



# France



## Welcome

The best way of welcoming people from France is to greet them individually with a simple 'bonjour' (see Useful Phrases below) or 'bonsoir' ('good evening'). Handshakes are the most common form of greeting, especially among people who do not know each other. When greeting friends or family, the French will exchange kisses on both cheeks.

**'Welcome!'**  
Byan-vuh-noo  
Bienvenue

When addressing the French, it is polite to call them *Monsieur* (*mur-syur*) – Mr, *Madame* (*madam*) – Ms/Mrs, followed by their surname, until they invite you to use their first name. Your guests will be especially impressed and appreciative if you make the effort to address them with their French titles.

France is the UK's nearest European neighbour. With direct train, air and ferry links, there are large numbers of French tourists in the UK at any given time.

## The Language

### Hello

Bon-zhoor  
Bonjour

### Goodbye

O ruh-vwar  
Au revoir

### Please

See voo pley  
S'il vous plaît

### Thank you

Mair-see  
Merci

The French are proud of their language and its history as the first language of diplomacy and science for many years. It also shares some roots with English. Many people outside France around the world still use French in their everyday lives, either as a first language or as a common second or official language. Use of a few phrases in French is generally appreciated by a native French speaker.

Many older people have never learned English. Younger generations are more likely to understand English, but they may not try to speak unless they are confident they will get it right. Though they will have learned British English in school, they may struggle to understand strong accents or slang.

### Did you know?

France is the most visited country in the world, hosting more than 79 million tourists every year.



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## The Culture

The French people are passionate about debate, food and life itself. France is especially well known for its café culture, restaurants and cuisine. Croissants, baguettes, cheese and wine, all popular symbols of French culture, are part of their everyday diet. Meals are important and never rushed: lunches and dinners will often last two or more hours and tend to be shared with friends or family.

The French place a lot of importance on family and relationships. They love spending time with friends, having intellectual discussions and debates about anything from politics to philosophy or even football.

There is a strong sense of national identity and pride in the prestige and the importance of French language and culture across the world.

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## Customer Service Advice

The customer is greatly valued in France. An individual, warm and attentive welcome is expected.

French breakfasts are usually a croissant or bread with jam or butter, taken with coffee. There is no equivalent to the 'full English breakfast' in France. They tend to avoid fast food and prefer to eat regularly, with lunch at around 12pm and dinner between 7 and 9pm. Although different cuisines are being introduced throughout France, many French people prefer to stick with what they already know.

Most French tourists like to buy a few very good quality items, rather than a larger number of poorer quality items. If they are considering buying an unfamiliar brand or label, they may ask a lot of questions.

- **DO** offer advice or information about wine if it does not come from France.
- **DO** inform customers whether a service charge has been included or not, as French people are used to it always being included in the bill.
- **DO** chat if you can about French sports figures or other famous French people.
- **DO** greet French people as soon as you notice them.
- **DO** use a few French words when greeting or thanking French people. It is appreciated.
- **DO** speak quite directly to them as they might not understand British indirectness.



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## Liberté, égalité, fraternité – the French national motto

France is the largest country in the EU and has 22 regions. While the capital, Paris, is the largest city in France, other major cities include Lyon, Marseille, Nice, Lille and Strasbourg.

France's economy is the world's fifth largest. Its empire was once the world's second largest behind Britain's, covering nearly 9% of the globe.

France continues to have a close relationship with many of its former colonies. Some are officially recognised as part of France.

### Key Facts

- **Population** – approx 61,700,000
- **Capital City** – Paris
- **Language** – French
- **Religions** – Catholics 51%, Muslims 4%, Protestants 3%, Jews 1%, others 10%, agnostics 31%
- **Currency** – Euro
- **Exchange Rate** – €1.34 = £1.00
- **Dialling Code** – +33
- **Time Difference** – GMT+1



## Where to go next

For more information about languages, culture and welcoming international visitors to London, visit: [www.rln-london.com/welcoming](http://www.rln-london.com/welcoming)

RLN London's *Service Finder* can help you find language and cultural services – including translation, detailed cultural briefing and language training. [www.rln-london.com/servicefinder](http://www.rln-london.com/servicefinder)

*'Welcoming the World' is an initiative which aims to help people in frontline roles to give great customer service to international visitors. RLN London has endeavoured to ensure the accuracy of the information contained within this country profile, which is one of a wider series. However, views or opinions presented by the contributing author do not necessarily represent those of RLN London.*

### Remember!

These are general guidelines on how people from different cultures *might* act and the customer service they *might* expect. They can't predict every individual's behaviour in every situation.