



## **Bienvenue en France**

«It's not better, it's not worse,  
it's just different»

# **Welcome to France !**

*A guidebook for hosted students in France*

## **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 being hosted in the countryside or in a big city, you will be immersed into French culture as soon as your feet touch the ground through your host family, your school and friends, TV programs, food, architecture, well, everything that you see, eat, hear and smell!

This sudden immersion can be exhausting 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 your integration and reminders of AFS rules. Don't forget to bring this booklet with you, you'll use it during your national arrival orientation and it might also prove useful all along your program with tips, facts and basic vocabulary.

Bonne lecture et à très bientôt !

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## Your host family

There is no typical French family ; your French host family can be a married or non-married couple, with kids of 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 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), and participate in family activities.

Don't be afraid to talk to your host parents, as this is a sure way to get to know them better and to show interest. It is usual

in French families to talk about oneself and ask for advice. Dinner time is very important family time in France. It is often the occasion for all family members to share their day and discuss the news. Showing your feelings, 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 quite cautious about their children's school results and outings. You may also find that you have less independence here than in your own country. Children are very often required to ask for permission to go out and to say where they are going and with whom, and to respect a curfew. French families hate to be taken for a hotel, and they will

expect you to respect their family rules and to share interests and participate in families activities.

Please note that your integration into your host family is a very important part of your AFS program. You will be asked to make the effort to do so; if your host family thinks you are not making any efforts to integrate, local volunteers will meet with you and your host family to discuss the issue, and will give you some advice to help you to make things better. If your local volunteers feel that you still don't show any effort, you might be moved to a different host family or even sent back home.

Make sure to bring a small present for 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 much contact, especially daily online chatting, will affect your integration process. If you miss them too much, we suggest you write your experiences 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. It is very uncommon for French teenagers to own their own laptop, and it is not needed for school. Bust most of all, it will keep you separated from your host family instead of allowing you to share in family time. It will also be a temptation for constant online chatting with home, and will keep you awake late at night. If necessary, your host family and/or volunteers might decide to take your laptop away at nights, or for a certain period of time.

On the contrary we encourage you to get a French cell phone plan which will help you to keep in touch with your new French friends, and will also enable you to call your host family or AFS volunteers in case you have a problem/you're late somewhere (phone booths are getting very rare). It will be much less expensive than using your own phone plan from home. Don't hesitate to ask for help from your host family. But remember, your cell phone bills will be at your own cost!

Finally, be extra cautious with Facebook/blogs and anything you, or others, post online about you. Always favor private messages. Never post anything public about your host family, friends or AFS. Never publish a picture online of anyone without their consent online.

## Inside the home

Upon arrival you'll have to discuss the daily routine with your family and check how the family organization works : how the laundry is handled, at what time you have to be home after school, whether you can help yourself in the fridge, what chores you are expected to do, whether you can decorate your bedroom as you like? Etc.

Many families are cautious with home expenses. You should always turn the light 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 turn the water off while cleaning your body/teeth or dishes.

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, always ask permission to call a cell phone number (starting with 06 or 07) from the home phone.

Almost every home has a TV. There are six basic channels—TF1, France 2, France 3, Canal +, France 5/Arte and M6— and many families also get more channels through cable or internet. Many teenagers watch TV shows after school, and the whole family gathers to watch « le 20h », also known as « le JT » (journal télévisé), which is the popular evening news on TF1 and France 2 airing from 8pm to 8.30pm. Often, French families also gather to watch a movie after dinner. On most channels, foreign films and TV shows are dubbed in 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 "VO" (version originale), rent a DVD from the local movie rental store or borrow one from the local library. Movies dubbed in French are marked with "VF" (version française).

Almost every home is also equipped with computer and internet access. However, the computer is often shared by all family members in a common room. Thus, it would be very rude to monopolize the computer, especially if it's not for school work. Note that downloading music or movies illegally is forbidden by French law. You should never do it from your host family's internet. If you do, they can be tracked down by the Government and get a very expensive fine and be cut from internet access for several years.

