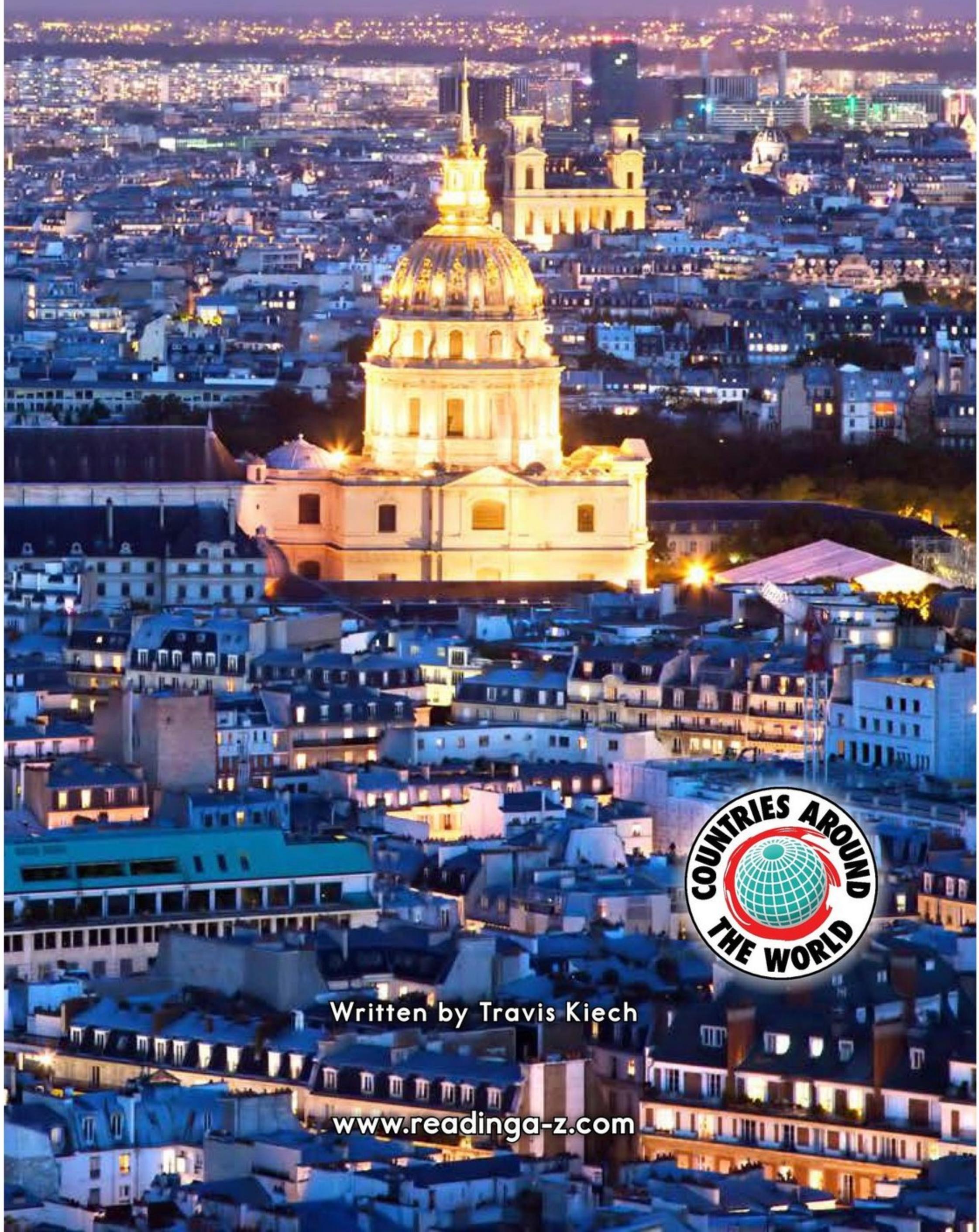


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# France



Written by Travis Kiech

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## Table of Contents

Where Is It? .....	4
People .....	6
Land .....	8
History .....	10
Celebrations .....	12
Food .....	13
Conclusion .....	14
Glossary .....	16



## Where Is It?

France is the largest country in western Europe. To the northeast of France are Belgium and Luxembourg, and to the east are Germany, Switzerland, and Italy. Spain is to the south of France, and across the English Channel to the northwest lie the United Kingdom and Ireland.

To the west of France is the Atlantic Ocean, and to the southeast is the Mediterranean Sea. The large island of Corsica, off the southeastern coast, is part of France. The tiny country of Monaco is located on France's southeastern coast as well.



