



BIENVENUE

EN FRANCE

**A Guidebook
for Hosted
Students**



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**Vivre Sans
Frontière**



Your experience starts NOW.

Welcome to AFS, welcome to France! We hope that you will enjoy your experience in France, an experience that we hope you will find to be both challenging and rewarding. Whether you are placed in the countryside or in a big city, you will be immersed into French culture through your host family, your school and friends, TV programs, food, architecture, and everything that you see, eat, hear and smell.

This sudden immersion can be tiring and this guidebook has been created to help you start getting prepared for your experience in France. You'll find information about our country, its culture and way of life, some advice to help you with your integration as well as reminders of AFS rules. Don't forget to bring this booklet with you, as you'll use it during your national arrival orientation and it will also be useful throughout your program with tips, facts and basic vocabulary.

Bonne lecture et à très bientôt !

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1. Your host family

There is no typical French family; your French host family can be a married or non-married couple, with kids your age or not, a retired couple, a single mother, etc. Most likely, you'll find that your French host family is different from your own, both in composition and in their way of life. Keep in mind that you are not a guest but rather a new member of the family. As such, you will be expected to observe the rules and customs of the family, to help with household chores (whether being directly or indirectly asked to) and to participate in the family activities.

Don't be afraid to talk to your host parents and host siblings as this is a sure way to get to know them better and to show your interest. It is usual in French families to talk about oneself and ask for advice. Dinner time is a very important family gathering in France. It is often the occasion for all family members to share about their day and discuss the news. Showing your feelings and expressing your satisfaction or incomprehension is usual in France. You will be expected to do that a lot. If you're tired because you've been trying hard to integrate and need to rest, do not hesitate to say so.

French parents are used to monitor their children's social life and school results. You may also find that you have less independence here than in your own country. Children are often required to ask permission to go out and to say where they are going, with whom and to respect a curfew. French families will expect you to respect their family rules.

Please note that your integration into your host family is a very important part of your AFS program. You will have to make efforts to become integrated. If you or your host family think that you are struggling with your integration or not making enough efforts, your local volunteers will meet with you to discuss the issues and give you some advice to improve the situation.

It is customary in France to not arrive empty-handed when invited somewhere. Make sure to bring a small present for your host family members to thank them for welcoming you into their home.



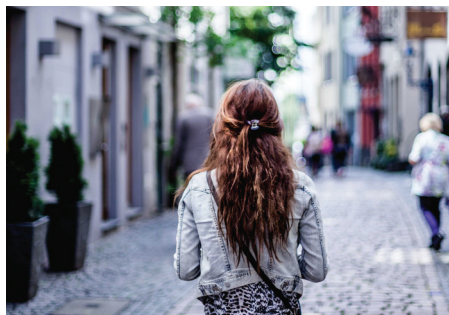
Contacting home, internet, laptops and cell phones

We encourage you not to contact your family and friends back home too often. Too frequent contacts, especially daily online chatting, will affect your integration process in a negative way. If you miss them too much, we suggest you to write your experiences down each day in a draft message and then send it to your family and/or friends once a week. Phone calls and online chatting should be reserved for special occasions and planned in advance.

We strongly discourage you from bringing a laptop with you as it is not needed for school and it can isolate you from your host family. It will also be a temptation for constant online chatting with home and might keep you awake late at night. If necessary, your host family and/or volunteers might decide to take your laptop away at nights or to turn off the wifi.

We encourage you to get a French cell phone plan which will help you to keep in touch with your French friends. It will also enable you to call your host family or AFS volunteers in case you have a problem or if you're late somewhere. Additionally, it will be a lot less expensive than using your own phone plan from your home country. Don't hesitate to ask for help from your host family or local volunteer. But remember, you will be responsible for the costs of your cell phone bills!

Finally, be extra cautious about anything you post online about your host family, friends or AFS. Always favor private messages. Never publish a picture online of anyone without his/her consent and don't criticize your host family online.



Inside the home

Upon arrival you'll have to discuss the daily routine with your host family and check how the family organization works: How is the laundry handled? At what time do you have to be home after school? Can you help yourself in the fridge? What chores are you expected to do? Can you decorate your bedroom or not? etc.