# Your host school

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

The typical school day starts at 8 am (your host family will expect that you get up and get ready on your own) and ends at 5 pm. Classes last 55 minutes and the school day is punctuated by 5-minute (between each class), 15-minute (twice a day) and 1-hour (lunch) breaks. 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 « classe » with 25 to 30 other students who will always follow the same classes and schedule as you. This way, it is easy to get to know people very quickly. Lunch, in most cases taken at « la cantine » (school cafeteria), 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 « Tu as fait tes devoirs ? ». Teachers regularly test students with « les contrôles » (written tests taken during class) on which you will be rated out of 20. In most subjects 13/20 is considered a good result. If you are in « Terminale » (last year of high school), you might want to take the Baccalauréat (« le bac ») at the end of the school year. This national exam is mandatory to go to university. You are tested on about 10 different subjects and you have to get at least 10/20 to pass.

The school year is divided into 3 trimesters. At the end of each

trimester, your teachers meet during the « conseil de classe » to discuss each student's results and behavior. Two of your classmates, whom you elect at the beginning of the school year, assist this « conseil de classe » as the students' representatives. After this meeting, the school sends a « bulletin de notes » (school report) to your host family.

The school is state-controlled by « l'Education Nationale » (Ministry of Education), which sets the same school programs throughout the country. No uniform is required but you have to make sure that your clothes and hair style do not offend your teachers. Moreover, public schools forbid any religious signs such as the veil, kippah, or even too big of a cross. Most likely, you will be registered in one of the following « classe » according to your age, your ability to speak the language and the school availability, **AFS France is absolutely, unable to guarantee a registration into the « classe » that you want, even if it is necessary to validate your school year back home.**

« **La Troisième** » (9<sup>th</sup> grade, 14-15 years old): if you are registered in « Troisième » it means you will go to « collège » (junior high) and not « lycée » (high school). You will study French, mathematics, biology, physics & chemistry, history & geography, 2 foreign languages (usually English and either German, Spanish or Italian), plastic arts, music, physical education. Some « collèges » also offer Latin or Greek as optional classes.

« **La Seconde** » (10<sup>th</sup> grade, 15-16 years old): same subjects as in « Troisième » except music and plastic arts that some « lycées » still might offer as optional classes, as well as a 3<sup>rd</sup> foreign language, and Latin and Greek..

« **La Première** » (11<sup>th</sup> grade, 16-17 years old): choice of one section among three (L: focus on literature and languages; S: focus on sciences; ES: focus on economics). All students have to take a French literature national exam at the end of the year.

« **La Terminale** » (12<sup>th</sup> grade, 17-18 years old): final year of school, same subjects as « Première » students (plus philosophy) and heavy focus on « le bac » (final national exam taken at the end of high school).

For more information on the French school system, a specific booklet is available, ask your sending AFS national office to send it to you if you're interested!

“ During my year in France, I gained many things and, most of all, a “second” family, with whom I feel as close as with my natural parents. ”

Emrah from Turkey



In France, the school year starts on the first week of September (« la rentrée ») and ends around mid-June. In addition to school vacations, there are several national days off throughout the year (e.g.: November 11th WWI armistice, May 1st Labour Day, May 8th WW2 armistice, etc.).

**STANDARDIZED VACATION PERIODS**

- November: 2 weeks off  
*Vacances de la Toussaint*
- December: 2 weeks off  
*Vacances de Noël*
- February/March: 2 weeks off  
*Vacances d'hiver*
- April/May: 2 weeks off  
*Vacances de printemps*
- July and August: 10 weeks off  
*Vacances d'été / Grandes vacances*

## Attendance

Attendance in French schools is mandatory and each missed class will be reported to your host family by your school. Teachers in France are pretty strict and you are expected to behave properly during class time (no talking, no drawing on your paper books, no texting on your cell phone...) and to show academic commitment. Moreover, going to school is part of your AFS program, and you might be sent home immediately if you don't go to school, or if you don't provide any school work.