Originally a fort, the Louvre became a museum in 1793.

Paris, the capital of France, is a city famous for its beautiful **architecture**, art, and historical landmarks. Millions of people visit Paris each year to see the Eiffel (EYE-ful) Tower, the Notre Dame (no-truh DAHM) **Cathedral**, and the Louvre (LOO-vruh) art museum, among other sites. A monument called the *Arc de Triomphe* (ARK du tree-OHMF) stands over one of the city's main avenues, the Champs-Élysées (SHAHM-zay-lee-ZAY). The Seine (SEN) River runs through the city, and public parks and gardens are plentiful.

More than ten million people live in Paris. The city is France's center for both business and culture, and is known for its museums, concert halls, and fine restaurants. Over the years, many writers and artists have lived in Paris, taking advantage of its cultural and educational opportunities. It is also known for its **fashion** industry, which displays new styles of clothing every year at huge shows.

# Tour de France

For three weeks in July, France hosts the Tour de France, the most difficult bicycle race in the world. People crowd along the streets to watch the cyclists as they cover thousands of miles of French terrain. It is the country's largest annual sporting event.



Tour de France trophy

## People

More than sixty-six million people live in France, with most people living in urban areas. Approximately 80 percent of people work in the service industries, and **tourism** is by far the largest service industry. In fact, France is the most-visited country in the world, with more than eighty-two million tourists each year.

Some French people also work in factories that produce cars, machinery, aircraft, electronics, clothing, and other products. Some factories make chemicals and process food, and a large mining industry also provides jobs.

Many French people often enjoy a slower pace of living compared to Americans. In fact, leisure time is so important that, in 2000, the government reduced the number of hours that French employees work from 39 hours to 35 hours weekly. Companies must also provide their employees with at least five weeks of paid vacation per year.

Although only about 4 percent of workers are farmers, France produces a large amount of agricultural products. More than half of the country's land is used for farming, with the majority of farmers growing wheat, corn, and other grains. Farmers also grow sugar beets and potatoes, and raise dairy cattle for cheese and other dairy products. In some regions of France, farmers grow fruits such as apples, pears, and peaches in orchards, as well as wine grapes in vineyards.



France is famous for its many different types of wine. Different types of wine are made from different types of grapes.

Many different groups have settled in France during its long history, so the French people have a mixed ancestry that includes **Celts**, **Romans**, **Germans**, **Vikings**, and North Africans. Most people in France are Christians, with about three out of every five people belonging to the Roman Catholic Church. Some Christians belong to Protestant churches, and a smaller percentage of people follow Islam or Judaism. The country's main language is French, although people speak different **dialects** in several areas.

## France's Landforms



### Land

France has hills, plains, rugged plateaus, towering mountains, beaches, and **massifs**, or older mountain blocks. Despite the wide variety of landforms, most of France is covered in flat plains and low, rolling hills.

Several river systems flow through France. The Seine River runs through Paris and, along with smaller rivers, drains the Paris **Basin**, France's largest lowland. The longest river in France is the Loire, flowing for 1,020 kilometers (634 mi.) and emptying into the Atlantic Ocean.



Many people in France enjoy biking and hiking in the Massif Central.

France includes five different mountain ranges. Most of these sit on its borders with other countries, forming a natural barrier. Part of the Alps, the largest mountain range in Europe, lies along the borders between France, Switzerland, and Italy. The highest mountain peak, Mont Blanc, is found in the French Alps. Another famous mountain range, the Pyrenees (PEER-uh-neeze), lies along the border between France and Spain.

A large, rugged plateau called the *Massif Central* spreads across about 86,000 square kilometers (33,200 sq. mi.) of France. The Massif Central includes an ancient mountain chain that has many extinct volcanoes and deep river **gorges**. In addition, beautiful beaches line the coasts of France, particularly along the Mediterranean Sea. Along the coast in northern France, impressive white chalk bluffs face the English Channel.

## History

In ancient times, France was known as Gaul, and the people who lived there were called *Celts*. Around 50 BC, Gaul became part of the Roman Empire for nearly five hundred years. The Romans spread the Latin language throughout Gaul, and many Celts adopted Roman customs and ideas.

By AD 400, the Roman Empire was quickly losing control of its regions. Neighboring tribes began invading Gaul, including the Germanic Franks. Around 486, the Franks took over Gaul and called it *Regnum Francorum*, which is Latin for “kingdom of the Franks,” or *Francia* for short. Eventually, *Francia* became France.

