



# La France



Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité

## Bretagne, Loire, Centre, and Poitou-Charentes

Brittany occupies the north-west peninsula of continental Europe in northwest France. It is bordered by the English Channel to the north, the Celtic Sea and the Atlantic Ocean to the west, and the Bay of Biscay to the south. Brittany has a history of war between France and Britain. In terms of climate, Brittany lies within the north temperate zone. It has a changeable, maritime climate, similar to Cornwall. Further inland, in the Loire Valley, the climate is favorable most of the year. Centre, like the Midi-Pyrénées, was named by the central government purely on the basis of geography, as the region is composed of too many historical provinces to use a single historical name.

**Gastronomy:** Carrots, beans, and melons grow in abundance in the fertile Valley of the Loire, and are often paired with beef, veal and lamb. Of the most famous food and drink, Poitou-Charentes is known for Cognac, a mellow, warming brandy. The most famous brand names include Courvoisier, Hennessy, and Remy Martin.

**Economy:** The coast offers up a strong economy in seafood, while in Centre, efforts are being made to invite agribusiness and finance.

**History:** The architectural heritage in the valley's historic towns is notable, especially its châteaux, such as the Château d'Amboise, Chambord, Chinon, du Rivau, Ussé, Villandry and Chenonceau. The châteaux, numbering more than three hundred, represent a nation of builders starting with the necessary castle fortifications in the 10th century to the splendor of those built half a millennium later. In Brittany, the enchanted Forêt de Brocéliande is famous for its legendary figures of King Arthur, Guinevere, and the Lady of the Lake.



### Normandie, Nord-Pas-de-Calais, Picardie, and Ile-de-France

Ile-de-France, literally "Isle of France," is the home of the national capital, Paris, and is at once the most populous and one of the smallest regions. It is almost completely covered by the Paris metropolitan area. Its neighboring regions are less densely populated and allow for agriculture. Inhabited since prehistoric times, the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region has always been a strategic (and hence one of the most fought-over) regions in Europe. French President Charles de Gaulle, who was born in Lille, called the region a "fatal avenue" through which invading armies repeatedly passed. Normandie is famous for the Invasion of Normandy during World War II. Picardie has a strong and proud cultural identity, including extraordinary Gothic churches, distinctive local cuisines and beer, and traditional sports such as longue paume, which is the ancestor of tennis.

**Gastronomy:** Some of the most famous foods from this region include baguettes, croissants, and Camembert, Neufchâtel, and Boursin cheeses.

**Economy:** Apple orchards in Normandie are a major source of crops, and provide for the famous Calvados apple brandy. Seafood is also abundant along the northern coast.

**History:** The area around Paris was the original personal domain of the king of France. Picardie is the birthplace of Gothic architecture, housing six of the world's greatest examples of Gothic cathedrals.

### Alsace, Lorraine, Champagne, Bourgogne and Franche-Comté

Eastern France, because it borders Germany and Switzerland, takes on a similar gastronomic landscape. Cabbage and sausage, as well as pretzels are common fare, and Lorraine is known for its traditional potato dishes. Having been early and always densely populated, Alsace is famous for its high number of picturesque villages. Nestled among the Vosges and Jura Mountains, the soil is perfect for growing grapes. Accordingly, Champagne is produced in its namesake region, while beer and wine are produced closer to the German border, especially Burgundy in its own namesake region. Franche-Comté, meanwhile, is France's first destination for cross-country skiing and other outdoor activities. Storks are a common sight in this region as well.

**Gastronomy:** Franche-Comté is known for its "vin jaune," or "yellow wine," and other delights from the region include heartier dishes which include potato, cabbage, sausage, and breads.

**Economy:** Wine and Dijon mustard from the Bourgogne region are exported across the world.

**History:** The city of Reims is the site of every former king of France's coronation. The Cathédrale de Notre Dame de Reims where the coronations took place was retrofitted in 2011 with stained glass by modern artist Marc Chagall.