Many families are cautious with home expenses. You should always turn lights and electronic devices off when you leave a room. Water is also expensive and showers (once a day) are favored to baths (except for little children). Showers should not last more than 10 minutes and you should not leave the water running for too long. For example, you can turn off the water while brushing your teeth or shampooing your hair.

Make sure you are allowed to call abroad from the home phone. Some families have free long-distance calls, otherwise you should offer to pay the bills or use a pre-paid card for your calls abroad. Also, you should always ask permission before calling a cell phone number (starting with 06 or 07) from the home phone because these numbers may entail extra costs.

In many cases, families gather to watch the news (« le journal télévisé ») on television. It is the popular evening news show airing from 8pm to 8.30pm (we also call it « le 20 heures » as it means 8pm in French). Oftentimes, French families watch a movie after dinner together. On most channels, foreign films and TV shows are usually available either in the original version or dubbed into French. If you want to see a foreign movie in its original version, you have to go to the movie theater and check for movies in « VOSTFR » (version originale sous-titrée en français – Original version subtitled in French). Movies dubbed into French are marked with « VF » (version française – French version).

Please note that downloading music or movies from illegal platforms is forbidden by French law. You should never do it from your host family's or friend's house's internet access. If you do so, they can be tracked down by the Government, get a very expensive fine and have their internet access shut down for several months.

2. Your host school

You might find that the French school system is very demanding, both regarding the schedule and the school work. Therefore, you will probably feel very tired during the first weeks of your program.

A typical French school day starts at 8am (your host family will expect you to get up and get ready on your own) and ends at 5pm. Classes last 55 minutes and students have 5 minutes between each class to go to the next class. The school day is punctuated by 15-minute breaks twice a day and a one-hour lunch break. Your schedule will follow a weekly pattern that will remain the same all year long. There's no school on Wednesday afternoons but there may be classes on Saturday mornings.

You will be assigned to a group (« classe ») of 25 to 40 students who will follow most of the time the same courses and schedule as you. This way, it is easy to get to know people very quickly. Lunch, which in most cases is taken at the school cafeteria (« la cantine »), will also be a good time to make friends.

There are always homework assignments and studying to be done after school. Your host family will probably often ask you if you have done your homework (« Tu as fait tes devoirs ? »). Teachers regularly test students with written exams taken during classes on which you will be rated out of 20. In most subjects, 13/20 is considered a good result. In the last year of high school, « Terminale », students prepare the Baccalauréat exam (« le Bac »). If you are in « Terminale », you will probably take the same exams during the year but you might not be allowed to register for the entire diploma.

The school year is divided into 3 trimesters. At the end of each trimester, your teachers meet during the class council (« le conseil de classe ») to discuss each student's results and behavior. At the beginning of the year, you will elect two classmates to represent you in this meeting. After this meeting, the school sends a school report (« bulletin scolaire ») to your host family.

The school is state-controlled by the Ministry of Education (« l'Éducation Nationale »), which sets the same school program for the whole country. No uniform is required but you have to make sure that your clothes and hair style are not perceived as provocative by your teachers. Moreover, as France is a secular country, any religious signs such as the veil, kippah, or cross are forbidden in public schools.

Most likely, you will be registered in one of the following levels according to your age, your ability to speak the language and the school availability. AFS France is absolutely unable to guarantee a registration in the level/field/school of your choice, even if it is necessary to validate your school year back home.





School levels

«Troisième » (9th grade in US grading system, 14-15 years old)

If you are registered in « Troisième », it means that you will go to Junior High (« collège ») and not to high school (« lycée »). You will study French, Mathematics, Biology, Physics & Chemistry, History & Geography, 2 foreign languages (usually English and either German, Spanish or Italian), Fine arts, Music, and Physical education. Some schools also offer Latin or Greek as optional classes.

«Seconde » (10th grade in US grading system, 15-16 years old)

You will have the same subjects as in « Troisième », plus Economics and Social Science and except Music and Fine arts which some schools might still offer as optional classes, as well as a 3rd foreign language, and Latin or Greek.

«Première » (11th grade in US grading system, 16-17 years old)

The students have core courses, which include Science, History, Geography, French literature, 2 foreign languages and Physical education. In addition, each student chooses 3 more classes among the choices offered by each high school (for example: Biology, Mathematics, Humanities, Geopolitics and political science, Chemistry, Physics, Computer science, foreign languages, Art, etc.). All students have to take a national French literature exam at the end of the year.