For hundreds of years, several **dynasties** of Frankish kings ruled France. The first king, Clovis, followed the Christian religion, and he and his followers brought this religion to France. In 732, a king named Charles Martel kept France from being invaded by Muslim armies from Spain.



Charles the Great, or Charlemagne (SHAR-luh-mayn), became France's first emperor in 800. The Holy Roman Empire fell apart soon after he died in 814.

In the tenth century, France allowed groups of Vikings to settle in a small part of northern France, called *Normandy*. In 1066, the Normans, led by William the Conqueror, successfully took over England. This was the beginning of hundreds of years of rivalry and wars between England and France. Finally, in 1453, the French drove the English out of France.

From the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries, France was ruled by kings who tried to increase the country's power—and their own. However, these kings lived lavishly, spending France's money on palaces, art schools, and other buildings. In 1789, the people rebelled, and the French Revolution began. France became a republic in 1792, although the next hundred years were full of turmoil as several dictators stepped in to rule the country. The French overthrew two more leaders, setting up new governments each time. Today, France is a republic with a strong democracy.



## Louis XIV

One of France's most famous kings was Louis XIV. He ruled from 1643 to 1715, the longest a king has ever ruled in Europe. His palace of Versailles (vehr-SEYE), near Paris, is a popular tourist site.

## Celebrations

The French celebrate many different holidays. Many holidays are tied to Christianity and the Roman Catholic Church.

On the first Sunday after New Year's Day, many French celebrate *Fête des Rois* (FET DAY RWAH), or Three Kings' Day. Bakeries sell round, flat pastries called *galettes* (gah-LETS). The galettes are filled with a paste made from butter and almonds. A small figurine is also baked inside the pastry, which comes with a cardboard crown. If you find the figurine in your portion, then you are crowned king or queen for the day.



galette

Another popular holiday is Bastille Day, which is held on July 14 and honors the day that the French Revolution began. On that day in 1789, French citizens stormed the Bastille, a prison in Paris, setting the prisoners free and taking control of the building. Today, French people celebrate their freedom with parades, speeches, and fireworks.



A wide variety of cheeses are sold by shopkeepers and outdoor vendors in France. Some regions make their own unique types of cheese.

## Food

France is famous for its food and cooking styles, and many French people consider good food one of life's greatest pleasures. One type of French cooking that has become popular around the world is called *haute cuisine* (OHT kwih-ZEEN) which means "high cooking." Meals cooked in this way usually include rich dishes made with butter, cream, eggs, and spices. Many French people also cook delicious, low-fat meals that use fresh ingredients.

French people can buy meat at a butcher, or *boucherie* (boosh-REE). At a bakery, or *boulangerie* (boo-LAHN-zuh-REE), people can buy bread baked in long thin loaves called *baguettes*. For dessert, the French sometimes eat crepes, which are very thin pancakes, and tarts, or small pies made with fruit or eggs.