### Limousin & Auvergne

Limousin, with a slowly rising population of less than a million, is the least populous region in France. It is essentially a rural region. Famed for some of the best beef farming in the world, herds of Limousin cattle—a distinctive chestnut red—are a common sight in the region. The region is also a major timber producing area. The regional capital, Limoges, was once an industrial power base, world-renowned for its porcelain and still a leader and innovator in electric equipment factories (which originally used porcelain as an insulator). However, large factories are now few in number. Its neighbor, Auvergne, is known for its mountain ranges and dormant volcanoes, and is located on the plateau Massif Central. The Puy de Dôme is the tallest volcano in the region with an altitude of 1,465 m. "Green" Tourism is now becoming an important draw for these regions.

**Gastronomy:** Cows are much in evidence and are used both for meat and for milk, which is made into a number of well-known cheeses: Bleu d'Auvergne, Cantal, Fourme d'Ambert and Saint-Nectaire.

**Economy:** The region is predominantly agricultural with tourism slowly becoming more important. Owing to its natural resources, including rubber, Michelin tires are produced there.

**History:** Auvergne has been settled by humans since 10,000 B.C., but around 3000 B.C. the Celts and Arverni, whom the region was named after, settled Auvergne. The leader of the Arverni was the famed Vercingetorix who defended Gallic independence against the Romans.

### Languedoc, Rhône-Alps, and Provence

Languedoc is a significant producer of wine, and a major contributor to the surplus known as the "wine lake". Today it produces more than a third of the grapes in France, and is a focus for outside investors. Wines from the Mediterranean coast of Languedoc are labeled as Languedoc, those from the interior have other labels such as Fronton, Gaillac, or Limoux to the west—and Côtes du Rhône towards east. In Rhône-Alps, the highest peak is Mont Blanc, on the French-Italian border. The most famous of these regions is Provence, which has the quintessential Mediterranean climate. Sun and sand draw many throughout the year. The Vaucluse is the meeting point of three of the four different climatic zones of France; it has a Mediterranean climate in the south, an alpine climate in the northeast, around the mountains of Vaucluse and the massif of the Baronnies; and a continental climate in the northwest. The close proximity of these three different climates tends to moderate all of them, and the Mediterranean climate usually prevails.

Provence has a special place in the history of the motion picture – one of the first projected motion pictures, a fifty-second silent film, was shown to an audience in Paris on 28 December 1895, causing a sensation.

**Gastronomy:** The Mediterranean climate has shaped the Mediterranean cuisine. Classic dishes have sprung from the region, including Salade Niçoise, Bouillabaisse, and ratatouille, but one also finds olive tapenade, sun-ripened vegetables, and fresh seafood. Fresh herbs and olive oil are the basics for each meal.

**Economy:** Aerospace, electronics, and bio-tech industries abound in Toulouse as well as high-tech, electronics, and computer industries. Despite the favorable environment for industry, services are the largest sector of the economy in the region. In Rhône-Alps, tourism is key. The region is a major European transit hub, linking northern France and Europe to the Mediterranean area. Millions travel along its motorways in summertime from Paris to holidays at the sea. There are international airports at Lyon, Grenoble and Saint-Étienne and many other minor airports and airfields. The region is also a transport hub for the rail-network with the TGV running through Lyon from Paris and the north, to the Mediterranean.

**History:** Rhône-Alps region has hosted the Winter Olympics three times: in 1924 at Chamonix, 1968 at Grenoble, and 1992 at Albertville. Annecy tried to be 4th city, but it failed. Vincent van Gogh (1853–1890) lived little more than two years in Provence, but his fame as a painter is largely a result of what he painted there. Pablo Picasso (1881–1973) spent each summer from 1919 to 1939 on the Côte d'Azur, and moved there permanently in 1946, first at Vallauris, then at Mougins, where he spent his last years.



Physical Features & Environment	Attractions and History	Regional Gastronomy
Mountain Range	War Memorial	Duck and Foie Gras
Volcano	Outdoor Activity	Beef
Mediterranean Climate	Skiing	Oysters
Farmland	Reims Cathedral	Cabbage
Storks	Brocéliande Forest	Mustard
	Castles	Apples
Regional Beverages	Wine	Champagne
	Brandy & Cognac	Beer