«Terminale » (12th grade in US grading system, 17-18 years old)

This is the final year of school. You will have the same core courses as in « Première » except French literature, which is replaced by Philosophy. Each student chooses 2 more specialty classes (among the choices offered by the school). There is a heavy focus on the preparation for the Baccalauréat which consists in 2 exams in January and April plus a final national exam taken at the end of the school year. If you are in « Terminale », you will probably take the same exams during the year but you might not be allowed to register for the entire diploma.

Attendance in French schools

Attendance is mandatory and each missed class will be reported to your host family by your school. Teachers in France are strict and you are expected to behave properly during class time (no talking, no drawing on your notebooks, no using your cell phone, no eating, no sleeping...) and to show academic commitment. Moreover, going to school is part of your AFS program and you might be sent home if you don't go to school or if you don't hand in your school work. No independent travel will be allowed during school days.

French school calendar for 2019-2020 :

France is divided into three zones (A, B, C), each one regrouping a few regions, and the dates of school holidays may change depending on which zone you are located in (don't worry, the dates for your zone will be communicated to you again by your school at the beginning of the year).

A school year lasts 10 months, with 8 weeks of holidays (four 2-week breaks spread throughout the year).

	A Zone	B Zone	C Zone
Beginning of the year	Monday, September 2nd		
Toussaint holidays	from Saturday, October 19th to Sunday, November 3rd		
Christmas holidays	from Saturday, December 21st to Sunday, January 5th		
Winter holidays	from Saturday, February 22nd to Sunday, March 8th	from Saturday, February 15th to Sunday, March 1st	from Saturday, February 8th to Sunday, February 23rd
Spring holidays	from Saturday, April 18th to Sunday, May 3rd	from Saturday, April 11th to Sunday, April 26th	from Saturday, April 4th to Sunday, April 19th
End of the year	Saturday, July 4th		

Classes will officially end on Saturday, July 4th as indicated above, however, please note that classes actually often end around mid-June for levels « Troisième », « Seconde » and « Première ». This depends on each school's own organization.

In addition to school holidays, there are several national days off throughout the year such as November 11th (armistice of World War I), May 1st (Labor Day), May 8th (armistice of World War II), etc.

3. Your host chapter

There are 28 AFS chapters in France (see [map](#)) and you will be assigned to one of them. During the year, you'll have some occasions to meet the other hosted students, prospective participants and returnees of your host chapter. You should bring a few typical items from your country (recipes, clothes, music, pictures, etc.) to share during AFS local events, at school or with your host family.

Each host chapter has a hosting coordinator whose name and phone number will be given to you during the national arrival orientation. Most likely, a few days after your arrival in your host chapter, a contact person will be assigned to you, and they will keep in touch with you regularly. Do not hesitate to reach out to your contact person whenever you have a question or do not feel very well. This person is here to advise you and to provide you support!

Whenever you have a problem or question, you must reach out to your contact person or any volunteer from your AFS host chapter. It will not be helpful to only share your issues with your natural family or friends at home, who will feel helpless and might make things worse than they need to be. The best and quickest way to obtain help is to communicate about your problems with volunteers from your host chapter. They are here to help you!

AFS France and the AFS National Office of your native country will also work very hard to make your AFS experience a success. Whatever your issue or request might be, be assured that we take it very seriously and your natural family will be contacted if necessary.

