finistère, Ille-et-Villaine and Morbihan. Fishing has long been the most important industry and the rocky Atlantic coastline, high tides and strong, treacherous currents demand high standards of seamanship. At Finistère (finis terrea or Land's End) the Atlantic swell can drive spouts of water up to 30m (100ft) into the air. The coastal scenery is particularly spectacular at Pointe du Raz and Perros-Guirec. The Gauls arrived on the peninsula in about 600BC. Little is known about their way of life or why they constructed the countless stone monuments to be found throughout Brittany - cromlechs, altars, menhirs and dolmens (Carnac is the supreme example of this). They were displaced by the Romans during the reign of Julius Caesar who in turn were displaced by Celts arriving from Britain in AD460. The Celts named their new land Brittanica Minor and divided it into the coastal area, l'Ar Mor (the country of the sea), and the inland highlands, l'Ar Coat (the country of the woods). The two areas in Brittany are still referred to as l'Armor and l'Argoat. The Celts were master stonemasons, as may be seen by the many surviving calvaires, elaborately carved stone crosses. Brittany emerged from the Dark Ages as an independent duchy. A series of royal marriages eventually brought Brittany into France and by 1532 the perpetual union of the Duchy of Brittany with France was proclaimed. Despite the rugged coastline, it is possible to enjoy a conventional beach holiday in Brittany. The Emerald Coast, a region of northern Brittany centred on Dinard, has **many fine bathing beaches. The beach resorts are often named after little-known saints**: St Enogat, St Laumore, St Brill, St Jacut, St Cast, etc. There are also bathing beaches in the bay of St Brieuc, including Val André, Etables and St Quay. Brittany's main attractions are her wild beauty and the unique Breton culture. In general, coastal areas have retained a more characteristically Breton way of life than the hills inland. Elaborate Breton head-dresses are still worn in some parts, the style varying slightly from village to village. Breton religious processions and the ceremonies of the pardons that take place in a number of communities at various times of the year may have changed little since Celtic times. In the region around Plouha many of the inhabitants still speak Breton, a language evolved from Celtic dialects. The coast from Paimpol consists of colossal chunks of rock, perilous to shipping, as the many lighthouses suggest. The very pleasant villages and beaches of Perros-Guirec, Trégastel or Trébeurden contrast with the wild and rocky shoreline.

Near the base of the peninsula, at Aber Vrac'h and Aber Benoit, the ocean is caught and churned up in deep, winding chasms penetrating far inland. Further along the coast is the huge and sprawling port of Brest, possessing one of Europe's finest natural harbours which has a 13th-century castle. The canal running from Brest to Nantes makes a very pleasant journey either by hired boat or walking or on horseback, although not all of the route is navigable by water. The interior consists of wooded hills and farms, buttes (knolls) with fine views, short rivers and narrow valleys. Many of the so-called mountains are merely undulating verdant dunes, barely 300m (1000ft) high. They are nonetheless remnants of the oldest mountain chain on the planet. Breton architecture is perhaps more humble than in other parts of France, being more akin to that of a village in England or Wales. Inland, there are several impressive castles and many walled towns and villages. The churches are small and simple. For the most part, Brittany benefits from the warmth of the Gulf Stream all year round, but the tourist season runs from June to September. The countryside blazes with flowers in the spring, attracting many varieties of birdlife. The city of Rennes, the ancient capital of Brittany, is a good base from which to explore the highlands; sights include the Palais de Justice, the castle, the Musée des Beaux-Arts and the Musée de Bretagne, which seeks to preserve and foster all things Breton. Some of Brittany's most productive farms are close to the northern shore. Fertilized with seaweed, they produce fine potatoes, cabbage, cauliflower, artichokes, peas, string beans and strawberries. The quality of locally-produced ingredients lends itself to the simple Breton cuisine, which brings out natural flavours rather than concealing them with elaborate sauces. Raw shellfish (including oysters), lobster, lamb and partridge are particularly good. The salt meadows of lower Brittany add a distinctive flavour to Breton livestock and game. Crêpes (pancakes) are a regional **speciality and there are two distinct varieties**: a sweet dessert crêpe served with sugar,

honey, jam, jelly or a combination (eg suzette); and the savoury sarrasin variety, made from buckwheat flour and served with eggs, cheese, bacon or a combination of several of these (the crêpe is folded over the ingredients and reheated). They can be bought ready-made in the local shops. Little or no cheese is produced in Brittany, but some of the finest butter in the world comes from here - it is slightly salted, unlike the butter from the other regions of France. Cider is frequently drunk with food, as well as wine. The popular wine, Muscadet, comes from the extreme southern point of Brittany, at the head of the Loire Estuary, near Nantes. It is a dry, fruity white wine that goes very well with shellfish, especially oysters.

Normandy

Normandy contains five départements: Seine Maritime, Calvados, Manche, Eure and Orne, all but the last two touching on the sea. Its southern border is the River Couesnon which has, over the years, shifted its course as it flows over almost flat country, gradually moving south of Mont-Saint-Michel, one of Europe's best-known architectural curiosities. Mont-Saint-Michel and its bay are on the Natural and Cultural World Heritage List drawn up by UNESCO. The tides are phenomenal. At their peak, there is a difference of about 15m (50ft) between the ebb and the flow, the height of a 5-storey building. The sands in the bay are flat and, when the tides are at their highest, the sea runs in over a distance of some 24km (15 miles) forming a wave about 70cm (2ft) deep. The sandbank changes from tide to tide and, if the legend of the sea entering the bay at the speed of a galloping horse is perhaps a slight exaggeration, the danger of quicksand is real enough. The present Abbey of Saint-Michel was built in the 8th century by Bishop Aubert; his skull bears the mark of the finger of Saint Michel, the archangel Michael. Cabourg is the Balbec in Proust's novels. Maupassant and Flaubert included Norman scenes in their novels and Monet, Sisley and Pissaro painted scenes of the coast and the countryside. Deauville - with its beach, casino, golf course and race track - is the social capital of the area. Bayeux is worth a visit for the fantastic tapestry - there is nothing like it in the world. The landing beaches and Second World War battlefields are remembered by excellent small museums in Arromanches (the landings) and Bayeux (battle of Normandy). There is also a 'peace museum' in Caen, with its beautiful Romanesque church and ruins of an enormous castle, founded by William the Conqueror. Other monuments worth visiting include the 14th-century Church of St Etienne, the Church of St Pierre (Renaissance) and the Abbaye aux Dames. There is also a museum of local crafts from the Gallo-Roman period to the present.
The cross-Channel terminus and port of Dieppe has attractive winding streets and a 15th-century castle, housing the Musée de Dieppe. There are some beautiful châteaux in Normandy, particularly along the route between Paris and Rouen. They include the Boury-en-Vexin, Bizy at Vernon, Gaillon, Gaillard-les-Andelys, Vascoeuil and Martinville. Along the same route are found a number of other sites classed monument historique; the Claude Monet House and garden in Giverny, the Abbey de Martemer (Lisors) and the village of Lyon-la-Fôret. All of these merit a detour. The ancient capital of Rouen features restored ancient streets and houses, including the Vieille Maison of 1466 and the place du Vieux-Marché, where Jeanne d'Arc was burnt in 1432. There is a magnificent 13th-century cathedral (the subject of a series of paintings by Monet), as well as many fine museums and churches, including St Ouen and St Maclou. The cloister of St Maclou was a cemetery for victims of the Great Plague. The old port of Honfleur, with its well-preserved 18th-century waterfront houses, is also well worth a visit.
Normandy is a land of farmers and fishermen and is one of the finest gastronomic regions of France. Exquisite butter, thick fresh cream and excellent cheeses, including the world-famous Camembert, Pont l'Evêque and Liverot, are all produced here. Both crustaceans and saltwater fish abound; sole Normande is one of the great dishes known to the gastronomic world. There is also lobster from Barfleur, shrimp from Cherbourg and oysters from Dive-sur-Mur. Inland one finds duck from Rouen and Nantes, lamb from the salt meadows near Mont-Saint-Michel, cream from Isigny, chicken and veal from the Cotentin, and cider and calvados (apple brandy) from the Pays d'Auge.

Nord, Pas de Calais & Picardy

Northern France is made up of the départements of Nord/Pas de Calais (French Flanders) and Somme-Oise Aisne (Picardy).

Amiens: Amiens, the principal town of Picardy, has a beautiful 13th-century cathedral, which is one of the largest in France. The choirstalls are unique. The nearby Quartier Saint-Leu is an ancient canal-side neighbourhood. Beauvais is famous for its Gothic Cathedral of St Pierre (incorporating a 9th-century Carolingian church) which would have been the biggest Gothic church in the world, if it had been completed. Its 13th-century stained glass windows are particularly impressive. There is also a fine musuem of tapestry.

Compiègne: Compiègne is famous for its Royal Palace, which has been a retreat for the French aristrocracy from the 14th century onwards and where Napoleon himself lived with his second wife, Marie-Louise. There are over a thousand rooms within the palace and the bedrooms of Napoleon and his wife, preserved with their original decorations, are well worth viewing for their ostentatiously lavish style. Surrounding the town and palace is the Forest of Compiègne, where the 1918 Armistice was signed, and which has been a hunting ground for the aristocracy for hundreds of years - a wander through its dark and tranquil interior is an exceptionally pleasant experience. The town also has a fine Hôtel de Ville (town hall) and a Carriage Museum is attached to the Palace.
The château of Chantilly now houses the Musée Condé and there are impressive Baroque gardens to walk around, as well as a 17th-century stable with a 'live' Horse Museum. The town of Arras, on the River Scarpe, has beautiful 13th- and 14th-century houses and the lovely Abbey of Saint Waast. There are pretty old towns at Hesdin and Montreuil (with its ramparts and citadel). Boulogne is best entered by way of the lower town with the 13th-century ramparts of the upper town in the background; the castle next to the basilica of Notre Dame is impressive.

Le Touquet: Le Touquet is a pleasant all-year-round coastal resort town with 10km (6 miles) of sandy beaches. The port of Calais, of great strategic importance in the Middle Ages, is today noted for the manufacture of tulle and lace, as well as being a busy cross-Channel ferry terminus. Nearby, the village of Sangatte has become a significant site, being the channel tunnel entrance on the French mainland.
The further north one goes, the more beer is drunk and used in the kitchen, especially in soup and ragoûts. Wild rabbit is cooked with prunes or grapes. There is also a thick Flemish soup called hochepot which has virtually everything in it but the kitchen sink. The cuisine is often, not surprisingly, sea-based - matelotes of conger eel and caudière (fish soup). Shellfish known as coques, 'the poor man's oyster', are popular too. The marolles cheese from Picardy is made from whole milk, salted and washed down with beer. Flanders, although it has a very short coastline, has many herring dishes, croquelots or bouffis, which are lightly salted and smoked. Harengs salés and harengs fumés are famous and known locally as gendarmes ('policemen').

