

France



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France

Brief Historical Overview



Although ultimately a victor in World Wars I and II, France suffered extensive losses in its empire, wealth, manpower, and rank as a dominant nation-state. Nevertheless, France today is one of the most modern countries in the world and is a leader among European nations. Since 1958, it has constructed a presidential democracy resistant to the instabilities experienced in earlier parliamentary democracies. In recent years, its reconciliation and cooperation with Germany have proved central to the economic integration of Europe, including the introduction of a common exchange currency, the euro, in January 1999. At present, France is at the forefront of efforts to develop the EU's military capabilities to supplement progress toward an EU foreign policy.

The [constitution](#) of the Fifth Republic was approved by [referendum](#) on [September 28, 1958](#). It greatly strengthened the authority of the executive in relation to [Parliament](#). Paris is the capital city.

chief of state: President Jacques CHIRAC (since 17 May 1995)

head of government: Prime Minister Dominique DE VILLEPIN (since 31 May 2005)



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Brief Historical Overview

While the main territory of France ([metropolitan France](#); French: *la Métropole*, or *France métropolitaine*) is located in Western Europe, France is also constituted from a number of territories in [North America](#), the [Caribbean](#), [South America](#), the southern [Indian Ocean](#), the [Pacific Ocean](#), and [Antarctica](#) (sovereignty claims in Antarctica are governed by the [Antarctic Treaty System](#)). These territories have varying forms of government ranging from [overseas département](#) to "[overseas country](#)".

With a population of 60,656,178, France's territory is slightly less than twice the size of Colorado.

Besides the "historic" populations, new populations have migrated to France since the 19th century: Belgians, Italians, Spaniards, Portuguese, Poles, Armenians, Jews from Eastern Europe and the Maghreb, Arabs and Berbers from the Maghreb, Black Africans, and Chinese, to list only the most prominent.

Religion in France is predominantly Roman Catholic 83%-88%, Protestant 2%, Jewish 1%, Muslim 5%-10%, unaffiliated 4%.



France

Major Holidays and Traditions

The national holiday of France since 1880 is the *Fête Nationale* (National Holiday), colloquially known as *le 14 juillet*, celebrating the *Fête de la Fédération* ([July 14, 1790](#)) and *not* the storming of the [Bastille](#) ([July 14, 1789](#)) as is often mistakenly believed, even by a majority of French people, and is the reason why the holiday is referred to as [Bastille Day](#) in [English](#).

1 January New Year's Day (Jour de l'an)

1 May Labor Day (Fête du premier mai)

8 May WWII Victory Day (Fête de la Victoire 1945; Fête du huitième mai)

14 July Bastille Day (Fête nationale)

15 August Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Assomption)

1 November All Saints Day (La Toussaint)

11 November Armistice Day (Jour d'armistice)

25 December Christmas Day (Noël)

26 December 2nd Day of Christmas

France



National Dish

Crepes are enjoyed all over France, either filled with sweet or salty ingredients. Below is how to make the basic batter.

INGREDIENTS:
3/4 cups unbleached, all-purpose flour
3 large eggs
3/4 teaspoon salt
1-1/3 cups whole milk
5 Tablespoons unsalted butter, melted

PREPARATION:

1. Combine the eggs, milk, flour and salt in the blender and blend on high speed for 1 minute.
2. If the batter is lumpy, strain it through a sieve. Cover and allow to rest at room temperature for at least one hour.
3. Whisk in 3 tablespoons of the melted butter. Skim the foam off the rest of the butter.
4. Heat an 8" crêpe pan or skillet over med-high heat. Sprinkle a few drops of water on the pan; if they sizzle, the pan is ready to use. Brush with a little of the melted butter.
5. Using a 1/4 cup measure, fill it with batter and pour it into the skillet. Immediately pick up the pan and tilt and swirl it so that the batter covers the entire bottom of the pan. Pour any excess batter back into the bowl.
6. Loosen the edges of the crêpe with a metal spatula. You can use a spatula to turn the crêpe, but I usually turn it with my fingers. Using both hands, I pick up the loosened edges with my thumb and index finger and quickly flip it over.
7. Cook on the other side until lightly golden (usually less than a minute) and slide it out onto a plate. Cover with waxed paper. Repeat with the remaining batter. Then fill with honey, jam, or Nutella!



France

Major Languages

The sole official language of France is French. However, several regional languages (including [Alsatian](#), [Basque](#), [Breton](#), [Caribbean Creole](#), [Catalan](#), [Corsican](#), [Flemish](#), [Franco-Provençal](#) dialects, [Gascon](#), [Lorraine German](#) dialect, [Norman](#), [Occitan](#), and some [Oïl](#) dialects - e.g., [Picard](#)) are also occasionally understood and spoken, mostly by elderly people. These historical regional languages have been known as [patois](#), though this has been considered depreciative.

They are now taught at some schools, though French remains the only official language in use by the government, local or national.

Some languages spoken by immigrants are also frequently spoken, especially in large cities: [Portuguese](#), [Maghreb Arabic](#), several [Berber languages](#), several languages of [Sub-Saharan Africa](#), [Turkish](#), several [spoken variants of Chinese](#) (most notably [Wu](#), [Cantonese](#), [Min Nan](#), and [Mandarin](#)), [Vietnamese](#), and [Khmer](#) are the most frequently spoken.



France

Basic vocabulary in French:

Hello – Salut

Good day – Bonjour

Good evening - Bonsoir

Good bye – Au revoir

Thank you – Merci

You're welcome – De rien

How much does it cost? – Combien est-que ça coute?

Excuse me/ I am sorry – Pardon / Je suis desolée

Yes - Oui

No - Non

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Travel Tips

When traveling to France, remember that the currency is the Euro, along with most European countries. This will save you from having to change currency between them.

Tour de France every July brings cycling fans together from all over the world.

The [Mont-Saint-Michel](#) is the most visited tourist site in France. Other very popular and well-known tourist sites include: [Louvre Museum](#), [Eiffel Tower](#), [Palace of Versailles](#), [Disneyland Resort Paris](#), [Centre Pompidou](#), the [châteaux](#) of the [Loire Valley](#), the ski resorts of the French [Alps](#), [Tahiti](#) and the [lagoons](#) of [French Polynesia](#).

Information from the CIA World Factbook, Wikipedia, and other websites.

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