4. French vocabulary

Bonjour/Salut, ça va ?/Quoi de neuf ?	Hello/Hi, how are you? /What's up?
Ça va. /Ça ne va pas trop.	I'm fine. /I'm not feeling very well.
Au revoir/Salut/À plus !	Goodbye/bye/see you!
Bonne journée/soirée.	Have a good day/evening.
Je vais me coucher, bonne nuit.	I'm going to bed, sleep well/good night.
Je suis désolé(e), je n'ai pas compris.	I'm sorry, I did not understand.
Peux-tu/Pouvez-vous répéter plus doucement ?	Can you repeat more slowly?
Que veut dire ce mot ?	What does that word mean?
J'ai mal au ventre/à la tête/au dos.	My stomach/head/back hurts.
Je voudrais aller chez le docteur.	I would like to see a doctor.
Je suis perdu(e).	I'm lost.
Excusez-moi, pourriez-vous m'indiquer la rue Lepic ?	Excuse me, could you show me the way to rue Lepic?
J'ai raté le bus, je suis arrivé(e) en retard au lycée.	I missed the bus, I arrived late for school.
A quelle heure commence le cours de math ?	What time does the math class start?
Où se trouve la salle 310/la cantine ?	Where is class room 310/the school cafeteria?
Je suis désolé(e), j'ai oublié mon livre à la maison.	I'm sorry, I forgot my text book at home.
Allo ?	Hello? (when answering the phone)
C'est de la part de qui ?	Who is asking?
Ne quittez pas, je vous le/la passe.	Hold on, I'll get him/her on the phone.
Je vais prendre la commande.	I'll take the order.
Je vous écoute./Et pour vous, ce sera ?	What will you take?
Je vais prendre un coca et un jambon/beurre.	I'll take a coke and a ham and butter sandwich.
(Je vais prendre) l'addition s'il vous plaît.	Can I have the bill please?
Comment réglez-vous ? Par carte bleue/en liquide.	How will you pay? Credit card/cash.



You will find that French people and media love talking about the weather ! You can find below some useful vocabulary:

Quel temps fait-il ?	What's the weather like?
Il fait froid/chaud.	It's cold/hot.
J'ai froid/chaud.	I'm cold/hot.
Il pleut.	It's raining.
Il neige/grêle.	It's snowing/hailing.
Il y a beaucoup de vent.	It's very windy.
C'est très ensoleillé aujourd'hui.	It's very sunny today.
Le temps est orageux.	There's a thunder storm coming.

Pre-departure readings (just for fun !):

- www.afs.fr- AFS France website
- <http://ca.france.fr> - French Tourist Office website
- www.tourisme.fr - Links to websites of the different French regions
- <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/> - Website of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs (click on « Conseils aux voyageurs »)
- www.radiofrance.fr - Portal of different French national radios
- www.rfi.fr - Website of Radio France Internationale (if you want to listen to French radio in your own language)

5. Facts and Culture

Geography

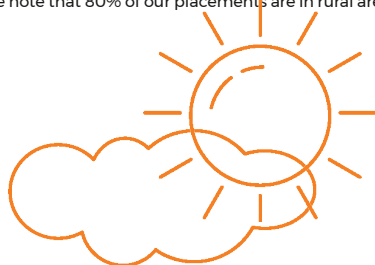
Metropolitan France (« la France métropolitaine » or « la métropole ») is the French territory located on the European continent. It's about 544000 km² and has a population of 67 million inhabitants. This is opposed to France overseas (« la France d'outre-mer ») which comprises all of the French territories located outside of Europe. Amongst them are la Nouvelle-Calédonie (in Oceania, near Australia), la Réunion (near Madagascar), Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon (near Newfoundland, Canada) etc. Unfortunately, there are no AFS chapters in these territories.

Weather

The weather in France is generally a temperate climate with a range of temperatures from -5°C in winter in the North to 35°C in summer. There are four distinct seasons: autumn (« l'automne »), winter (« l'hiver »), spring (« le printemps ») and summer (« l'été »).

It is warmer and sunnier in the South and South-West even during winter. However, even if you are being hosted in those areas, you should take a warm coat with you. In

Metropolitan France is divided into 13 regions, including Corsica (« la Corse »). Every region has its own culture, food and traditions. The Paris region (« la région parisienne ») is often opposed to everything outside Paris (« la province »). Please note that 80% of our placements are in rural areas.



winter, it can get very cold in the mountains and in the North and North-East, so make sure to pack several warm sweaters, gloves and a woolen hat. Bretagne is known to always be rainy. It often snows a little almost everywhere a few days a year. The weather gets globally warmer around April. For more information about the weather, you can go and check the website of Météo-France on www.meteofrance.com.

Politics

French people love talking about politics, even teenagers. You'll witness people getting into animated debates about politics but still remain close friends afterwards!

The French political system is composed of the executive power (the President « le Président » and his government « le gouvernement ») and legislative power (the Senate « le Sénat » and the National assembly « l'Assemblée Nationale »). The President is elected for 5 years directly by the French citizens and the same candidate can only be elected twice in a row (10 years in total) as President. Only adults over 18 years old are allowed to vote. The current President of France is Emmanuel Macron. He was elected in May 2017.