Champagne & Ardennes

The chalky and rolling fields of Champagne might have remained unsung and unvisited, had it not been for an accident of history. Towards the end of the 17th century a blind monk, tending the bottles of mediocre wine in the cellars of his abbey at Hautviliers, discovered that cork made a fine stopper for ageing his wine. After the first fermentation, cork kept air, the enemy of ageing wine, from his brew. But it also trapped the carbon dioxide in the bottle and when he pulled the cork it 'popped'. At that moment, some say, the world changed for the better. 'I am drinking the stars,' he is said to have murmured as he took the first sip of champagne the world had ever known. This northeastern slice of France is composed of the départements of Ardennes, Marne,

Aube and Haute Marne. On these rolling plains many of the great battles of European history have been fought, including many in the First and Second World Wars. The Ardennes was once known as the 'woody country' where Charlemagne hunted deer, wild boar, small birds and game **in the now vanished forests. The area has three main waterways**: the Seine, the Aube and the Marne. The Marne Valley between Ferté-sous-Jouarre and Epernay is one of the prettiest in France. Forests of beech, birch, oak and elm cover the high ground, vines and fruit trees sprawl across the slopes and corn and sunflowers wave in the little protected valleys. The valleys form a long, fresh and green oasis, dotted with red-roofed villages. In 496, Clovis, the first king of France, was baptised in the cathedral in Rheims. From Louis VII to Charles X, the kings of France made it a point of honour to be crowned in the city where the history of the country really began. Rheims and its cathedral have been destroyed, razed, and rebuilt many times over the centuries. The Church of St Rémi, even older than the cathedral, is half Romanesque, half Gothic in style. The most remarkable feature is its great size, comparable to that of Notre-Dame-de-Paris. Beneath the town and its suburbs there are endless caves for champagne. Epernay is the real capital of champagne, the drink. Here, 115km (72 miles) of underground galleries in the chalk beneath the city store the wine for the delicate operations required to make champagne. These include the blending of vintages, one of the most important tasks in the creation of champagne. It is left to age for at least three years. Aside from champagne as the world knows it, there is an excellent blanc de blanc champagne nature, an unbubbly white wine with a slight bite and many of the characteristics of champagne. The perfect Gothic style of the cathedral of St Etienne in Châlons-sur-Marne has preserved the pure lines of its 12th-century tower. Nearby, the little town of St Ménéhould, almost destroyed in 1940, has contributed to the gastronomic world recipes for pigs' feet and carp, but historically it is known for the fact that the postmaster, in 1791, recognised Louis XVI fleeing from Paris with his family and reported him.
Before the annexation of Franche-Comté and Lorraine, Langres was a fortified town. Its Gallo-Roman monuments, its 15th- and 17th-century mansions and its religious architecture make it well worth a visit. Troyes, ancient capital of the Champagne area, has a beautifully preserved city centre with a Gothic cathedral, dozens of churches and 15th-century houses and a system of boulevards shaped like a champagne cork. The city also boasts the Musée d'Art Moderne in the old Bishops' Palace - a private collection of modern art, including works by Bonnard, Degas and Gauguin.
There are beautiful lakes in the Champagne-Ardenne region, the largest being Lac du Der-Chantecoq. The Fôret d'Orient has a famous bird sanctuary. There is no school of cooking founded on the use of champagne, but locally there are a few interesting dishes that include the wine. Châlons-sur-Marne has a dish that involves cooking chicken in champagne. It goes well in a sauce for the local trout; kidneys and pike have also been fried in champagne.

Lorraine, Vosges & Alsace

This part of France is made up of two historic territories, Alsace and Lorraine, in which there are **six départements**: Vosges, Meurthe-et-Moselle, Meuse, Moselle, Bas-Rhin, Haut-Rhin and the territory of Belfort. These territories have see-sawed from French to German control during conflicts between the two countries for centuries. The major cities of the area are Strasbourg, Metz, Nancy and Colmar. Strasbourg, by far the largest and most important, has been for centuries what its name suggests: a city on a highway - the highway being the east-west trade (and invasion) route and the north-south river for commerce. Today it is the headquarters of the European Parliament and the European Court of Human Rights, but it is rich in historic monuments and architecture and possesses a magnificent cathedral.

Metz: Metz, a Gallo-Roman city, is situated in a strategic position as a defence point and is also a crossroads of trade routes. It contains some elegant medieval walls, arches and public buildings, but its pride is the Cathedral of St Etienne. Nancy is best known for its perfectly proportioned Place Stanislas, gracefully surrounded with elegant wrought-iron gates. The history

of Lorraine is excellently documented in the town's museum. A visit to Colmar can be a pleasant glimpse into the Middle Ages, and it is one of the most agreeable cities in Alsace, as well as being capital of the Alsatian wine country. The narrow, winding, cobbled streets are flanked by half-timbered houses, painstakingly restored by the burghers of the city. The 13th-century Dominican Convent of Unterlinden, now a museum, contains some important works from the 15th and 16th centuries, including the exquisite Grünewald triptych.
Colmar is a perfect place from which to set out along the Wine Route (Route du Vin), stopping at many of the appealing towns along the way to taste the local wine. Turckheim, just outside Colmar, has some of the best-preserved array of 15th- and 16th-century houses in the district and a town crier takes visitors through the streets at night to recall the atmosphere of old. The town of Eguisheim, with its Renaissance fountain and monument in the village square, is also a charming Alsatian town with many historic houses and wine cellars open to the public for wine-tasting. Kayersberg (the birthplace of Dr Albert Schweitzer, whose house has been turned into a museum with mementoes of his work and life) also has some castle ruins on a hill overlooking the town and a picturesque stream that meanders through the town. A particularly popular town with tourists is Riquewihr, with its 13th- and 14th-century fortifications and belfry tower and its many medieval houses and courtyards. St Hippolyte is another picturesque wine-tasting town at the foot of the Haut-Koenigsbourg Castle, a sprawling and impressive medieval castle where Jean Renoir filmed La Grande Illusion.
Self-steer boats are readily available for canal cruising in a number of locations. There are also regularly scheduled Rhine river and canal tours daily all summer; several hotel boats ply these waterways as well. Sightseeing helicopters and balloons make regular flights, weather permitting. Several ancient steam trains make regular circuits including Rosheim/Ottrat (on the wine route); at Andolsheim a steam train runs along the Canal d'Alsace between Cernay and Soultz. Throughout Alsace there are artisans' workshops, including glass and wood painting at Wimmenau and pottery in Betschdorf where studios and shops are open to the public. Organised walking tours that include overnight stops and meals en route are arranged from Colmar and Mulhouse. Bicycle trails are marked along the Rhine, where bicycles are readily available for hire. Belfort, a major fortress town since the 17th century, commands the Belfort Gap, or Burgundy Gate, between the Vosges and the Jura mountains. Dominating the routes from Germany and Switzerland, it became famous during the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-71 when it withstood a 108-day siege. This is commemorated by a huge stone statue, the Lion of Belfort, by Bartholdi, the creator of the Statue of Liberty. The route du vin lies between the Rhine and a low range of pine-covered mountains called the Vosges. The flat, peaceful plain is covered with orchards and vineyards. Lovely, rural villages dot the landscape, their church spires piercing the horizon. The wines of Alsace have a long history, the Alsatian grapes being planted before the arrival of the Romans. It has never been clearly understood where they originated; unlike other French wines, these depend more on grape type than soil or processing. Almost exclusively white with a fruity and dry flavour, they make an excellent accompaniment to the local food. Beer also goes well with Alsatian food, and as might be expected, good beer is brewed in both the Alsace and the Lorraine areas. There are famous and popular mineral water sources in Contréxeville and Vittel (also a spa town). They were well known and appreciated by the Romans and today are the most popular in France. One of the food specialities of Alsace is truite bleue, blue trout, which is simply boiled so fresh as to be almost alive when tossed into the water. The swift rivers provide gamey trout and they can be fished by visitors if permits are obtained (at any city hall). The cooking is peppery and hearty and quite unlike that of any other French region. Munster, a strong winter cheese, is usually served with caraway seeds. Lorraine and Alsatian tarts are made with the **excellent local fruits**: mirabelles (small, yellow plums), cherries, pears, etc. Each of these fruits also makes a world-renowned eau-de-vie, a strong white alcohol liqueur which is drunk as a digestive after a heavy meal. Lorraine is famous for quiche lorraine made only in the classical manner: with cream, eggs and bacon. Nancy has boudin (blood sausage), although this is found in all parts of France.

Burgundy & Franche-Comté

Burgundy begins near Auxerre, a small medieval town with a beautiful Gothic cathedral, and extends southward to the hills of Beaujolais just north of Lyons. The départements are the Yonne, Côte d'Or, Nièvre and the Saône-et-Loire. Driving through this region, one seems to be **traversing a huge carte des vins**: Mersault, Volnay, Beaune, Aloxe Corton, Nuits-Saint-Georges, Vosne-Romanée and Gevrey-Chambertin. This vast domain of great wines was for 600 years an independent kingdom, at times as strong as France itself, enjoying its heydey in the 15th century. Throughout a stormy history, however, Burgundy's vineyards survived thanks in large part to the knowledge, diligence and good taste of its monks. Several of the orders owned extensive vineyards throughout the region, among them the Knights of Malta, Carthusians, Carmelites and, most importantly, the Benedictines and Cistercians. As a result the 210km (130-mile) length of Burgundy is peppered with abbeys, monasteries and a score of fine Romanesque churches, notably in Fontenay, Vézelay, Tournus and Cluny. There are also many fortified châteaux. Dijon, an important political and religious centre during the 15th century, has several fine museums and art galleries, as well as the Palais des Ducs, once the home of the Dukes of Burgundy. There are also elegant restored town houses to be visited, dating from the 15th to the 18th century, and a 13th-century cathedral. The towns of Sens and Macon both possess fine churches dating from the 12th century. The region of Franche-Comté is shaped like a fat boomerang and is made up of the départements of Doubs, Jura and Haute Saône. The high French Jura Mountains, rising in steps from 245 to 1785m (805-5856ft), run north to south along the French-Swiss border. To the west is the forested Jura plateau, the vine-clad hills and eventually the fertile plain of northern Bresse, called the Finage. The heights and valleys of the Jura are readily accessible and, in the summertime, beautifully green, providing pasture land for the many milk cows used in the production of one of the great mountain cheeses: Comté. There are many lovely (and romantically named) rivers in this region - Semouse, Allance, Gugeotte, Lanterne, Barquotte, Durgeon, Colombine, Dougeonne, Rigotte and Romaine (named by Julius Caesar). They weave and twist, now and then disappearing underground to reappear again some miles away. All these physical characteristics combine to make Franche-Comté an excellent region for summer vacations and winter sports.

