

France and Its Bounties

Colours as Far as the Eye Can See

Fine sand beaches, snow-covered peaks and luscious green valleys – all these landscapes give France its character, unique throughout the world.

One after the other, The English Channel, the North Sea, the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea formed the 5,500 km of shores that shapes the French coastline. Shores of pink granite in Brittany, the silver coast in Aquitaine, the coves of the Côte d'Azur – a multitude of variations.

The more exotic overseas French territories, also called France of Three Oceans, are colourful lands.

The Vosges, the Jura Mountains, the Alps, the Massif Central and the Pyrenees form a massive skiing area in winter. The Savoy alone offers you the most extensive slopes in the world.

The arrival of summer is a time for magnificent walks: 180,000 km of hiking trails, 45,000 km of off-road cycling paths and nature lovers can take advantage of the *via ferrata* (iron vertical pathways).

The tranquil waters of the rivers and canals accommodate numerous canoes and kayaks and an equal number of houseboats. Riverboarding is less subtle, but just as spectacular. Lastly, seeing France from the air while paragliding, hand-gliding or in a hot air balloon is a vertiginous sight to behold.

France, Open-Air Museum

From vestiges of the Gallo-Roman era to cathedral master-builders, passing through the Renaissance up to modern times, cities and villages offer tourists a range of locations.

Over 80,000 structures, countless parks and gardens in the so-called French style show off the talent and passion this country has for artistic creation. This heritage is rounded off with its 6,000 museums. Also, The Louvre alone has the largest collection in the world. The glass pyramid designed by famous architect I. M. Pei is the symbol of modern creativity that is forever being solicited. It is also a reminder that France is a museum in constant motion. The Carré d'Art in Nimes, the Centre d'Art Plastique Contemporain in Bordeaux, the Cartier Foundation and so many others throughout the territory illustrate a tradition for openness and giving artists carte blanche.

A Distinct Concept of Happiness

The art of living the French way means approaching life poetically and amassing a Prévert-like inventory where emotions and the magic of your surroundings and everyday occurrences intertwine. It's a treasure trove that contains an intermingling of delightful moments at coffee shops, wanderings through flea markets and estate sales, the solemnity of an exceptional heritage, intense moments that make theatre, music and cinema come alive, the international festivals from Cannes to Avignon, Mariac or Deauville. As for the more

down-to-earth regional events, that's not where you'll find attractions "for tourists", even if they are welcome. They reflect traditions that the locals are proud to pass on. The Christmas market in Alsace, the truffle market in Perigord, the santon (figurines) fair in Provence, etc. We are at the heart of a French way of life, at times brusque or with a singsong accent, but always good-natured. And to capture the best of this spirit, visit the small public dances held in the summertime. The young and the old, the haves and the have-nots are all there, raising their glasses and dancing to the sound of the national accordion or a rock band.

A Unique Array of Dishes and Flavours

France produces foods that are renowned all over the world. From the north to the south, from Brittany to Languedoc by way of Alsace or Cantal, everything an epicurean desires. Of course, we think of wine, foie gras, cheese (over 350 varieties), *tarte tatin* or *puits d'amour*. But there are also the specialities found in every region and little village where down the road from a hostel you'll enjoy dishes with local flair that inspire famous chefs. Heirs to Brillat-Savarin, today their names are Marc Veyrat, Alain Passart, Joël Robuchon, Alain Ducasse, Alain Senderens.