France has been a member of the European Union (« Union Européenne ») since its creation in 1957, along with 27 other countries.

The European Parliament is located both in Strasbourg in France and in Brussels in Belgium.



Food

Food is a very important part of the French culture. French people love to eat and spend a lot of time around the table (« à table »), especially with family and friends. Your host family will expect you to taste and try everything they cook or buy but they will probably be cautious not to offer you food that you've already tried and disliked.

French cuisine is very diverse and every region has its specialties: « crêpes » in Bretagne, « cassoulet » in the South-West, « tartiflette » in Savoie, etc. There are about 400 different cheeses produced in France! Be ready to experience many different tastes and flavors such as oysters, snails and strong cheese!

Your meals will be generally as follows:

- Breakfast** (« le petit-déjeuner »): warm drink, bread and butter, marmalade, milk and cereals.
- Lunch** (« le déjeuner ») between 1 pm and 2pm: taken at the school cafeteria (« la cantine ») during week days.
- Dinner** (« le dîner ») between 7pm and 9pm: very important family time. Make sure to respect dinner time and to always ask permission in advance if you cannot be present. You will have to make an effort to participate in the conversation, ask questions about the other family members' day and talk about your day.

Dinner and lunch are generally composed of 3 or 4 dishes served one after another:

- First course** (« l'entrée »): soup, raw vegetables, salad
- Main course** (« le plat principal »): warm meal with fish or meat, vegetables and starch.
- Cheese** (« le fromage »).
- Dessert** (« le dessert »): fruits, yogurt or sometimes a home-made cake.

There is always bread (« pain ») on the table. People usually drink plain water and adults might also drink wine during dinner.

And also:

- Afternoon snack** (« le goûter ») is a light snack taken after school between 4pm and 5pm, mostly by children. It is composed of fruit juice and cookies.
- Aperitif** (« l'apéritif », also known as « l'apéro ») is served before lunch or dinner mainly when there are guests and is composed of a glass of alcohol with peanuts, olives ...



Money & prices

Since 2002, the currency used in France is the Euro (symbolized by €). It is the same currency for 18 other countries in Europe: Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain. Each country has a different face on the coin but not on the bill. Look at your coins, you can collect them all! On the bills, you can see bridges and gates that represent communication between European countries and open borders. In early June 2019, the exchange rate was 1€ = 1,12 US\$.

France is known to be an expensive country, therefore you should plan a minimum budget of 100€/month to cover your personal expenses (beauty products, club activities, clothes, outings with friends, etc.). Additional expenses for school trips can also be asked. It is sometimes possible for our AFS students to open a bank account in a French bank and there are usually restrictions to how you can use this French account. Therefore, we recommend you to bring an international withdrawal card.

You can find below a few examples of prices of usual items. However, please note that prices can vary largely from a big city to a small village:

- Coffee (« le café »): 2,50€
- Big Mac Meal (McDonald's): 8,00€
- Daily Newspaper or magazine: from 2,50€ to 4,00€
- Downloading one song from i-Tunes: 0,99€
- Movie ticket: 10,00€ (but don't forget to check for student discounts!)
- H&M pair of jeans: 30,00€

Big events in France

Sports

French people like national sport events and especially the tennis tournament taking place in Paris every year in May/June, Roland Garros; the annual bicycle race taking place in July throughout France and ending with a speed race on the Champs-Élysées, « le Tour de France », as well as any soccer tournaments especially « l'Euro » (UEFA Euro Championship) and « la Coupe du Monde » (FIFA World Cup), both taking place in June and July every four years, the next Euro cup being in 2020.



Celebrations



Le 14 juillet

French national day (« la Fête Nationale »), commemorating the fall of the Bastille fortress (« la prise de la Bastille ») in 1789. This event symbolically represents the beginning of the French Revolution and the end of absolute monarchy. On the morning of July 14th, a traditional military parade takes place on the Champs-Élysées. At night, fireworks (« les feux d'artifice ») and popular dances organized by fire stations (« les bals des pompiers ») are organized everywhere in France.