Val de Loire

The 'centre' of France from Chartres to Châteauroux and from Tours to Bourges includes the départements of Eure-et-Loir, Loiret, Loir-et-Cher, Indre, Indre-et-Loire and Cher. The Central Loire includes the famous Châteaux country, perhaps the region most visited by foreign tourists to France. Through it flows a part of the Loire River, the longest river in France, and considered to be its most capricious, often reducing to a mere trickle of water in a bed of sand. It has been called a 'useless' great river, because it drives no turbines or mill wheels and offers few navigable waterways. It could be said that the Loire serves only beauty and each of its tributaries has its own character. The Cher is a quiet, slow-moving river, flowing calmly through grassy meadows and mature forests. The château of Chenonceaux stands quite literally on the river; a working mill in the early medieval period when the Cher flowed more vigorously, it was transformed into perhaps the most graceful of all French châteaux, its court rooms running clear from one bank to the other on a row of delicate arches. Chenonceaux's development owed much to a succession of beautiful and powerful noblewomen, and its charm is of an undeniably feminine nature. The Indre is a river of calm reflections. Lilies abound and weeping willows sway on its banks. The château at Azay-le-Rideau was designed to make full use of these qualities and stands beside several small man-made lakes, each reflecting a different aspect of the building. Water is moved to and from the river and between the lakes through a series of gurgling channels. The water gardens and its reflections of the intricately carved exterior more than compensate for the rather dull interior. The Vienne is essentially a broad stream. It glides gracefully beneath the weathered walls of old Chinon, where several important chapters in French history were acted out. The

château of Blois, which is one of the finest architecturally speaking, is certainly the most interesting in terms of history. It stands in the centre of the ancient town of the same name, towering over the battered stone houses clustered beneath its walls. Chambord, several miles south of the Loire, is the most substantial of the great châteaux. Standing in a moat in the centre of a vast lawn bordered by forests, the body of the building possesses a majestic symmetry. In contrast, the roofscape is a mad jumble of eccentric chimneys and apartments. Some have attributed the bizarre double-helix staircase to Leonardo da Vinci. The five châteaux described in outline above are generally ranked highest amongst the Loire châteaux and form the core of most organised tours. There are, of course, dozens more that can be visited and it is even possible to stay overnight in several. Contact the French Government Tourist Office for more information. The Loire Valley is very warm and crowded with tourists in summer.
Besides châteaux, there is much else of interest in the Loire Valley and surrounding districts. There are magnificent 13th-century cathedrals in Chartres and Tours, as well as abbeys and mansions and charming riverside towns and villages.
Other places of outstanding interest include Orléans, famous for its associations with Jeanne d'Arc, with a beautiful cathedral, the Musée des Beaux Arts and 16th-century Hôtel de Ville; and Bourges, a 15th-century town, complete with old houses, museums and the Cathedral of St Etienne. The charming little town of Loches, southeast of Tours, has a fine château and an interesting walled medieval quarter. It was in the heartland of the Touraine where the true cuisine of France developed (Touraine was given the name 'the garden of France').

Western Loire

The region of the Western Loire comprises the départements of Loire-Atlantique, the Vendée, Maine et Loire, Sarthe and Mayenne. The Vendée and the Loire-Atlantique share a beautiful and wild coastline with Brittany. There are 305km (190 miles) of sandy beaches. Inland, the mild climate makes for beautiful mature pastures, often made more attractive by clumps of wild camelias and roses.
In the Western Loire, La Baule, a summer resort with a fine, seemingly endless beach, is a pleasant town with winding streets and giant pines, excellent hotels, restaurants and a casino. It has an unusually mild microclimate and is exceptionally warm for the region. Le Mans, famous for its racetrack, is an historic old town built on a hill overlooking the west bank of the Sarthe. The 12th-century choir in the Cathedral of Saint Julian is one of the most remarkable in France. The magnificent 13th- and 14th-century stained glass is also impressive. Most of the Sarthe Valley consists of beautifully-wooded hills, divided by the thick hedges that are seasonally draped with wild roses, honeysuckle, or large juicy blackberries. In May or early June the apple and pear blossoms blend with the hawthorn; the orchards are in bloom and the fields and forests are rich and green. These two months are most attractive and the weather at that time is usually favourable; the autumn is less dry but as a rule usually remains pleasant through October.

Nantes: Nantes, on the coast of the Loire-Atlantique, is a thriving commercial and industrial centre. There is a medieval castle, which also houses the Musée d'Art Populaire, a display of Breton costumes; a 15th-century cathedral; and a naval museum. St Nazaire, along the coast from Nantes, boasts a new attraction, Escal Atlantic, a replica of an ocean liner containing interactive exhibits which evoke the golden age of ocean travel. Upstream from Nantes, the town of Angers contains some spectacular tapestries. In the castle can be seen 'St John's Vision of the Apocalypse' (14th century) and in the Hôpital St Jean, Jean Lurcat's 'Chant du Monde' (20th century). The Hôpital itself is very beautiful and there are several museums and art galleries in the town worth a visit, as well as the magnificent castle/fortress and the cathedral.
The regional cuisine has the advantages of excellent vineyards, an abundance and variety of fish from the Loire and its tributaries, plentiful butter and cheese, fruits and vegetables and easily available game from the forests. In general, the wines of the Loire all have a clean refreshing taste that makes them ideal for light lunches or as an apéritif.

Aquitaine & Poitou-Charentes

This area of sunshine and Atlantic air in the southwest of France includes the départements of Deux Sèvres, Vienne, Charente-Maritime, Charente, Gironde, Dordogne, Lot-et-Garonne, Landes and Pyrénées Atlantiques, the latter on the Spanish border. The coastline has 270km (170 miles) of beaches and the 30km (20 miles) or so from Hossegor to Hendaye fall within the Basque area and offer some of the best surfing in Europe.
North of Bordeaux the region of Guyenne is sometimes referred to as 'west-centre' as if it were a clearly defined part of France, yet a diversity of landscapes and an extraordinary mixing and mingling of races exists here - Celts, Iberians, Dutch and Anglo Saxons, to name a few. The linguistic frontier between the langue d'oïl and langue d'oc runs between Poitiers (former capital of the Duchy of Aquitaine) and Limoges, creating a dialect which developed from both. These people have in common the great north-south highway, the important line of communication between the Parisian basin and the Aquitaine basin. Throughout the centuries it was the route of **many invaders**: Romans, Visigoths, Alemanni, Huns, Arabs, Normans, English, Huguenots and Catholics all moved along it. Not far from Poitiers is Futuroscope, a huge theme park containing interactive and cinematic exhibits, as well as rides and other entertainment. It is now accessible by TGV. Biarritz and Bayonne are both resorts on the Aquitaine/Basque coast, close to the Spanish border. Biarritz has been famous as a cosmopolitan spa-town since the 19th century, when it was popular with the European aristocracy. There are several sheltered beaches, as well as a casino. Bayonne, a few kilometres up the coast but slightly inland, is a typical Basque town which is worth a visit. There is a 13th-century cathedral and two museums (one of them devoted to Basque culture). Bordeaux is on the Garonne River just above where it joins the Dordogne, the two streams forming an estuary called the Gironde which forms a natural sheltered inland harbour. It is flanked on both sides by vineyards as far as the eye can see. The combination of great wines and great wealth made Bordeaux one of the gastronomic cities of France and the city offers an impressive sight from its stone bridge with 17 arches that crowns the enormous golden horn which forms the harbour. The second-largest city of France in area, the fourth in population, the fifth port, it was described by Victor Hugo with the words: 'Take Versailles, add Antwerp to it, and you have Bordeaux'. Its magnificent geographical position and unsurpassed vineyards belie Hugo's simplification. The city is the commercial and cultural centre for all of the southwest.
South of Bordeaux along the coast is a strip of long sandy beaches backed by lagoons, some communicating with the sea, some shut off from it. Just at the back of this is the Landes, covered with growths of scrubby pine. Here in the marshes the shepherds walk on stilts. The hilly region between the Adour and Garonne rivers comprises the inland part of Gascony, first known as Aquitania Propria and later as Novem Populena. It was inhabited by Vascones, or Basques who, since prehistoric times, had lived in this area and south of the Pyrénées. In the south the Basque language has survived to this day, but the northern part of the area became known as Vasconia and then Gascony, a name made famous by the swashbuckling Gascons of literature; Cyrano de Bergerac, d'Artagnan of 'The Three Musketeers' and le vert gallant - Henri IV. In the centre of Gascony is the old countship of Armagnac which, like Cognac, provides the world with a magnificent brandy that bears the name of the region. The difference between the two stems from several factors: the type of grape used, the soil, the climate, the method of distilling the wine and the variety of wood used in the maturing casks. Armagnac is still made by local artisans and small farmers. The quality and taste varies much more than Cognac, but it inevitably retains its fine flavour.
The Dordogne (and neighbouring Lot) is the area where traces of prehistoric (Cro-Magnon) man abound. The Dordogne River itself, one of the most beautiful of all French rivers, flows swiftly through the region, its banks crowded with old castles and walled towns. In Montignac the fabulous painted caves of Lascaux are reproduced in the exact proportions and colours of the original, a few miles away. The reproduction was necessary as the original deteriorated rapidly when exposed to the heat and humidity of visitors. A highly interesting and informative museum

and zoo of prehistoric artefacts and animals has been created in le Thot a few miles from Agen. The area around Perigueux is a country of rivers and castles - very different from those on the Loire as these are older and, for the most part, fortified defence points against medieval invaders. There are facilities for renting horse and gypsy wagons (roulotte à chevaux) for slow-moving tours of the region. Along with hiking treks, river boating and bicycling tours, it offers a relaxed way to explore this beautiful land.
It is possible in Aquitaine and Poitou-Charentes to find pleasant hotels and auberges for an overnight or few days' stay. They range from gîtes and chambre d'hôtes - a farm bed & breakfast programme - to châteaux hôtels with elegant restaurants. There are no less than 150 chambres d'hôtes stopovers in the Poitou-Charentes region alone, including many on the coast, near beaches and pleasure ports. The area of Poitou-Charentes has lovely mature woodland and an attractive coast where oysters are cultivated. The Charente-Maritime is known as 'the Jade Coast', with Royan to the south (a fine modern resort with 13km/8 miles of fine sand beaches) and La Rochelle to the north. The rivers of the region offer quiet scenic walks or boating trips.
The centre of the département of Charente, amid low, rolling hills covered with copses of trees and vineyards, is a little town of only 22,000 inhabitants whose name is known all over the world. Here, in an area of some 150,000 acres, the only brandy that can be called Cognac is produced. Use of the name is forbidden for brandy which is made elsewhere or from other than one of the seven officially accepted varieties of grape. The Valois Château, located here, was the birthplace of Francis I. The ancient port of La Rochelle, from which many pioneers left to explore the new world, is today a popular vacation and sailing port.
Close by, the offshore islands of Oléron and Ré are both connected to the mainland by bridges.

