


France Factsheet (Cycle)

Currency	Euro (€)	Divided into 100 cents; Swiss Francs in Switzerland
Time	GMT + 1	i.e. when it is 12 noon in London it is 13:00 in Paris or Geneva
Language	French	English is widely understood
Electricity	220v	two-pin plugs are widely used 

PASSPORT & VISA

A valid ten-year passport is essential and, for British Citizens, needs only be valid for the duration of your stay, though it's always good practice to have at least three months' validity. Check the FCO's advice on entry requirements for France (and Switzerland if appropriate) to be sure: <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice>. Remember to check any regulations for countries you may transit during your journey. There is usually no visa requirement for British passport-holders, but please check current visa requirements on our website (<https://www.discoveradventure.com/essential-information#/get-your-visa>) and ensure you allow plenty of time.

MONEY:

Euros can be obtained before you arrive in France, and it's recommended that you bring enough for the first few days with you. Currency can be exchanged at banks, bureaux de change and some large hotels, though you will usually get a better rate of exchange at ATMs (cash machines) – these are more convenient as they are not restricted to banking hours. Travellers' cheques are the safest way to carry money, but opportunities to change them during your trip will be limited. Most places accept the major credit cards; ATMs are widely available in most towns and cities. It's easy to change Euros to Swiss Francs in Switzerland, or get them in advance if you prefer.

Tipping

Most restaurants and hotels automatically add a 15% service charge so a tip is not necessary, although another 2-3% is customary if the service has been especially good. If service is not included 15% is customary. Taxi drivers expect 10-15% of the fare. Tips of €1 are usually given to washroom and cloakroom attendants, and if you pop into a café to use their toilets, leave a tip to thank them.

HEALTH:

Vaccinations

We recommend you ensure your routine UK schedule of vaccinations is up-to-date (especially Tetanus) and check the Fit For Travel (<http://www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk>) website for further details. You should always check with your GP/travel clinic for the latest health advice, as they are made immediately aware of any updates in World Health Travel requirements.

General

France (and Geneva) are remarkably free of health hazards and it is considered safe to drink tap water, although if you know your stomach is easily upset by different minerals and changes in environment etc, it is inadvisable to do this. Drastic changes in diet experienced while travelling can often make you susceptible to minor stomach ailments, such as diarrhoea. On the trip itself, food is cooked and prepared to very high standards and you can eat with confidence – though adopt good hand-washing procedures to prevent bugs being passed around the group. Elsewhere, do not eat a meal if you think it has not been freshly cooked.

Sunstroke, sunburn and dehydration are always a risk on trips of this nature. Use a high sun factor cream or sun block – remember that you can burn even on cloudy days or when you feel cold. In the mountains, bear in mind the sun is also very strong even if you feel cooler, and windburn can also be a factor. Wear a hat (when you're not cycling) and sunglasses, and ensure that you drink plenty of water or energy drinks to replenish your fluid levels. Try to avoid caffeine (remember it is also found in soft drinks.)

SAFETY & SECURITY

While generally safe, visitors are advised to take precautions against petty theft and to ensure their personal safety, just as you would in the UK. Beware of thieves and pickpockets operating in busy areas such as bus stations, airports, markets, popular tourist sites and on the Metro in Paris. Use your common sense and don't flash any valuables around, including your watch and camera. You don't need your best jewellery and gadgets on this trip. It helps to

wear a concealed money belt with your flight ticket, cash and important documents inside. Be careful at night and avoid walking or getting into taxis alone. Should you require further information see the FCO's section on safety & security for each country: <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice>

WEATHER:

The climate of northern France is very similar to that of southern England. It can be hot, cold, sunny or rainy, or very changeable! It may be windy in flatter areas. In the south it's more reliable and you can expect sunny conditions, though you should still be prepared for cooler or wet weather. Weather in the Alps and Pyrenees can change rapidly. Climate is affected by altitude more than latitude; though it can be very warm during the day it can still get very cold at night and cold winds can spring up at any time. Rain is always a possibility and it may be windy in the valleys. As you climb a mountain you may start with a tail-wind and end with a head-wind! The weather and temperature at the foot of a climb can be dramatically different to the top, where it may be foggy, in cloud or much colder. The following table shows average min / max temperatures and rainfall (mm) for the main cities of our different trips in France (including Geneva for the Alpine regions.)

	May		June		July		August		September		October	
	Temp °C	Rain	Temp °C	Rain	Temp °C	Rain	Temp °C	Rain	Temp °C	Rain	Temp °C	Rain
Calais	10 - 16	42	12 - 18	39	15 - 20	48	15 - 21	44	13 - 19	54	10 - 15	63
Paris	10 - 20	57	13 - 23	54	15 - 25	59	14 - 24	64	12 - 21	55	8 - 16	50
Geneva	9 - 19	68	13 - 23	89	15 - 25	64	14 - 24	94	12 - 21	99	7 - 14	72
Grenoble	9 - 21	106	12 - 24	62	14 - 27	56	14 - 27	63	11 - 22	100	8 - 17	93
Toulouse	10 - 21	78	13 - 24	65	16 - 28	46	16 - 28	50	13 - 24	52	10 - 19	52
Luchon	10 - 20	102	13 - 22	94	14 - 24	75	15 - 26	98	12 - 23	56	9 - 19	68
Carcassonne	12 - 22	57	15 - 26	43	17 - 29	24	17 - 29	41	14 - 24	45	11 - 20	57

LANGUAGE

French, unsurprisingly, is the official language in France, and also in Geneva. There are many regional dialects; Basque is spoken as a first language by some in the southwest of France, and Breton by some in Brittany, while some still speak Catalan and Occitan. Many people, particularly those connected with tourism in the major areas, speak at least some English but it is always polite and fun to have a few phrases handy from your phrase book!

Hello / Goodbye	- Bonjour / Au revoir	Yes / No	- Oui / Non
Please / Thank you	- S'il vous plait / Merci	How much?	- C'est combien?
I don't understand	- Je ne comprends pas	Sorry	- Désolé
1 - un	5 - cinq	9 - neuf	100 - cent
2 - deux	6 - six	10 - dix	1000 - mille
3 - trois	7 - sept	20 - vingt	
4 - quatre	8 - huit	50 - cinquante	

CULTURE

Over 62 million people live in France; of these the majority (83%) is Roman Catholic. Protestants, Muslims and Jews make up the majority of the remainder.

Shaking hands and, more familiarly, kissing one or both cheeks (depending on region), are the usual forms of greeting. A ban on smoking in workplaces (including airports, railway stations, shops and offices etc) came into force in February 2007, and bars and restaurants joined the list a year later.

Cycling is France's national sport and drivers are generally far more aware of people on bikes than here in Britain, so you may be pleasantly surprised at the experience of cycling on French roads.

RECOMMENDED READING:

Travel Guides (especially useful if extending your stay)

- France - Lonely Planet
- Rough Guide to France
- French Phrasebook - Lonely Planet

Other Non-Fiction:

- Tour Climbs - Chris Sidwell
- Alpe d'Huez: The Story of Pro Cycling's Greatest Climb - Peter Cossins

Fiction / Autobiography

- French Revolutions - Tim Moore
- The Escape Artist - Matt Seaton
- Boy Racer - Mark Cavendish
- Cycling Is My Life - Tom Simpson
- Talk to the Snail - Stephen Clarke
- Tout Sweet - Karen Wheeler
- The Man who Married a Mountain - Rosemary Bailey
- A Race for Madmen - Chris Sidwell
- Labyrinth - Kate Mosse (set in Carcassonne)