La fête du Travail (Labour day)

This national day off takes place on May 1st. Traditionally workers unions organize parades everywhere in France and people give each other lily of the valley flowers (« le muguet ») as a lucky charm (« le porte-bonheur »).

Noël (Christmas)

This Christian celebration is big for almost every family in France, even for non-believers. Towards the end of November, cities everywhere in France put up decorations on their streets such as Christmas lights. But most of all, it's a time you'll have to share with your host family and it will be expected that you give a small present to each close family member attending the celebration. Christmas dinner is often composed of « le foie-gras » (from duck's liver), « les huîtres » (oysters), « la dinde aux marrons » (turkey with chestnuts), « la bûche glacée » (ice cream log) and of course « champagne ».

Popular Culture

Zinedine Zidane, also known as Zizou : retired soccer player who was on the team when France won the world cup in 1998.

Omar Sy : French actor, his movie « Intouchables » is the 3rd most successful movie ever in the French Box-Office.

Jean Dujardin : French actor who won the Best Actor Oscar in 2012.

Simone Veil : Auschwitz survivor and former Health Minister who legalized abortion in France in 1975. She died in 2017.

Edith Piaf : French singer from the mid-20th century whose most famous songs are classics known by every French person.

Jeanne d'Arc : the hundred year's war national heroin

Charles de Gaulle : head of the Resistance during World War II and French President from 1959 to 1969.

Pierre Curie and his wife **Marie Curie** : originally from Poland and naturalized French. Both famous physicists and chemists who made great discoveries on radioactivity. Marie Curie was the first woman to win a Nobel prize.

« **La grande vadrouille** » : one of the three most successful French movies ever, released in 1966, with **Louis De Funès** and **Bourvil**.

Mai 68 (May 1968) : the largest protest and general strike ever in France, which led to major reforms and social progress.

Religion

France is traditionally a Catholic country as you will be able to see by the numerous Catholic churches everywhere in France and by the Catholic events such as Easter and Assumption, which are also holidays. However, more and more people (20 to 30%) describe themselves as atheists. Less than 5% go to church every week. The second biggest religion is Islam (10%). You can find protestant churches, mosques, synagogues and Buddhist temples in all large French cosmopolitan cities. Elsewhere, it might be difficult to have access to such sites. So, be aware that you won't automatically be able to attend religious services of your faith.

French people are most of all very attached to secularism (« la laïcité ») since the separation of State and Church in 1905. If you are a believer, you should first talk about it with your host parents on how you can practice your religion. Religion is often a subject of debate in France which can lead to heated conversations. Don't feel afraid of talking about it if you feel like it but keep in mind that France is a secular State and faith remains personal and different for each person.

La bise

When greeting each other, French people kiss on the cheeks (« faire la bise ») to say hello, but only in certain situations! You do so to say hello and goodbye with friends and family members. Two men might do so or only shake hands. Depending on the region, you give 1, 2, 3 or 4 kisses! Just look around and do the same if you

want to. You never kiss teachers or any adult that has not been presented as a close relative or acquaintance of your host family.

Strikes

France is known for often being on strike (« les grèves ») and we sometimes joke that it is almost a national sport! You'll have many occasions to witness general strikes, mainly in public sectors and factories. University and high-school students can also go on strike sometimes. French people also often take part in protests (« les manif ») and there are hundreds organized all year long to show dissatisfaction or express demands.

Réductions (Student Rates)

When going to a museum, an exhibition or to the (movie) theater, make sure to check the possible discount rates (« réductions »). Very often because of your age or because you are a high school student, you will pay less. For instance, national museums are free for every EU citizen younger than 26 years old. Some days/hours also give you

better prices (le Louvre is free every first Sunday of the month; movies are sometimes cheaper in the mornings, etc.). It can also be the case for public transportations and trains.

Politeness

In the French language, there are two forms for saying "you": « vous » and « tu ». The form you should use depends on your relationship with the person you address to. Any adult that you don't know will have to be addressed to as « vous » until you are formally authorized to say "tu" (more casual). Your host family will also expect politeness during the meals. For example, when pouring yourself a glass of water, offer some water to the others as well, always wait until everyone is served before starting to eat, make sure it is ok to take the last piece of food and do not leave the table without asking.

You should also help with the daily chores without waiting to be asked to do so (for instance: clearing the table or washing the dishes).

