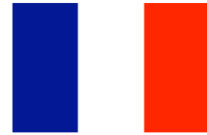


France - people, culture, language

A guide for businesses



The Country

France today: With a population of 59 million, France is the second largest country in Western Europe (after Russia). A strong regional culture, rich natural resources and a strong enterprise spirit have attracted foreign investment and created a dynamic economy. The capital Paris, with 9.8 million inhabitants, is the country's economic and political base. In spite of devolution, France still has a centralised administrative and political system focused on the capital.

Environment: Known as the Hexagon, after its shape, France extends from plains and forests in the North and East to the tropical Mediterranean coast of the Côte D'Azur in the South. With the mountains of the Jura and the Alps in the South East, to the Atlantic coastline to the West, France has astonishing variety. France is divided into *France Métropolitaine* and the *Départements d'outre mer* or DOM Martinique, Guadeloupe, French Guiana and Réunion, together with the *Territoires d'Outre Mer* or TOM of Mayotte, New Caledonia, Wallis and Futuna, French Polynesia, the French Antarctic and St Pierre et Miquelon.

Growth sectors: Automotive industry, IT and electronics, food and drink, tourism and finance.

Other information: France is famous for the regional variety of its wine and its food as well as for the great culinary traditions of its Michelin-starred restaurants. Visits to the wineries of the Loire valley or to Lyons France's other gastronomic capital, or to the Côte d'Azur, France's Mediterranean coast, are highlights of the visitor's trip. France has 11 national holidays, including Roman Catholic holidays, such as the feast of the ascension in May and the Assumption of the Virgin Mary on August 15th, and political holidays, such as Bastille Day on July 14th commemorating the French Revolution in 1789. New Year's Day in France is a major festival, known as St. Sylvestre, after its patron saint.

Did you know..?

Marianne is the symbol of France, symbolised by paintings and statues of her in a red and blue sash and revolutionary cap, storming the barricades in the French revolution. A French actress is regularly chosen to be the model for 'Marianne' and a few years ago, France was scandalized when a 'Marianne' was photographed nude for a magazine.

The People

Educated: In France, education, intelligence and eloquence are high priorities. Children study philosophy in school and logical thinking and a liking for abstract argument is a French characteristic, which can cause problems for more pragmatic practically minded British counterparts.

Entrepreneurial

There are close links between industry and government and the top echelons of both are educated at the *Grandes Ecoles*, graduate schools entered by competitive examination. To be an '*enarch*', graduate of the *Ecole Nationale d'Administration*, is to be marked as a future political or business leader.

Frenchness

The French are very aware of the status and power of being 'French' and invest in projects aimed at increasing French prestige and position in the world. They are also excited by novelty and gadgetry, which will uphold and enhance the prestige of France. It is important if you are dealing with France regularly to learn the language in order to earn the respect and co-operation of its people.

Formality and correctness

The French are quite formal in public and preserve the distinction between the family '*tu*' and the formal '*vous*'. You should expect to use '*vous*' with people you know until they invite you to use '*tu*'. Saying '*Bonjour Monsieur*' or '*Bonjour Madame*' is important in greetings and it's to preserve a degree of formality until you get to know people.

Catholicism and Islam

Although church attendance is falling, the Roman Catholic church is important in France but there are also about a million Muslims, mainly from North Africa, especially Algeria.

The French word *Bistrot*, a small restaurant serving quick meals, comes from the Russian, meaning 'quick'. The word was imported by Russian troops who occupied Paris during the Paris Commune revolution after the war of 1870.

'*La grande dictée*', a national spelling bee, attracts 300,000 entrants a year and seven million viewers on TV.