

World Spotlight



France

From roughly the first century BC until the fifth century AD, the area of modern France was governed by the Roman Empire. During this era a group of Celts, otherwise known as Gauls, inhabited the land.

The Gauls, along with a plethora of other tribes, existed under Roman governance for hundreds of years until Clovis I led his Salian Franks into battle. Clovis I eventually defeated the Romans and helped gain independence from the Roman Empire for the populations residing in French territory. Yet despite their freedom from Rome, the area of France remained highly factionalized.

Throughout the middle ages and continuing into the modern ages, France was plagued by internal and external disputes, which often times gave way to massive wars. In the span of 150 years, starting in 1789, France endured a revolutionary war and both world wars, all of which were fought on domestic soil. Yet despite the insurmountable losses suffered, France miraculously made a swift recovery and in 1958 established a stalwart government which has since proved insusceptible to anarchy.

With the creation of the Fifth Republic in 1958, France embraced a democratic style of government, and has since then prospered. Along with their egalitarian system, France's improving relationship with Germany has also generated affluence, and fostered a more closely knit Europe. Currently, France is ranked as the sixth-largest economy in the world. Although the history of France is somewhat tarnished by the high frequency of war, modern France has evolved into a leader in global commerce with rich history and profound culture.

At-a-glance

Official Name: French Republic

Capital City: Paris

Population: 60,876,236

Official Language: 100% French, rapidly declining regional dialects and languages (Provençal, Breton, Alsatian, Corsican, Catalan, Basque, Flemish)

Religions: Roman Catholic 83%-88%, Protestant 2%, Jewish 1%, Muslim 5%-10%

Life Expectancy: 76.1 years for men; 83.54 years for women

Currency: euro (EUR)

GDP: Purchasing Power Parity - \$1.816 trillion (2005 est.)

National Holiday: Bastille Day (Acknowledges the beginning of the French Revolution), July 14, 1789

Industries: machinery, chemicals, automobiles, metallurgy, aircraft, electronics, textiles, food processing, tourism

Chief Crops: wheat, cereal, sugar beets, potatoes, wine grapes, beef, dairy products, fish

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Health Care

France prides itself on health care and demonstrates immense dedication in ensuring that all French citizens have access to high quality medical attention. Over 96% of the local population receives medical services free of charge, or receives reimbursement for their medical expenses. Despite the comprehensive health care offered by the French government, over 80% of French citizens have supplemental insurance through employers.

Along with providing cost-free health care, in recent years the French Government has created legislation to further serve French citizens. In 2001 the government mandated that the health care system provide increased assistance for families in need, while a law passed in 2002 allowed for compensation of work-related accidents. Finally, the growing number of doctors also characterizes the improving trends in French health care. The number of doctors in France has tripled in the past 40 years, and doctor-to-citizen ratios in France are higher than those of Great Britain and the United States.

Hospitals in France are classified in three categories: private clinics, not-for-profit health care, and public hospitals, all of which are available to the French population. There are roughly 2,139 private clinics and not-for-profit health care institutions in France, providing over 170,000 beds. Public hospitals also play a major role in French health care with over 1,000 facilities adding more than 300,000 beds.



Above: Stethoscope.

Etiquette in France

Business

- In France, a rigid hierarchy exists between employers and their employees. Such rigidity leads many supervisors to adopt authoritative stances when dealing with their subordinates. This hierarchy exists well outside the office into lunch and dinner meetings, where it is vital to address a superior business associate by their business title.
- The French largely concern themselves with their country's rules and regulations which in turn make them weary of ambiguity, as they prefer to be familiar with all aspects of a certain venture.

Greetings

- Shaking hands is an acceptable form of greeting for business partners in France.
- Kissing on cheeks is limited to close friends, usually of equal status.
- Unlike the United States, firm-gripped and lengthy handshakes are considered impolite. Instead the French handshake involves a lighter grip and a single shake.
- Referring to a business associate by their first name is considered impolite, as first names are seldom used outside the circle of family and friends.

Business Meetings

- Discuss business only after the senior French business associate has initiated business conversation.
- When conversing, disagreement is acceptable so long as all arguments are heard and respected.
- Refrain from discussing personal or family related issues.

Pork Chops with Mustard-Cornichon* Sauce

Commonly referred to as Côtes de Porc Vigneronne (Grape Growers' Pork Chops), this dish is often enjoyed after a day of harvesting grapes. (Serves 6)

INGREDIENTS:

- 6 1-inch-thick pork loin rib chops
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 1/2 cup water
- 1 large shallot, minced
- 2 tablespoons minced cornichons
- 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
- 1/4 cup chopped fresh Italian parsley

DIRECTIONS:

- Add 1 tablespoon of butter in skillet at medium heat
- Sprinkle salt and pepper onto pork chops, then add 3 chops to the skillet and sauté for 3 minutes
- Cover skillet and cook for about 9 minutes, then transfer chops to warm plate
- Add half of water, shallot and garlic to the skillet, cook for 2 minutes
- Whisk in cornichons and mustard, then pour contents over pork chops and sprinkle with parsley

Gift Giving

- If invited into a French home, the guest should bring either flowers or chocolates to demonstrate their appreciation.
- When giving flowers remember that: chrysanthemums are given at funerals; red roses symbolize romance; carnations are noted for their inexpensiveness. Additionally, any flower arrangement should be presented in odd numbers in accordance with both European tradition and the belief that odd numbers are lucky.
- Although gift giving is acceptable and often expected, including one's business card with their gift is frowned upon.
- Avoid giving wine, as it can often be interpreted as insulting by the host.

