

Travel Book - A Journey Through Every Country in the World, The



A stubborn conviction that they live in the best place on the planet is what makes most French folk – which accounts for an awful lot of those zesty stereotypes showered on this Gallic goliath: arrogant, snooty, officious, opinionated, sexy and super-stylish are accolades and insults bestowed upon this cultured set who have some of the world's greatest philosophers, artists, musicians and literati in their gene set. No surprise then to find France is a timeless land of deep-rooted tradition and modern innovation, a fabled feast of fine food and wine, a place which has unfaltering romance woven into every seasonal festival, a cinematic trip from opulent Renaissance chateau to Parisian jazz bar to electric-blue seascape.

BEST TIME TO VISIT
April to June, September and October

TOP THINGS TO SEE

- The mind-blowing glacial panorama atop Aiguille du Midi (3842m), a cable-car ride from the mountaineering mecca of Chamonix in the French Alps
- How French kings and queens lived at France's grandest chateau in Versailles
- Capital art in Paris: Mona Lisa at the Louvre, *The Kiss* at Musée du Rodin and cutting-edge contemporary art at Pompidou
- The garden Monet painted at his home in Giverny
- Europe's highest sand dune (Dune du Pilat) overlooking views of amazing surf

TOP THINGS TO DO

- Taste champagne in ancient cellars in Reims and Épernay
- Walk barefoot across kilometres of wave-tipped sand to Mont St-Michel
- Pedal through vineyards, cherry orchards and lavender fields in rural Provence
- Tuck into French gastronomic art de vivre in gourmet Bordeaux
- Motor the mythical corniches (coast roads) on the French Riviera

GETTING UNDER THE SKIN

Read *Sixty Million Frenchmen Can't Be Wrong: What Makes the French so French* by Jean-Benoît Nadeau and Julie Barlow for a witty insight into the French

Listen to Serge Gainsbourg's breathless *Je T'aime... moi non plus* and feel your soul turn Francophile

Watch *Le Fabuleux Destin d'Amélie Poulain* and feel like a Parisian in Montmartre

Eat Breton crêpes in a traditional long house inspired by a crêmière (prehistoric megalith) in Brittany

Drink cider in Normandy, pastis in Provence and well-aged red in Burgundy

IN A WORD
SOUL (PH)

TRADEMARKS
Baguettes, cheese, café society, red wine, designer fashion, cabaret, Tour de France

RANDOM FACT
Among other things, the French invented the first digital calculator, the hot-air balloon, Braille and margarine



1. The sight of the Mont Blanc massif towering above Grenoble. (L: Dineo; S: Jean-Benoît Nadeau)
2. François I used Chateau de Chambord in the Loire valley as his rather casual, rather big hunting lodge
3. Aerial view of the dunes of the Atlantic coast, with the shimmering Christmas lights of the Champagne
4. Baskers contribute to the colour and life of the Latin Quarter in Paris

FRANCE
CAPITAL Paris | POPULATION 64,057,726 | AREA 551,500 sq km | OFFICIAL LANGUAGE French

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