Auvergne & Limousin

West of the Rhône are the volcanic highlands of the Massif Central, historically known as Auvergne and consisting today of the départements of Haute-Loire, Cantal, Pays-de-Dôme and Allier. The Limousin region to the west comprises Haute-Vienne, Creuse and Corrèze. Architecturally, Auvergne is rich in châteaux and churches (especially in the Allier and Loire gorges) and is noted for its colourful, rich and mysterious nature. The National Park here offers magnificent walking country - a land of water, mountains, plains and extinct volcanoes (the Cantal crater may once have been 30km/20 miles wide). There are ten spa resorts within its boundaries, as well as many lakes, rivers and forests. The high plateaux of Combrailles, Forez and Bourbonnais are very beautiful.

Clermont-Ferrand: Clermont-Ferrand, which is the political and economic nucleus for the whole of the Massif Central, is a lively and sprawling town and the birthplace of the Michelin tyre empire. Much of the town's architecture (especially in the older parts of the Clermont area) is black, because of the local black volcanic rock. There is a 13th-century Gothic cathedral and a 14th-century Romanesque basilica, as well as several museums. The town makes a very good base for exploring the beautiful areas around it.
There are plenty of good hôtels, gîtes d'hôtes, and gîtes de France throughout the region. The cuisine is splendid, including cornet de Murat (pastries), pounti, truffades and the St Nectaire cheeses. At nearby Saint-Ours-les-Roches, the new European Volcano Centre, a specially designed exhibition and entertainment centre, is opening in 2001.
The 2000-year-old regional capital of Limousin, Limoges, is an important rail and route crossroad, famous for the production of extremely fine porcelain. The nearby city of Aubusson is noted for its tapestries (a local tradition dating back to the 8th century). Both cities are also famous for their enamel.

Languedoc-Roussillon

The combined territories of Languedoc and Roussillon include five départements: Aude, Gard, Hérault, Lozère and Pyrénées-Oriental. The area has been French since the 13th century and the name languedoc comes from langue d'oc or language in which 'yes' is oc (as opposed to langue d'oïl the language in which 'yes' is oui). This ancient language is still heard throughout the south of France, on both sides of the Rhône. The Mediterranean coast between Perpignan (the ancient capital of the Kings of Mallorca) and Montpellier now has one of the most modern holiday complexes in Europe, including the resorts of La Grande Motte, Port Leucate and Port Bacarès. More wine is produced in Languedoc-Roussillon than any other place in the world. The vineyards, started in the Roman era and producing red, white and rosé wine, begin in the Narbonne area, run past Béziers (the wine marketing centre for the region) and on to Montpellier. Once an important seaport which imported spices (its name derives from 'the Mount of Spice Merchants'), the city is an important intellectual and university centre with five fine museums, impressive 17th- and 18th-century architecture and a superb summer music festival. There are a great variety of other attractions in this warm southland. The Roman (and some Gallic) ruins are often magnificent; the Maison Carré, Diana's Temple and the Roman Arena in Nîmes, the Rome of the Gauls, are among the finest examples of Greco-Roman architecture to be found today. The 2000-year-old Pont de Gard is one of humanity's greatest architectural accomplishments and certainly merits a special trip. There is the medieval city of Aigues-Mortes which would still be recognizable to St Louis and his crusaders, for it was from here they embarked for the east; and the crenelated walled city of Carcassonne and towers of Uzès are unmissable.
The Canal du Midi, ideal for cruise holidays, is a tranquil waterway, largely abandoned by commerce, that connects the Atlantic with the Mediterranean. It runs through the sleepy village of Castelnaudary, famous for its cassoulet, past the citadel of Carcassonne and on through Montpellier.

Rhône, Savoie & Dauphiny

This region includes the French Alps and their foothills, and the vast long valleys of the Rhône and Saône rivers. The départements are Loire, Rhône, Ain, Ardèche, Drôme, Isère, Savoie and Haute-Savoie.

Lyons: Lyons, in the deepest part of the Rhône valley, has a proud gastronomic tradition. As France's second city, Lyons is a major cultural, artistic, financial and industrial centre, with international festivals and trade fairs. The Cathedral of St Jean is well worth a visit, as are the Roman remains of the city, and the Musée de la Civilisation Gallo-Romaine. A casino, the Grand Casino de Lyons, has recently opened in the city. The French Alps stretch across Savoie and Dauphiny on the border with Italy. Napoleon came this way after escaping from Elba in 1815. Landing with 100 men near Cannes, he intended to march along the coast to Marseilles and up the Rhône Valley to Lyons and Paris, but he received reports that the population on that route was hostile and was forced instead to head inland through the mountains. They reached Gap (150km/93 miles from the coast) in four days, Grenoble a few days after and arrived in Paris (1152km/715 miles from Cannes) in 20 days with a large and loyal army in tow. It is possible to retrace his route, which passes through much beautiful scenery; each stopping place is clearly marked. The Alps have demanded much of France's engineers and some of the roads and railways are themselves tourist attractions. Notable examples include the 9km (6-mile) steam locomotive run from La Rochette to Poncharra (about 40km/24 miles from Grenoble); and the 32km (19-mile) track (electrified in 1903) from Saint-Georges-de-Commiers to la Mira (near Grenoble), with 133 curves, 18 tunnels and 12 viaducts. As in most mountainous regions of the world, white-water boating (randonnées nautiques) can be enjoyed on many of the Alpine rivers. Hiking is popular and well organised, utilising the GR (grandes randonnées or main trails) maps that show where the official marked trails pass. The rivers racing from the Alpine heights into the Rhône provide a great deal of electrical power and good opportunities for trout fishing. The

Fédération des associations agréées de Pêche et de Pisciculture de la Drôme in Valence can lead a fisherman to the right spot (HQ in Valence, but branches in 36 cities). Skiing, however, is the principal sport in the French Alps. The best skiing is found, for the most part, west of Grenoble and south of Lake Geneva. All the resorts are well-equipped, provide warm, comfortable lodgings and good food. Some specialise in skiing all year round, but almost all have summer seasons with facilities such as golf courses, tennis courts, swimming pools and natural lakes. At the lake resort of Annecy, there is an unusual Bell Museum with a very fine restaurant attached; international festivals of gastronomy are held throughout the year.

Midi-Pyrénées

The Midi-Pyrénées area, with its magnificent mountain scenery, lies between Aquitaine to the west and Languedoc-Roussillon to the east. It encompasses part of the Causses, the high plateau country and most of Gascony. Included in it are the départements of Lot, Aveyron, Tarn-et-Garonne, Tarn, Gers, Haut-Garonne, Ariège and Hautes Pyrénées. This is a land of plains dotted with hillocks, sandy stretches, moors and pine woods, desolate plateaux cleft by magical grottoes, and little valleys covered with impenetrable forests. The northeastern section is a rough, mountainous land, known as the Rouergue. It is situated on the frontier of Aquitaine, formed by the plateau of the Causse, where game and wild birds feed on the thyme and juniper growing wild in the chalky soil. As a result, these little animals and birds develop a delicious and individual flavour. The principal town, Rodez, is severe and beautiful. The crenelated summit of its red tower, one of the marvels of French Gothic architecture, rises above a confusion of narrow streets and small squares. From here there are views of the high plateaux beyond the Aveyron, a majestically stark landscape of granite outcrops and steep ravines. The villages and farmhouses, built of local rock, often mimic the rock formations to the extent that they are all but invisible to outsiders.
To the southeast is Millau, gateway to the Tarn gorges, and to the south lies Roquefort with its windy caves that store the famous ewe's-milk cheese. These damp cold winds are the secret that has created the 'cheese of kings and the king of cheeses'. Auch was the ancient metropole of the Roman Novem Populena, one of the most important towns in Gaul, long rivalling Burdigala (Bordeaux) in importance. The cathedral has two Jesuit towers, choirstalls carved in solid oak and a 16th-century stained glass window. The people of Auch have erected a statue to le vrai d'Artagnan ('the real d'Artagnan'), the famous Gascon musketeer immortalised by Dumas. Cahors, situated on a peninsula formed by the River Lot, has a famous bridge, Pont Valentré, with its six pointed arches and three defensive towers rising 40m (130ft) above the river. It is the most magnificent fortified river span that has survived in Europe and was begun in 1308. Legend has it that the construction work was plagued with problems and the bridge still remained unfinished after 50 years. Then one of the architects made a pact with the devil and the bridge was finished without another hitch. A small figure of the devil is still visible on the central tower. A fine, very dark red wine bears the name Cahors. It is made from grapes of the Amina variety brought in from Italy in Roman times. Toulouse, one of the most interesting cities of France, is an agricultural market centre, an important university town, an aero-research centre and one of the great cities of French art (it has seven fine museums). After the Middle Ages the stone quarries in the region were exhausted so the city was built with a soft red brick which seems to absorb the light. As a result it is called the Ville Rose and is described as 'pink in the light of dawn, red in broad daylight and mauve by twilight'. There are many beautiful public buildings and private dwellings, like the 16th-century Renaissance Hôtel d'Assezat and one known as the Capitole, now used as a city hall. The finest Romanesque church in southern France is here. The first Gothic church west of the Rhône was built in Toulouse, the Church of the Jacobins; and the first Dominican monastery was founded in Toulouse by Saint Dominic himself. Toulouse is a vibrant city with much activity, with its long rue Alsace-Lorraine being its axis. It is here in the early evenings that Toulousians and visitors alike sit for an apéritif at one of the large sidewalk cafés. The region was an important part of the Roman Empire, subjected for 800 years to Arabic

influence (the Moors holding substantial parts of Spain just across the Pyrénées) and the cuisine has therefore developed from both Roman and Arabic. Toulouse sausage, a long fat soft sausage whose filling must be chopped by hand, is one of the ingredients of the local cassoulet as well as a very popular dish in its own right. Albi is another red-brick city, smaller but no less interesting than Toulouse, located on the River Tarn. The first extraordinary thing about Albi is its brick church. Albi was the centre of violent religious wars (the Albigensian Heretics resisted the Catholic crusaders for decades). The mammoth red-brick Cathedral of Saint Cécile, towering above all the other buildings of the town, was built as a fortress to protect the cruel bishop who imposed the church on the populace. Inside is a vast hall, subdivided by exquisite stonework embellished with statues. The nearby 13th-century Palace of the Archbishop (also fortified) is now a museum containing the largest single collection of the works of Toulouse-Lautrec. The town of Lourdes has acted as a magnet for the sick in need of miracle cures, ever since the visions of Bernadette Soubirous in the mid-19th century. Apart from the famous grotto, there is a castle and a museum.