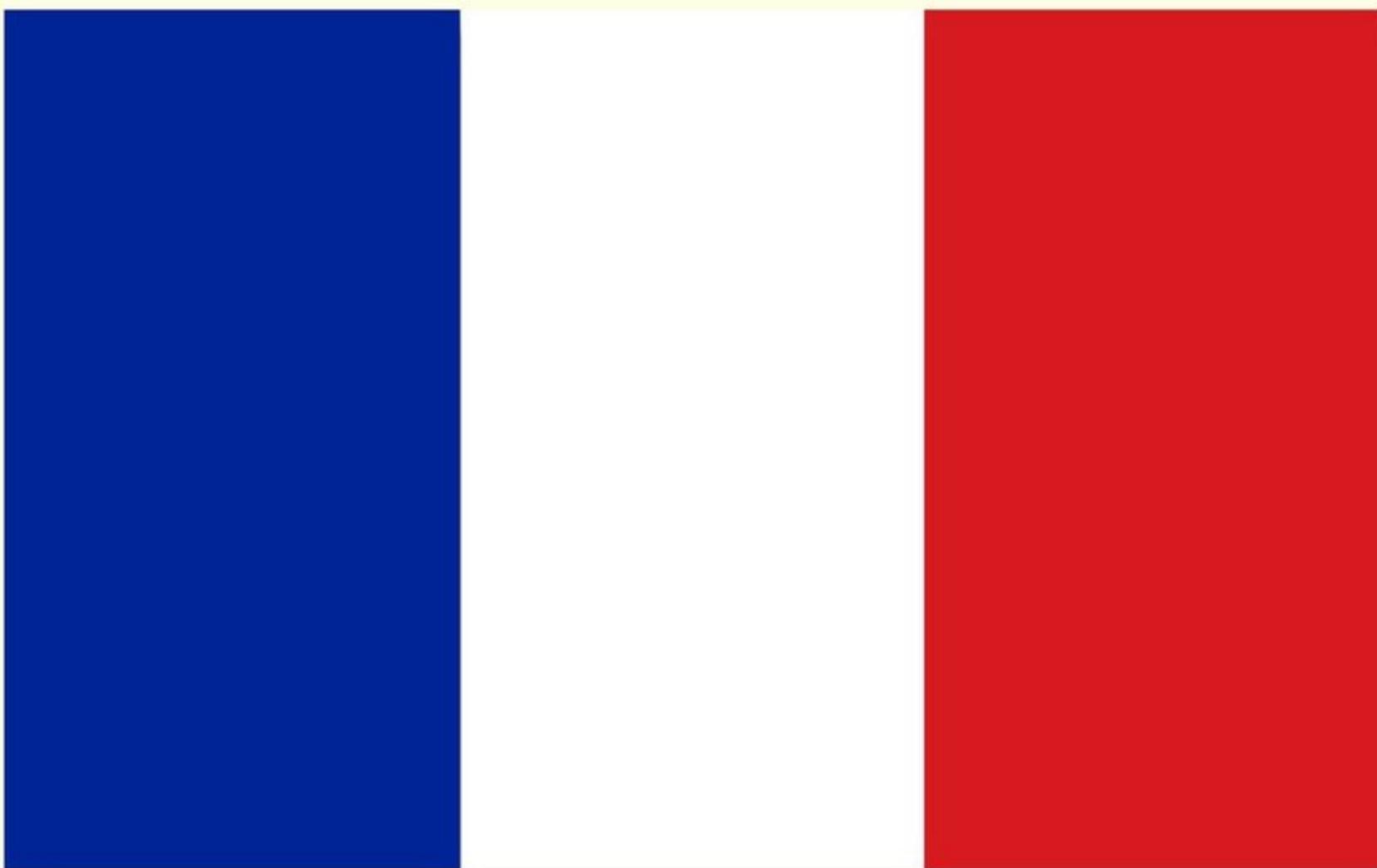


Part of Normandy in northern France is called the *Alabaster Coast* because of its white cliffs.

## Conclusion

France is a modern country with a long and fascinating history. The ancestry of its people reflects a history of invasions and warfare. Today, many of its people enjoy lives filled with good food, art, and other leisurely pursuits.

France has become a country known throughout the world for its architecture, art, food, and culture. Beautiful cities, villages, castles, and vineyards dot its rolling hills, plains, and mountains. With its landmarks and rich history, it is no wonder France is the most visited country in the world.



**Population:** 66,259,012

**Land:** 620,427 sq km (239,548 sq. mi.)

**Capital City:** Paris

**Primary Language:** French

**Primary Religion:** Roman Catholic

**Currency:** Euro (YUR-oh)



Source: Central Intelligence Agency (July 2014), World Bank

## Glossary

<b>architecture</b> (n.)	the design and construction of buildings (p. 5)
<b>basin</b> (n.)	a low area in the earth's surface (p. 8)
<b>cathedral</b> (n.)	a large church (p. 5)
<b>Celts</b> (n.)	people who lived in ancient Britain and Western Europe (p. 7)
<b>dialects</b> (n.)	forms of language that are used in specific regions or by specific groups of people (p. 7)
<b>dynasties</b> (n.)	series of rulers in a country from the same families (p. 10)
<b>fashion</b> (n.)	popular or current styles of clothing (p. 5)
<b>gorges</b> (n.)	long, deep valleys surrounded by higher land (p. 9)
<b>massifs</b> (n.)	groups of older mountains that form one large shape (p. 8)
<b>tourism</b> (n.)	the business of providing services for people who travel to a place for pleasure (p. 6)
<b>Vikings</b> (n.)	Scandinavian explorers, traders, and pirates who raided and settled much of northwestern Europe in the eighth to eleventh centuries (p. 7)
<b>vineyards</b> (n.)	fields where grapes are grown (p. 7)

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Front and back cover: Paris includes many famous buildings, such as Les Invalides (lahs EN-vah-LEED), a complex of buildings that contains museums and monuments relating to France's military history.

Title page: Chateau Castelnau, a medieval castle in France, is a popular tourist destination.

Page 3: France is known for its impressive art collections, such as those held in the Louvre (LOO-vruh), an art museum in Paris.

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