Communications

- Many French citizens involved in business speak English.
- Although speaking French is not essential for conducting business in France, it is advisable to be familiar with rudimentary French words and phrases.
- Conversation is highly valued in France, and business lunches and dinners often play host to intense debate.
- Although discussion can be passionate, it is imperative to restrain from raising one's voice.
- It is important to regularly make eye contact.

Dining

- Many believe French cuisine to be the ultimate culinary experience, as the French boast a wide array of foods and wines. The variety comes from the clear distinctions between classical (haute) cuisines and provincial cuisines which incorporate an assortment of ingredients including butter, olive oil, herbs, and even sauerkraut.
- When eating, one should keep their hands above the table at all times.
 - Men are permitted to rest their wrists on the edge of the table, while women may rest their forearms.
 - At no time should a member of a dinner party place their elbows on the table, as doing so is considered extremely rude.
 - Taste the food before applying condiments in order to avoid insulting the person who has prepared the food.
 - Before enjoying a meal in a restaurant at night, turn off your cellular phone.
 - In regards to olive pits, place them on the side of your plate rather than in a napkin or atop the table cloth.
 - After finishing a meal, the fork and knife should be placed together in the middle of the plate.
 - When one member of the dining party departs, others should follow suit shortly afterwards.

Appearance and Behavior

- France keeps fashion in high regards, and business attire deeply reflects this.
- Informal attire in France usually refers to a shirt and tie.
- The French wear their suit jackets and keep their ties properly tied throughout the day.
- Punctuality is loosely regarded, but it is advised to be on time.
- Acknowledge business titles and refer to associates with their proper titles through all forms of communication (i.e. telephone, fax, e-mail).

***Cornichons are French pickles which can be found at specialty food stores and most supermarkets.**



Meet Our Resident Expert

David Gullino

**Sales Director,
Northwest Region**

Former Expatriate, France

Q: Where in France did you live?

A: I lived in southern France for two years in the towns of Bordeaux, Toulouse, and Biarritz. Biarritz was particularly interesting since it was predominantly Basque, which is an ethnic group that occupies parts of France and Spain. The Basque speak their own language and they consider themselves to be indigenous to the land. Living among the Basque in Biarritz enabled me to experience a unique culture, which was very different than the French lifestyle to which I had grown accustomed.

Q: Describe your experience as an expatriate in France.

A: I was in my early 20s, and working for a previous employer. The experience as a whole was exciting, yet nerve-racking, because I had never lived abroad and was not fluent in French (although I learned quickly!).

Q: How do the French perceive Americans?

A: Based on my experience in the southwestern part of the country, I would say that Americans are perceived very positively. When I lived there, "pre-Internet" as I like to put it, teenagers always wanted my Levis and other American goods. Although there are often mixed perceptions of tourists in general, the French are very hospitable. As long as you try and communicate in their language, you are cordially welcomed.

Q: Did you have any experience with the French health care system?

A: The French health care system offers high quality medical care. As an expat however, a specific challenge I faced was that although I became fluent in conversational French, my knowledge pertaining to communicating medical conditions was limited to none, making doctor visits daunting. I was forced to clumsily thumb through my French-English dictionary to look up medical terms in order to describe my ailments to the doctor. If only I had AGB and access to the online translation databases then!

Q: Pertaining to French living and French culture, is there anything that few Americans are aware of?

A: The stereotype that the French are rude is a huge misnomer. I think that sometimes travelers can be pretty "country-centric" based on their own origins and cultural practices. We forget that different countries have different practices and that we are essentially guests. I've encountered many situations in many countries where I was perceived to be inconsiderate and arrogant, not because of my actions, but simply because I am an American. I think that if you make any effort to communicate in the local language, no matter how rudimentary it may be delivered, people are appreciative and make an effort to understand you. However, when no effort is made to speak or communicate in the local language, it's possible that you are perceived to be rude and their reaction is simply that—a reaction to their perception of your rudeness.

Q: What did you gain by living in France?

A: My time in France provided me with a better appreciation for different cultures. During my stay I enjoyed working with people of different backgrounds and social systems. Additionally, I developed a well-rounded view point of cultural practices around the world, ranging from educational norms to parenting styles.

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- > www.1worldglobalgifts.com/francegiftgivingetiquette.htm
- > www.ambafrance-us.org/atoz/health.asp
- > www.bbc.co.uk/dna/h2g2/A354782
- > www.communicaid.com/france-business-culture.asp
- > www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/fr.html
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- > www.infoexport.gc.ca/fe-er/DisplayDocument.jsp?did=26112
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- > en.wikipedia.org/wiki/France



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