During conversations or debates, it is common for French people to give their own perspective or interrupt the speaker to share their own anecdotes. This is not viewed as rude or impolite. However, it is of course important to listen to one another.



6. Tips

Travelling

Remember that your host family is not here to take you sight-seeing all around France. However, you'll probably have several occasions to travel, especially given that France is allotted with a good railway network and that train tickets are affordable when booked in advance.

During the holidays many French families take the occasion to visit another part of France. You might be asked to contribute financially, especially in the case of expensive activities like a ski trip, so, please make sure to clearly discuss with your host family about who should pay for what. You might also be able to ask your local

volunteers to help you find another French host family in another chapter for your school vacation.

This gives you the opportunity to visit a different area and get to know another French family. All these kinds of trips are automatically approved by AFS, but in the case they take place abroad, your natural parents will have to sign an authorization through the sending and hosting AFS offices.

Train à Grande Vitesse

...also known as « TGV » (high-speed train) which, for example, link Paris to Marseille (about 780km) in only 3 hours instead of 8 hours by car.



Independent trips

An independent trip is a trip that is neither organized nor sponsored by AFS. It is submitted to strict rules that are set to guarantee your safety and smooth your adaptation:

Please note the following rules concerning an independent trip:

- In a general way, independent trips must take place in safe conditions. For instance, hotel accommodations and travelling by night without family members or host family's adult friends are forbidden.
- Only year or semester program students can be allowed to do an independent trip. It is strictly forbidden for short term-program students.
- Independent trips can only take place after a minimum of 3 months in the program.
- You must be accompanied by a trusted adult who is at least 21 years old.
- Independent trips cannot be organized during school periods.
- Independent trips cannot last more than 15 days in total.
- Independent trips to the Netherlands are not allowed.
- Plans of independent trips must be formally notified and submitted for authorization to your local volunteer at least two weeks before the beginning of your trip. Your host family or local volunteer will have to fill in an online request with detailed information such as dates, transportation, accommodation, contact details, etc.

AFS will not allow any trip without the consent of your local volunteer.

Independent trips must be authorized by your natural parents as they will have to sign a Travel Waiver through the sending and hosting AFS offices. This Travel Waiver releases AFS from any responsibility of care, welfare, travel arrangements, arrangement of medical services, food and lodging or financial assistance during the entire duration of the independent trip. However, you will still be covered by the AFS medical insurance during an independent trip.



Visa and travel abroad

Every AFS student coming to France is required to have a passport valid at least for the whole duration of the AFS program. Moreover, a visa is mandatory for most non-European Union and non-Schengen area citizens coming to France for more than 90 days. The visa will be issued by the French consulate of your home country and your AFS office will help you throughout the application process. You will need to apply for a visa for underage school students (« visa D mineur scolarisé »).

With this visa, you will be able to travel to the other Schengen countries for touristic purposes, for a total of maximum 90 days.

If you have the opportunity to travel in a non-Schengen country, whether by yourself, with your school or with your family, it is your responsibility to make sure you are legally allowed to do so by contacting the embassy of the country you wish to visit. Depending on your nationality and the country of destination, you could be denied the right of entry and you might need to apply for a specific visa for this country. Every country has its own immigration and entrance laws. AFS France cannot be held responsible for your inability to enter a foreign country other than France.

Visits from your natural family

The experience on which you are embarking is an in-depth adaptation to a new environment which can be a long process. Therefore, in order to avoid switching back and forth from one culture to another, we do not favor visits from your natural family during your stay in France. This also applies to travelling with your natural family or friends from home, especially during important French family gatherings such as Christmas. It is important that you spend those meetings with your host family.

This visit must be approved in advance by your host family, your local chapter and AFS France. In the case that your family wants to visit you, you should tell them to contact the AFS office of your native country. Please also note that your host family has no obligation to host your natural family and it is more appropriate for your natural family to find their own accommodation.

Any trip taken without the authorization of AFS can be a reason to be sent back home immediately!

However, a visit from your natural family can be considered **towards the end of your program**.

7. Safety tips

AFS rules

If you break one of the following rules, you will automatically be sent back home:

- No driving of a motorized vehicle
- No hitch hiking.
- No use of any kinds of drugs.
- No binge-drinking.
- No breaking of the law.