Côte d'Azur & Provence

The Côte d'Azur, or French Riviera, is in the département of the Alpes-Maritimes. It runs along the coast from the Italian border, through Monaco, and continues to a point just beyond Cannes and reaches more than 50km (30 miles) northward into the steep slopes of the Alps, connecting the balmy coastal region with the ideal ski resorts of the lower Alps. This part of the Mediterranean coast has more visitors each year during July and August than any other part of France, although many of the summer visitors are French. The two most famous French resorts, Cannes and Nice, are to be found here and the area is generally accepted as one of the most beautiful resort spots in the world. It well deserves its immense popularity - with artists (Matisse, Picasso, Chagall and Dufy) as well as tourists. There is an abundance of palm trees, blue sea and beautiful beaches; sparkling cities and villages are set against backdrops of high green mountains. Travellers have been drawn to the region since the 18th century, some no doubt inspired by the writings of Dr Tobias Smollet. His visits are described in Travels in France and Italy. The weather is wonderful with long, hot and sunny summers. There is plenty of diversion here, especially in the spring, summer and early autumn months. The coastal resort towns include Cannes, made popular as a resort by Lord Brougham in the 19th century when, because of a plague in Nice, he was forced to stop here; Nice, itself, the largest metropolis on the coast, a thriving commercial city as well as a year-round resort (the annual carnival and battle of roses perhaps date back to 350BC); Napoule Plage, a small and exclusive resort with several sandy beaches, a marina and a splendid view of the rolling green Maure Mountains; Golfe-Juan, now a popular resort town with many expensive mansions and hotels; Juan-les-Pins, with a neat harbour, beaches and pine forests in the hills which protect the village from the winds in both summer and winter; Antibes and Cap d'Antibes, very popular but expensive resorts; Villefranche-sur-Mer, a deep-water port which has been used by pleasure yachts and navies for centuries; St-Jean-Cap-Ferrat, an exclusive and expensive resort consisting of great private mansions and seaside estates; Beaulieu, much less exclusive, yet a fine resort town; and Menton (near the Principality of Monaco), once a fishing village and citrus-fruit-producing area, now a pleasant vacation resort. The Côte d'Azur is an extraordinary playground with every kind of amusement. There are excellent museums, historic places dating from the pre-Christian era to the present day, hills, mountains, lakes and rivers, gorges and alpine skiing trails. The entire area has a generous supply of good, comfortable hotels as well as luxury châteaux, restaurants with every sort of food, and good bars everywhere. One of the greatest museums in the world, the Maeght Foundation, is located in St-Paul-de-Vence. Picasso, Braque, Matisse and Léger museums also exist and there is plenty of beautiful foothill countryside to explore. Resorts further along the coast from Cannes include St Tropez, a terribly crowded, hard to reach yet fashionable village; Port Grimaud, the first of the custom-built 'fishing village' resorts (and now old enough to look almost like the real thing); St Maxime, a fashionable but crowded resort with fine beaches and

harbour; Fréjus, which was a port when the Greeks were settling in the Mediterranean basin 'like frogs around a pond' and which is less fashionable than most of its neighbours; and St Raphael, at one time a Roman resort, and now a comfortable middle-class vacation town. Grasse, just north of Cannes, is a charming hilltop town famed for its perfume. Spectacular weather is one of the major attractions of Provence, whose départements comprise Hautes Alpes, Alpes de Haute Provence, Var, Vaucluse and Bouches du Rhône. The deep blue skies of summer are seldom clouded, although there is some rain in spring and autumn. The only inhospitable element is the mistral, a wind that sometimes roars down the Rhône Valley, often unrelenting for three or four days. When the Romans arrived in Gaul, they were so delighted with the climate of the Bouches du Rhône that they made it a province rather than a colony, which was more usual.
The varied flora that have taken root in this land have given it the hues of pewter, bronze, dark green and vibrant green. The sun has baked the dwellings to shades of ochre and rose while the deep red soil has provided tiles that remain red, defying the searing rays of the Midi sunshine. The towns, their architecture, stones and tiles all blend subtly throughout Provence with the majestic plane trees in the streets and squares. Their long heavy trunks of mottled greys and the graceful vaulting of the heavily leafed branches create a peculiar atmosphere not found anywhere else. These are the principal adornments of most of the cities, market towns and villages, casting a deep blue shade on the inhabitants, the mossy fountains, café terraces and games of pétanque. The eras of Greek and Roman domination of Provence have left monuments scattered across the countryside. They include walled hill towns, triumphal arches, theatres, colosseums, arenas, bridges and aqueducts. Christianity brought the Palace of the Popes in Avignon, many churches and hundreds of roadside shrines or 'oratories' which have given the name oradour to many communities along the Rhône.
Christian art of the highest quality is scattered throughout the area from Notre-Dame-des-Doms in Avignon to Notre-Dame-du-Bourg in Digne in the centre of the lower alps. The pilgrims throughout the territory built wonderful churches typified by graceful semi-circular arches, round rose windows, statues of Christ surrounded by evangelists, saints, the damned in chains and processions of the faithful. These are carved in stone so worn by the sun and wind they almost have the quality of flesh.
Many of the towns and villages are marked by fortified castles and watchtowers to guard against the coming of the Saracens, the Corsairs of the Rhône and marauding bands. For this was the invasion route, by land from the north and by sea from the south. Tarascon, Beauclair, Villeneuve, Gourdon, Entrevaux, Sisteron and many others had their 'close' and tower situated high above the river or overlooking the sea. Marseilles was founded by the Greeks (they called it Massalia) and used as a base for their colonisation of the Rhône Valley. Today, it is France's most important commercial port on the Mediterranean and consequently is of a primarily industrial nature. Nonetheless, there are sites of interest to the conventionally minded tourist - the old port, the hilltop church of Notre-Dame-de-la-Garde, many fine restaurants (especially for seafood), several museums, Le Corbusier's Unité d'Habitation, the Hospice de la Vieille Charité and, of course, the Château d'If, one of the most notorious of France's historic island fortresses. Vast oil refineries and depots dominate the sparsely populated salt flats and marshes to the north and west of the city, but the land is not yet dead. It is the perfect habitat for several species of birds found in only a few other places in Eastern Europe, including bustards and nightjars. On the far side of the Rhône is the marshy area known as the Camargue, long used for the breeding of beef cattle and horses, for the evaporation of sea water to make salt, and more recently for growing rice. The cattle breeders, or cowboys, are armed with lances instead of lassos. Vast flocks of waterbirds nest here in a national bird reserve, among them pink flamingos and snow-white egrets. When, in 123BC, Consul Sextias Calvinus established a camp beside some warm springs in the broad lower Rhône Valley, it was named Aquae Sextiae - today known as Aix-en-Provence. Other interesting ancient sites are the ruined Roman aqueduct at Pont du Gard and the amphitheatre in Arles. This whole region is also fascinating since it was frequently painted by the great Post-Impressionist painters Cézanne and Van Gogh. The combination of gentle light and breathtaking scenery finds echoes throughout the art galleries of the world. Near Arles is Les

Baux, a haunting medieval hilltop village. The many olive trees found throughout Provence provide a popular fruit and one of the important staples of the local cuisine, a fine olive oil used extensively in the cooking of local food. Garlic, though not exclusively associated with Provence, is used more here than in any other part of France. It is sometimes called 'the truffle of Provence'. A third element, the tomato, seems to get into most of the delicious Provençal concoctions as well. The cooking here varies from region to region. In the Camargue a characteristic dish is estouffade de boeuf. Marseilles is noted for a dish called pieds et paquets ('feet and packages') which consists of sheep's tripe stuffed with salt pork and cooked overnight in white wine with onions, garlic and parsley. Tripe à la Niçoise is similar, but nonetheless unique. Perhaps the most typical dish, and one found in most parts of Provence, is tomates provençales, **a heavenly concoction with all the Provençal specialities**: olive oil, garlic and parsley baked in and on a tomato. This combination can also be applied to courgettes (zucchini) and aubergines (egg plant). All of these vegetables, along with sweet peppers, are found in the most famous Provençal vegetable ragoût known, for some long lost reason, as ratatouille, this too being well laced with garlic and of course cooked in olive oil. Mayonnaise, also, well mixed with Provençal garlic, becomes aioli, which is served with boiled vegetables and/or fish. Quail, thrush, trout and crayfish were, not so long ago, the mainstays of the Provençal table, but stocks have declined and these dishes are now rarely served. Gigot (leg of lamb) is a more common local speciality. Surviving into the era of nouvelle cuisine and still the pride of the Provençal coast is the famous fish stew called bouillabaisse. Like cassoulet in Languedoc there are several versions, each claiming to be the 'authentic' one. The ingredients are not vastly different - having to do with the amount of saffron or the inclusion or exclusion of certain fish.
Few wines are grown in Provence, although some are quite good, especially those originating in the Lubéron. The four districts that have been granted recognition are best known for their rosé **wines**: Cassis, Bandol, Bellet and la Palette. They are all on the coast, except la Palette which is near Aix.

Corsica

The island of Corsica is made up of two French départements: Haute Corse (upper Corsica) and Corse du Sud (south Corsica). The 8720 sq km (3367 sq miles) are inhabited by not many more than 250,000 people. It is one of the very few places left in Europe that is not invaded by campers and trailers during the vacation season and its charm lies in this unspoiled and rugged atmosphere. The name Corsica, or Corse, is a modernisation of Korsai, believed to be a Phoenician word meaning 'covered with forests'. The Phoenician Greeks landed here 560 years before the Christian era to disturb inhabitants who had probably originated in Liguria. From that time on, Corsica has been fought for, or over, creating a bloody history probably unparalleled for such a small area. The Greeks were followed by the Romans, then the Vandals, Byzantines, Moors and Lombards. In 1768, Genoa sold Corsica to France and its 2500 years of disputed ownership ended. In spite of its extensive and colourful history it is of course best known as the birthplace of Napoléon Bonaparte. The island has been described as 'a mountain in the sea', for when approached by sea that is exactly what it looks like. A strange land, the mountains rise abruptly from the western shore where the coast is indescribably beautiful with a series of capes and isolated beachless bays; along its entire length rock and water meet with savage impact. The coastline, unfolded, is about 992km (620 miles) long. Corsica consists of heaths, forests, granite, snow, sand beaches and orange trees. This combination has produced a strange, fiery, lucidly intellectual and music-loving race of people, both superstitious and pious at the same time. The interior is quite undeveloped, with mountains, and dry scrubby land overgrown with brush called maquis (from the local maccia which means 'brush'). It is a dry wilderness of hardy shrubs - arbutus, mastic, thorn, myrtle, juniper, rosemary, rock rose, agave, pistachio, fennel, heather, wild mint and ashphodel, 'the flower of hell'. During the German occupation of France (1940-44) resistance fighters were given the name maquis from the association of the wild country in which they hid, much as the savage backlands of Corsica provided at one time comparatively safe