Sexual behavior & harassment

You might find that French teenagers generally show physical proximity (a couple of boys and girls openly hold hands, hug and kiss). Talking about sexuality is usually not considered as taboo. In any cases, you are the one to decide what you find acceptable and what you are comfortable with according to your own standards, beliefs and maturity. No one, even your boyfriend/girlfriend, can ask you to do anything you don't feel comfortable with. If you need advice about sex and contraception you can talk to your school nurse or a public family center available in most cities (« planning familial »). Always use protection in case of any sexual activity.

In some situations you might feel unsure whether you are being sexually harassed or not. Never keep it to yourself. In any case, it is very important to talk about it to someone: your host family, friends or volunteers. They will be able to listen to you and help you with any situation. You might also find that some men in the streets comment loudly about your body or try to touch you especially in crowds. Move away and find refuge if necessary with other adults or in public places nearby (cafés, shops, supermarkets, etc.).

Don't hesitate to tell your host family or local volunteers about situations where you feel uncomfortable (even if you are not sure about the interpretation of the situation).

Aggressions

France is rather a safe country. Of course, delinquency and crimes are a reality as in any other country. Although issues like racket and bag snatching are frequently discussed, it does not represent the daily life of French people.

In order to prevent problems, you should avoid carrying large amounts of money or ostensibly showing your wallet or expensive items (such as cellphones, iPods, watches, etc.). Also keep your bag closed and under your watch. Do not bring expensive items to school and do not leave expensive belongings (money, phone, bag, etc.) out of sight (remember AFS does not have insurance against theft, stolen items will not be reimbursed by our insurance). If you ride a bike, make sure that it is safely attached when you leave it in a public area. Keep a copy

of your passport and visa in your wallet and leave the originals in a safe place. Do not talk to strangers who are trying to bother you, do not accept a ride in a car if you don't know the driver and do not walk alone in the streets at night.

If you feel like you are in danger, uncomfortable or are being followed, go in the nearest public place (shop, hotel, restaurant, etc.), explain what is happening to you and call your host family. If this is not possible, use your cell phone and loudly explain where you are.

If you are a victim of an aggression of any kind: report it immediately to your host family, local volunteers or AFS France National Office. We will be able to help and advise you.

Insurance and medical care

During the whole duration of your program you will be covered by a medical insurance contracted by AFS. There are a few exclusions to this insurance such as eye and dental care (except if you need this kind of medical care due to an accident or for pain relief), vaccinations, expenses related to a pre-existing condition, contraception, etc. For more information, contact your sending AFS national office. In case you don't feel physically well, make sure to tell your host family. They will probably take you to the family doctor (« le médecin généraliste » ou « le médecin de famille ») who will direct you to a specialist if necessary.

Your host family will pay for those charges and AFS France will reimburse them. Direct payment can be made from our office in case of expensive medical care (hospitalization, surgery, etc.). You have to bring your immunization records with you, as well as any useful medical record that you might need during your program in France.

Substance abuse

Alcohol

The legal age for drinking and buying alcohol in France is 18. Although some French teenagers drink alcohol during parties, it is illegal under 18. Any inappropriate behavior with alcohol, including getting drunk or putting yourself at risk, will lead to **an immediate early return to your home country**.

Smoking

You'll notice that smoking is a common habit in France, even among teenagers (but generally not with parental approval). It is forbidden in France to smoke in public areas since 2007. Unless you have specifically indicated in your application that you are a smoker, your host family will expect you not to smoke. Therefore you cannot put them in a situation where they would have to put up with your smoking. In France it is illegal to sell cigarettes to underaged (« mineurs »). Don't start smoking while in France!

Drugs

Any drug use will mean **an immediate return back home**. You might find yourself in a situation where friends your age or maybe even host siblings use marijuana. Never accept to smoke with them, not even just to try it. Also try to avoid situations in which you know that there will be marijuana.



AFS Vivre Sans Frontière (AFS France)

The National Office is located near Paris in Saint-Maurice

18 professional staff members

28 local AFS VSF chapters

400 French students abroad each year

1000 unpaid volunteers

450 foreign students hosted in France each year

10700 French students sent abroad since 1947

11500 foreign students hosted in France since 1947

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