shelter for the island bandits. There is a desolate grandeur about the maquis, while on the other hand the rugged beauty of Corsica's magnificent mountain scenery is anything but desolate.
A considerable amount of forested area remains, although since discovered by the Greeks it has been frequently raided for its fine, straight and tall laricio pine that seems to thrive only here. They have been known to grow as high as 60m (200ft), perfect for use as masts and are still used as such. Corsica is also rich in cork oaks, chestnuts and olives. There is a Regional Nature Conservation Park on the island. North of the eastern plain are the lowlands, principally olive groves, known as La Balagne, the hinterland of Calvi and l'Ile Rousse. To the south is the dazzling white city of Ajaccio, full of Napoleonic memorabilia. The town runs in a semicircle on the calm bay, set against a backdrop of wooded hills.
At the foot of the cape at the northern end of the island is the commercial, but none the less picturesque, town of Bastia, with its historic citadel towering over the headland. The old town has preserved its streets in the form of steps connected by vaulted passages, converging on the Vieux port. The port itself, with a polyglot population, is busy all year round. A little further north, the terraced St Nicholas Beach, shaded by palm trees and covered with parasols and café tables, separates the old port from the new. The new port, just beyond, is the real commercial port of the island. Corsican cuisine is essentially simple, with the sea providing the most dependable source of food, including its famous lobster. Freshwater fish abound in the interior and, as is to be expected, the maquis is game country. The aromatic herbs and berries add a particularly piquant flavour to the meat. Among the game available, sanglier and marcassin - young and older wild boar - turn up in season either roasted, stewed in a daube of red wine, or with a highly spiced local sauce pibronata. Sheep and goats are plentiful. Pigs, fed on chestnuts, are common at the Corsican table and they make an unusually flavoured ham. The extremes of the Corsican climate limit the variety of vegetables available. The Corsicans like hot and strong flavours that use even more herbs than are used in Provence. They like to shock with hot peppers and strong spices. A fish soup called dziminu, like bouillabaise but much hotter, is made with peppers and pimentos. Inland freshwater fish is usually grilled and the local eels, called capone, are cut up and grilled on a spit over a charcoal fire. A peppered and smoked ham, called prizzutu, resembles the Italian prosciutto, but with chestnut flavour added. A favourite between-meal snack is figatelli, a sausage made of dried and spiced pork with liver. Placed between slices of a special bread, these are grilled over a wood fire. Red wine is available in abundance, but white and rosé are also produced on the island.

10 SPORT & ACTIVITIES

For information and detailed brochures/guides on all the sports and activities listed below, contact the French National Tourist Office (see address section). Further details on regional attractions, cultural sites and major tourist resorts can be found in the Resorts & Excursions section.

Watersports: Watersports: France has over 3000km (1880 miles) of coastline, ranging from the rugged English Channel and Atlantic coasts in the north and west to the sunny shores of the French Riviera (Côte d'Azur) along the Mediterranean in the south. All types of watersports are available, although the warm climate of the Mediterranean provides obvious advantages, with swimming in the sea possible practically all year round. Diving and snorkelling are popular in Porquerolles and Corsica. The colder English Channel and Atlantic waters are popular with sailing enthusiasts, and Biarritz is renowned for good surfing. The Côte d'Azur offers the possibility of sailing to Corsica.

Canal cruises: Canal cruises: France is criss-crossed by some 8500km (5313 miles) of canals and rivers, and houseboats can be rented easily. Popular itineraries include the Lorient-Redon

route (along the former route of the Britanny invasions); Marne-Strasbourg (through the vineyards of Champagne to the Alsace-Lorraine canals); the Burgundy Canal (a popular wine route); and Bordeaux-Sète (a 500km/313 mile-journey from the Atlantic to the Mediterranean along the Canal du Midi). Boats can be rented from numerous private operators who can also arrange the necessary permits. Most vessels sleep between 2 and 12 people. The return journey is usually via the same route; one-way trips are possible but involve extra costs. Prices range between FFr3000-FFr10,000 per week.

Fishing: Fishing: Good fishing regions include Brittany (salmon and trout), Franche-Comté (which has many lakes), Languedoc-Roussillon (mountain fishing), and Midi-Pyrénées (famous for the fario trout). Trips with local fishermen are possible along the Atlantic coast. Popular catches include crayfish, lobster, scallops and, at low tide, crabs, shrimps and mussels. Deep-sea-fishing trips are widely available on the Côte d'Azur. Permits for river fishing can be obtained from local city halls.

Wintersports: Wintersports: The French Alps offer excellent skiing with some of the world's best known resorts. There are over 480km (300 miles) of ski pistes, over 150 ski lifts, innumerable ski schools and quality resort facilities. All the major resorts offer skiing package holidays. The season runs from early December to the end of April. The height of the season is during February and March, which is reflected in the higher prices.

Hiking: Hiking: There are thousands of miles of carefully marked trails in France. These are known as Sentiers de Grande Randonnée, and are generally marked on maps as well as being recognisable by a red and white logo marked GR. The hiking routes are complemented by an extensive network of gîtes and mountain refuges providing inexpensive but comfortable accommodation. A Guide des Gîtes de France is available from bookshops.

Cycling: Cycling: French towns and cities are actively promoting the use of bicycles. There are some 28,000km (17,500 miles) of marked cycling paths throughout the country. Bicycles can be hired from many local tourist offices, and French Railways (SNCF) also offers bicycles for hire at some 30 stations. There is an extensive network of pistes cyclables (cycling paths) along the Atlantic coast, all the way down to the Spanish border. Regional cycling maps are available from the French Tourist Board.

Horseriding: Horseriding: Although popular and available countrywide, one of France's favourite destinations for horseriding is the Camargue where even inexperienced riders can gallop along sandy beaches and through the characteristic marshland. Horses can be hired from numerous stables.

Golf: Golf: There are over 200 golf courses. A number of companies are offering themed golf holidays which combine golfing with other activities as well as sightseeing. Popular destinations include the Loire Valley, Burgundy and the French Alps.

Spectator sports: Spectator Sports: The most popular are rugby and football, which the French follow passionately. Emotions exploded to fever pitch when France won the football World Cup in 1998. The Tour de France cycling race during summer is one of the world's most prestigious cycling races and a favourite spectator event. The French Open at Roland Garros near Paris is one of the four Grand Slam tennis tournaments and attracts all the world's top players as well as drawing huge crowds. Another notable event on the French sports calendar is the 24-hour motor race at Le Mans. The highlight of the horseracing calendar is the Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe held on 1 October each year. It takes place in Longchamp close to the Bois de Boulogne.

Traditional Sports: Traditional Sports: The traditional boules (also called pétanque), requiring as much dexterity as social skill, is frequently played in public squares. Visitors wishing to join in may find it easier if they speak French.

Wine tours: Wine tours: Tailor-made tours to France's numerous wine-producing regions and domaines (estates) are widely available. There are 10 principal wine regions, each with its own identity based on grape varieties and terroir (soil). Highlights on the wine calendar include the annual appearance of Beaujolais Nouveau (released fresh from the cellars on the third Thursday of November); the vendanges (grape harvest) festivals in Burgundy during autumn; and champagne tasting in Champagne (with many producers in Rheims and Epernay offering free samples). The wines' origins and quality are guaranteed by strict appellation contrôlée laws. In various regions, the most famous wine routes (routes du vin), as well as special sales and auctions, are signposted. Wine tours are frequently combined with cheese tasting. Like the wines, France's 365 cheeses vary according to region and climate. For further information, see Food & Drink in the Social Profile section. An illustrated map with details of cheeses, wines and regional dishes is available from the French National Tourist Office.

11 SOCIAL PROFILE

Food & Drink: With the exception of China, France has a more varied and developed cuisine than any other country. The vegetables, cheese, butter and fruit eaten in a French restaurant are usually fresh, although with the mushrooming of cafeterias and fast-food establishments, quality is no longer always reliable. The simple, delicious cooking for which France is famous is found in the old-fashioned bistro and restaurant. There are two distinct styles of eating in France. One is of course 'gastronomy' (haute cuisine), widely known and honoured as a cult with rituals, rules and taboos. It is rarely practised in daily life, partly because of the cost and the time which must be devoted to it. The other is family-style cooking, often just as delicious as its celebrated counterpart. It is the style of cooking experienced daily by the majority of French people and is the result of a carefully maintained family tradition. Almost all restaurants offer two types of meal: à la carte (extensive choice for each course and more expensive) and le menu (a set meal at a fixed price with dishes selected from the full à la carte menu). At simple restaurants the same cutlery will be used for all courses. The tourist office publishes a guide to restaurants in Paris and the Ile-de-France. Many restaurants close for a month during the summer, and one day a week. It is always wise to check that a restaurant is open, particularly on Sunday. Costs are not necessarily high. Generally speaking, mealtimes in France are strictly observed. Lunch is as a rule served from noon to 1330, dinner usually from 2000-2130, but the larger the city, the later the dining hour.
Dishes include tournedos (small steaks ringed with bacon), châteaubriand, entrecôte (rib steak) served with béarnaise (tarragon-flavoured sauce with egg base), gigot de présalé (leg of lamb roasted or broiled) served with flageolets (light green beans) or pommes dauphines (deep-fried mashed potato puffs). Other dishes include brochettes (combinations of cubed meat or seafood on skewers, alternating with mushrooms, onions or tomatoes) or ratatouille niçoise (stew of courgettes, tomatoes and aubergines braised with garlic in olive oil); pot-au-feu (beef boiled with vegetables and served with coarse salt) and blanquette de veau (veal stew with mushrooms in a white wine/cream sauce). In the north of France (Nord/Pas de Calais and Picardy) fish and shellfish are the star features in menus - oysters, moules (mussels), coques (cockles) and crevettes (shrimps) are extremely popular. In Picardy duck pâtés and ficelle picarde (ham and mushroom pancake) are popular. In the Champagne-Ardenne region there are the hams of Rheims and sanglier (wild boar). Among the fish specialities in this area are écrevisses (crayfish) and brochets (pike). Alsace and Lorraine are the lands of choucroute (sauerkraut) and kugelhof (a special cake), quiche lorraine and tarte flambée (onion tart). Spicy and distinctive sauces are

the hallmark of Breton food, and shellfish is a speciality of the region, particularly homard à l'amoricaine (lobster with cream sauce). Lyon, the main city of the Rhône Valley, is the heartland of French cuisine, though the food is often more rich than elaborate. A speciality of this area is quenelles de brochet (pounded pike formed into sausage shapes and usually served with a rich crayfish sauce). Bordeaux rivals Lyon as gastronomic capital of France. Aquitaine cuisine is based on goosefat. A reference to 'Perigord' will indicate a dish containing truffles. Basque chickens are specially reared. In the Pyrénées, especially around Toulouse, visitors will find salmon and cassoulet, a hearty dish with beans and preserved meat. General de Gaulle once asked, with a certain amount of pride, how it was possible to rule a country which produced 365 different kinds of cheese; some of the better known are Camembert, Brie, Roquefort, Reblochon and blue **cheeses from Auvergne and Bresse. Desserts include**: soufflé grand-marnier, oeufs à la neige (meringues floating on custard), mille feuilles (layers of flaky pastry and custard cream), Paris-Brest (a large puff-pastry with hazelnut cream), ganache (chocolate cream biscuit) and fruit tarts and flans.
For more information on the specialities from the various regions of France, consult the regional sections.

Drink: Countless books have been written on the subject of French wine, and lack of space here does not permit any major addition to the vast corpus of literature, which ranges from the scientific and learned to the emotional and anecdotal. Wine is by far the most popular alcoholic drink in France, and the choice will vary according to region. Cheap wine (vin ordinaire), can be either very palatable or undrinkable, but there is no certain way of establishing which this is likely to be before drinking. Wines are classified into AC (Appellation Contrôlée), VDQS (Vin delimité de qualité superieure), Vin de Pays and Vin de Table. There are several wine-producing regions in the country; some of the more notable are Bordeaux, Burgundy, Loire, Rhône and Champagne. In elegant restaurants the wine list will be separate from the main menu, but in less opulent establishments will be printed on the back or along the side of the carte. The waiter will usually be glad to advise an appropriate choice. In expensive restaurants this will be handled by a sommelier or wine steward. If in doubt, try the house wine; this will usually be less expensive and will always be the owner's pride. Coffee is always served after the meal, and will always be black, in small cups, unless a café au lait (or crème) is requested. The bill (l'addition) will not be presented until it is asked for, even if clients sit and talk for half an hour after they have finished eating. Liqueurs such as Chartreuse, Framboise and Genepi (an unusual liqueur made from an aromatic plant) are available. Many of these liqueurs, such as eau de vie and calvados (apple brandy) are very strong and should be treated with respect, particularly after a few glasses of wine. A good rule of thumb is to look around and see what the locals are drinking. Spirit measures are usually doubles unless a baby is specifically asked for. There is also a huge variety of aperitifs available. A typically French drink is pastis, such as Ricard or Pernod. The region of Nord/Pas de Calais and Picardy does not produce wine, but brews beer and cider. Alsace is said to brew the best beer in France but fruity white wines, such as Riesling, Traminer and Sylvaner, and fine fruit liqueurs, such as Kirsch and Framboise, are produced in this area. The wines from the Champagne region of the Montagne de Reims district are firm and delicate (Vevenay Verzy), or full-bodied and full-flavoured (Bouzy and Ambonnay). The legal age for drinking alcohol in a bar/café is 18. Minors are allowed to go into bars if accompanied by an adult but they will not be served alcohol. Hours of opening depend on the proprietor but generally bars in major towns and resorts are open throughout the day; some may still be open at 0200. Smaller towns tend to shut earlier. There are also all-night bars and cafés.

Nightlife: In major cities such as Paris, Lyon or Marseille, there are lively nightclubs that sometimes charge no entry fee, although drinks are likely to be more expensive. Alternatively, the entrance price sometimes includes a consommation of one drink. As an alternative to a nightclub, there are many late-night bars and cafes. Tourist offices publish an annual and monthly diary of events available free of charge. Several guides are also available which give

information about entertainments and sightseeing in the capital. In the provinces the French generally spend the night eating and drinking, although in the more popular tourist areas there will be discos and dances. All weekend festivals in summer in the rural areas are a good form of evening entertainment. There are over 130 public casinos in the country.

Shopping: Special purchases include lace, crystal glass, cheeses, coffee and, of course, wines, spirits and liqueurs. Arques, the home of Crystal D'Arques, is situated between St Omer and Calais, en route to most southern destinations. Lille, the main town of French Flanders, is known for its textiles, particularly fine lace. Most towns have fruit and vegetable markets on Saturday. Hypermarkets, enormous supermarkets which sell everything from foodstuffs and clothes to hi-fi equipment and furniture, are widespread in France. They tend to be situated just outside a town and all have parking facilities. Shopping hours: Department stores are open 0900-1830 Monday to Saturday. Most shops are closed between 1200-1430. Food shops are open 0700-1830/1930. Some food shops (particularly bakers) are open Sunday mornings, in which case they will probably close Monday. Many shops close all day or half-day Monday. Hypermarkets are normally open until 2100 or 2200.

Special Events: For a complete list of events and festivals throughout France, contact the French Government Tourist Office, which publishes a handbook giving full details; free copies are available on request. The following is a selection of the major festivals and other special events celebrated in France during 2001:
Jan 27-Apr 30 2001 Exhibition 'Settecento: Le siècle de Tiepolo', Palais des Beaux-Arts, Lille. Feb 8-27 Nice Carnival. Mar 4 Paris Marathon. May 9-20 54th International Cannes Film Festival. May 28-Jun 10 French Open Tennis, Roland Garros, Paris. Jun Paris Air Show; Django Reinhardt Festival; Fête de la Musique/PériphéRock. Jul 7-29 Tour de France. Jul 14 Bastille Day. Aug 1-5 Bayonne Festival. Sep Wine and Gourmet Food Fair, France-Comté.

Social Conventions: Handshaking and, more familiarly, kissing both cheeks, are the usual form of greeting. The form of personal address is simply Monsieur or Madame without a surname and it may take time to get on first-name terms. At more formal dinners it is the most important guest or host who gives the signal to start eating. Meal times are often a long, leisurely experience. Casual wear is common but the French are renowned for their stylish sportswear and dress sense. Social functions, some clubs, casinos and exclusive restaurants warrant more formal attire. Evening wear is normally specified where required. Topless sunbathing is tolerated on most beaches but naturism is restricted to certain beaches - local tourist offices will advise where these are. Smoking is prohibited on public transport and in cinemas and theatres. Tobacconists display a red sign in the form of a double cone. A limited choice of brands can be found in restaurants and bars. Tipping: 12-15% service charge is normally added to the bill in hotels, restaurants and bars, but it is customary to leave small change with the payment; more if the service has been exceptional. Other services such as washroom attendants, beauticians, hairdressers and cinema ushers expect tips. Taxi drivers expect 10-15% of the meter fare.

12 BUSINESS PROFILE

Economy: France has the fourth largest economy in the world, after the USA, Japan and Germany. It has a wide industrial and commercial base, covering everything from agriculture to light and heavy industrial concerns, the most advanced technology and a burgeoning service sector. France is also Western Europe's leading agricultural nation with over half of the country's land area devoted to farming. Wheat is the most important crop; maize, sugar beet and barley are also produced in large quantities. The country is self-sufficient in these (which are produced in sufficient surplus for major exports) and the majority of other common crops. The livestock

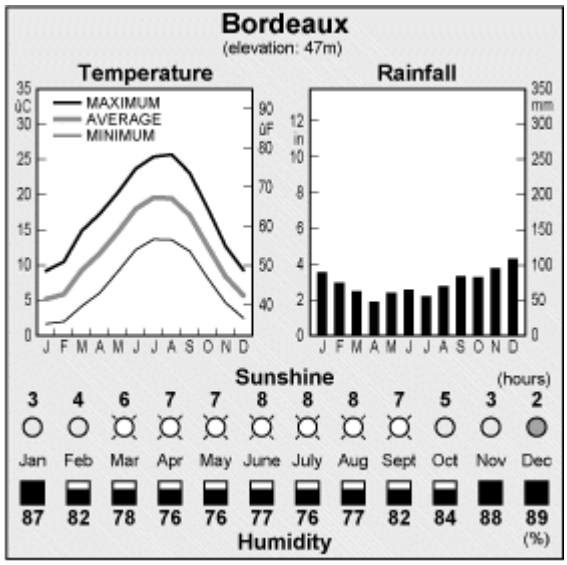
industry is also expanding rapidly. As is well-known, France is one of the world's leading wine producers. Despite the widespread belief in some quarters (not least the UK) that French agriculture is inefficient, the sector has regularly turned in good profit margins and a sound export performance. French companies are prominent in many industries, particularly steel, motor vehicles, aircraft, mechanical and electrical engineering, textiles, chemicals and food-processing. In advanced industrial sectors, France has a nuclear power industry sufficiently large to meet nearly three-quarters of the country's energy requirements (coal mining, once important, is in terminal decline), and is a world leader in computing and telecommunications. The service sector is dominated by tourism, which has long been a major foreign currency earner, but financial services have grown rapidly during the 1990s. Two main and related issues have dominated the economic policy debate in France in recent years: the chronically high level of unemployment (currently 11%) and the future of the large part of the economy owned or controlled by the state. A privatisation programme initiated by the Juppé government saw the disposal of oil and finance companies (including some of the banks nationalised in the 1980s). Although its Socialist successor suspended much of the programme (and introduced a scheme to create 350,000 new jobs) the need to improve the state of government finances in order to meet the EMU convergence criteria meant that it was not postponed completely. France was a founder member of the European Community and has benefited greatly from its participation. The EU - especially Germany, Belgium, Italy, Spain and the UK - accounts for the bulk of French trade. Outside the EU, the United States and Japan are its principal trading partners.

Business: Business people should wear conservative clothes. Prior appointments are expected and the use of calling cards is usual. While a knowledge of French is a distinct advantage in business dealings, it is considered impolite to start a conversation in French and then have to revert to English. Business meetings tend to be formal and business decisions are taken only after lengthy discussion, with many facts and figures to back up sales presentation. Business entertaining is usually in restaurants. Avoid the holiday period of mid-July to mid-September for business visits. Office hours: Generally 0900-1200 and 1400-1800 Monday to Friday.

Commercial Information: The following organisations can offer advice: Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie de Paris, 27 avenue de Friedland, 75008 Paris (tel: (1) 55 65 70 00; fax: (1) 42 89 78 68; web site: http://www.ccip.fr) or Centre de Renseignements des Douanes, 84 rue d'Haudeville, 75010 Paris (tel: (1) 53 24 68 24 or (08) 125 30 82 63 (within France); fax: (1) 53 24 68 30; e-mail: dgddicrd01@calva.net; web site: http://www.finances.gouv.fr/douanes).

Conferences/Conventions: Paris is the world's leading conference city, with the total amount of seating available (over 100,000 seats) exceeding that of any rival city. Also in demand are the Riviera towns of Nice and Cannes (the Acropolis Centre in Nice being the largest single venue in Europe); other centres are Lyon, Strasbourg and Marseille. The Business Travel Club (CFTAR) is a government-sponsored association of cities, departments, hotels, convention centres and other organisations interested in providing meeting facilities and incentives; it has over 80 members. Enquiries should be made through the French Government Tourist Office, which in several cities has a special department for business travel; these include London, Frankfurt/M, Düsseldorf, Milan, Madrid and Chicago. The following organisation can offer advice: Maison de la France, Conference and Incentive Department, 178 Piccadilly, London W1V 0AL (tel: (020) 7399 3521; fax: (020) 7493 6594; web site: http://www.meet-in-france.com/).

13 CLIMATE



A temperate climate in the north; northeastern areas have a more continental climate with warm summers and colder winters. Rainfall is distributed throughout the year with some snow likely in winter. The Jura Mountains have an alpine climate. Lorraine, sheltered by bordering hills, has a relatively mild climate.
Mediterranean climate in the south; mountains are cooler with heavy snows in winter.
The Atlantic influences the climate of the western coastal areas from the Loire to the Basque region; the weather is temperate and relatively mild with rainfall distributed throughout the year. Summers can be very hot and sunny. Inland areas are also mild and the French slopes of the Pyrenees are reputed for their sunshine record.
Mediterranean climate exists on the Riviera, and in Provence and Roussillon. Weather in the French Alps is variable. Continental weather is present in Auvergne, Burgundy and the Rhône Valley. Very strong winds (such as the Mistral) can occur throughout the entire region.

Required clothing: European, according to season.

14 HISTORY AND GOVERNMENT

History: After the disintegration of the Roman Empire in the 5th century, Gaul was settled by Germanic peoples from the east. After the collapse of the Visigothic Merovingian kingdom, Gaul in the 8th and 9th centuries became the heart of Charlemagne's Frankish empire, which stretched from the Pyrénées to the Baltic. During the following centuries the area under the control of the French kings gradually increased, although it was not until the reign of Louis VI (1108-1137) that royal authority became more than an empty theory in some areas of France, whose rulers were his vassals in name only. Among the most powerful of these were the Dukes of Normandy who had, by the mid-12th century, acquired England and western France. In 1328, however, the direct line of the Capetian royal house became extinct: one of the claimants to the throne was Edward III of England. The resulting intermittent conflict, known as the Hundred Years' War, was not resolved until the final English defeat in 1453. The period of French recovery is associated with the reign of the astute Louis XI (1460-1483): by the time of his death the area of France was much as it is today. During the late 15th and 16th centuries, France was again

distracted by foreign adventures, including the Italian Wars and several other grandiose pan-European schemes initiated by François I, and internal troubles (the Wars of Religion). This latter conflict was ended by the accession of the gifted Henry IV, a Protestant-turned-Catholic. Henry was assassinated in 1610, but his work of building up the power of the French state was continued under the administrations firstly of Cardinals Richelieu and Mazarin and subsequently the long reign of the 'Sun King', Louis XIV (1643-1715), by which time the country had replaced Spain as the major European power. The 18th century was a period of great colonial expansion, and France again became involved in conflicts with England, this time over their possessions in the New World. The reign of Louis XV (1715-74) was in general a time of great prosperity in France, but the age also witnessed a widening gap between rich and poor. The inequality of the taxation system (in particular the aristocratic and clerical exemption from the taille), the lack of political representation for the increasingly wealthy middle class and the inefficiency and profligacy of central government were but three of the underlying causes of the French Revolution of 1789 which overthrew Louis XVI. One of the great issues, the equality of the individual before the law, proved a decisive and divisive issue in Europe for the next century. The Government of the last years of the 18th century was deeply unstable, unpopular and impoverished, and was overthrown in 1799 by a rising army commander named Napoleon Bonaparte. After five years as consul, Napoleon was declared Emperor and embarked on a military campaign to establish a French empire in Europe. Defeat at Trafalgar at the hands of Nelson in 1805 left Britain in command of the sea, but on land, Napoleon scored a series of stunning victories in the next seven years, defeating the Prussians, Austrians and Russians. By 1812 the French empire extended beyond France to take in north west Italy and the Low Countries, while the Confederation of the Rhine, Switzerland, Spain and the Grand Duchy of Warsaw were dependent states. Napoleon's fortunes went into decline after the ill-fated invasion of Russia in April 1812 in which 600,000 men - the largest army ever assembled - were driven back westwards six months later. Napoleon was forced into exile, his armies and empire dismantled by the Austrians and British. He temporarily escaped imprisonment and returned to France, where he was welcomed as a hero. This brief 'Hundred Days' came to an end when Napoleon, his previous military prowess much diminished by time and physical infirmity, was defeated at Waterloo by the Duke of Wellington. The monarchy was restored and remained until the uprising of 1848 led by radical students and workers. Although the insurrection was crushed within a few months the monarchy was again overthrown and the Second Republic declared. Four years later the army intervened and instituted the Second Empire with Louis Napoleon (a nephew of the first Emperor Napoleon) as Emperor, seizing dictatorial power. The Second Empire (1852-1870) further expanded France's colonial possessions, while at home the repression was eased during the 1860s; in 1870 the regime obtained a popular mandate by referendum. France now faced a new enemy in the emerging power of Germany. The Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71 ended in defeat for the French and the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine by the Germans. The Third Republic, which was established in France after 1871, maintained an uneasy peace with its new powerful neighbour and sought succour in the Entente Cordiale with Britain. As events proved, the elaborate diplomatic designs of the late 19th and early 20th century in Europe were too fragile to guarantee peaceful co-existence in Europe. The interlocking network of treaties and alliances finally collapsed in August 1914 following the assassination of Grand Duke Ferdinand in Serbia. France recovered Alsace-Lorraine as a result of the Treaty of Versailles and introduced a new electoral system - still under the Third Republic - based on proportional representation. The inter-war years saw the election of a series of socialist governments and an increasing preoccupation with Germany and the deteriorating European situation. After the German invasion of Poland in 1939, France declared war on Germany. The Third Republic collapsed with the German invasion of 1940. The country endured four years of Nazi occupation with the co-operation of the Vichy regime installed by the Germans. In 1946 the Fourth Republic was established, but brought to an end in 1958 as a result of the Algerian crisis. The Fifth Republic has lasted from 1958 up until the present day. This constitution is characterised by the strong executive powers vested in the presidency, typified by the first holder of the office, General de

Gaulle, the wartime leader of the anti-Nazi government in exile. The Fifth Republic was almost overthrown in 1968 by a radical alliance of students and industrial workers. By way of reaction, conservative presidents and centre-right majorities in the National Assembly governed France throughout the 1970s. In 1981, the Socialist François Mitterand won the presidential election, the first time the party's candidate had been victorious. In May 1988, he was re-elected for a second term. Under 'Ton-ton' (Uncle) Mitterand and his conservative Gaullist successor, Jacques Chirac, the French have pursued their customary activist and occasionally maverick foreign policy. Its major commitment is to the European Union, and especially relations with Germany. After some initial uncertainty about the consequences of German reunification in 1991, the Franco-German axis has continued to be the driving force behind the EU's progress towards economic and political harmonisation. Beyond that, France is still active in almost every other part of the world. This arises from a combination of historical reasons (colonies and a self-image as a nuclear and world power), coupled with a desire to confront a perceived Anglo-American pursuit of global hegemony. French suspicions of the USA are a common feature of the international diplomatic environment. The French continue to maintain a significant economic and military presence in some of their former colonies, especially in Africa where have been a number of military interventions, and substantial influence in many others. The principal economic instrument is the 'Franc Zone' under which many francophone African countries - especially in West Africa - have linked their currencies to the French franc. France has been deeply involved in Rwanda, which has caused it some political difficulty due to its support for the extremist Hutu regime responsible for the genocide of 1994. (In 1998, the Government set up an unprecedented fact-finding committee to investigate allegations of French "complicity" in the genocide.) North of the Sahara, France has historically close relations with several Arab regimes, notably Algeria whose regime now relies on French support for its continued survival. In the Middle East, during the 1980s, France experienced an ill-fated involvement, along with other Western powers, in Lebanon. In 1991, it contributed a sizeable military force to the US-led force which drove the Iraqis from occupied Kuwait. But none of these commitments were as controversial as France's engagements in the Pacific. During the 1980s, French troops were despatched to fight a colonial counter-insurgency struggle against independence fighters in New Caledonia. Part of the reason Paris was keen to hang on to the colony was its availability for nuclear weapons testing. In 1995, the newly-elected President Chirac announced a series of nuclear tests in defiance of international opinion and strong opposition locally, where the pro-independence and anti-nuclear movements had united to campaign against the tests. They went ahead nonetheless, and continued periodically until Jacques Chirac announced an end to testing in January 1996. Chirac, who had been both mayor of Paris and Prime Minister, had succeeded Mitterand as president in 1995 after a narrow victory over the Socialist challenger Lionel Jospin. In the legislature, Chirac had the benefit of a conservative majority. This came about after a crushing victory for the right in the legislative elections in March 1993: unusually, the two main right-wing parties, the Gaullist Rassemblement pour la République (PRP) and the more centrist Union Démocratique Francaise (UDF) - normally fierce rivals - agreed to present joint candidates. Edouard Balladur of the RPR, a sometime Minister of Finance, became Prime Minister. In 1995, Balladur was replaced by Alain Juppé, whose rigorous pursuit of an economic austerity programme undermined support for the government and opened the way for a resurgence of the left. In the legislative elections of May-June 1997, Jospin's Parti Socialiste (PS) came close to an outright majority: his formation of a government with the support of smaller left-wing parties signalled the start of five years of 'cohabitation' with the right-wing Chirac in the Elysée Palace. The control of the main centres of political power in France - the presidency and the National Assembly - by opposing parties was all but unknown until the Mitterand era. It is now a routine feature of French politics.

Government: The president - who has unusually extensive executive power - is elected by direct popular vote for a 7-year term. Legislative power is held by a bicameral parliament: the 577-member National Assembly, elected for a 5-year term, and the 321-member Senate.

Senators are elected for 9 years with one-third of the seats coming up for re-election every 3 years.

15 OVERVIEW

Country Overview: France is bounded by the English Channel, Belgium, Luxembourg, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, the Mediterranean, Spain, Andorra and the Atlantic Ocean.

The spectacular variety of scenery ranges from the mountains of the Alps and Pyrenees, to the attractive wine producing river valleys of the Loire, Rhône and Dordogne.

France's capital, Paris, is one of the world's great cities and is easy to negotiate even on the first visit. There are more than 80 museums and 200 art galleries in Paris including, of course, the Louvre.

For many visitors though, it is the variety of each region with its particular geographical features, architectural tradition and cultural heritage which draws them back again and again. Brittany, with its elaborately carved Celtic crosses and pretty fishing villages; Alsace with its pastel-coloured half-timbered houses and famed wine route; the Loire and the historic chateaux that overhang its banks, or the mysteriously cratered landscape of the Auvergne - each has something different to offer the visitor.

There is almost complete unanimity of opinion that French food is the best in the Western world. Well-known dishes include entrecôte (rib steak) served with béarnaise sauce, pot-au-feu (beef boiled with vegetables and served with coarse salt), quiche lorraine or cassoulet.

Wine is by far the most popular alcoholic drink in France, and the choice will vary according to region.

In the major cities such as Paris, Lyon or Marseille, there are lively and fashionable nightclubs and discos that sometimes charge no entry fee, although drinks are likely to be more expensive. There are many late-night bars and cafes.

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