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# Your host chapter

There are 25 AFS chapters (see map) in France. You will be assigned to one of them, and during the year, you'll have many 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) that you'll have several occasions to share during AFS local events, but also at school, or with your host family.

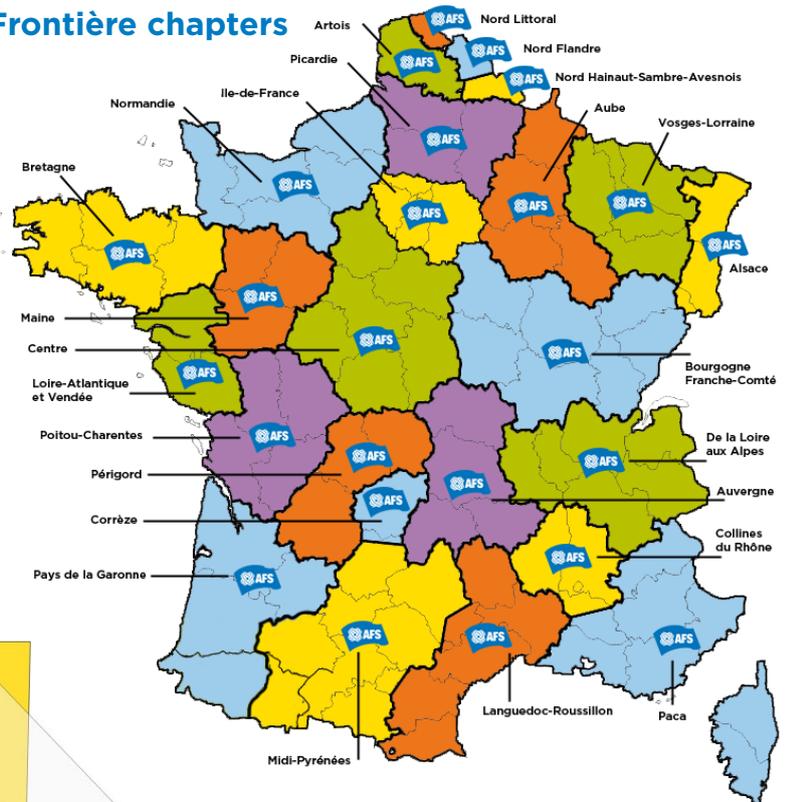
Each host chapter has a hosting coordinator whose name and phone number will be given to you during the national arrival orientation. Most likely, a few days after your arrival in your host chapter, you will also be attributed a contact person who will keep in touch with you regularly. Do not hesitate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

Whenever you have a problem or question, you must contact your contact person, or any volunteer from your AFS host chapter, instead of sharing your issue directly with your natural family, who will feel helpless and who will probably make things worse than they need to be. The best and quickest way to seek help is to share your issue with volunteers from your host chapter. They are here to help you!

AFS Vivre Sans Frontière and the AFS national office of your native country 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. Just trust us!



## The 25 AFS Vivre Sans Frontière chapters



### Contacting the national office

In case you don't feel comfortable talking to any volunteer from your host chapter, feel free to contact our national hosting support coordinator in the national office of AFS Vivre Sans Frontière. The office is open **from Monday to Friday, from 9 am to 6 pm**. Our phone number is **01 45 14 03 10**.

If the office is closed, and **ONLY** in case of emergencies, you can reach an AFS Vivre Sans Frontière staff member on our emergency phone **06 82 11 24 45**.

### The AFS Chain of Communication



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## More about French

### French 101

Bonjour/Salut, ça va ?/quoi de neuf ?	Hello/Hi, how are you?/what's up?
Ça va !/ça va pas trop	I'm fine!/I'm not doing very well.
Au revoir/salut/à plus !	Goodbye/bye/see you!
Bonne journée/soirée!	Have a good day/night!
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 need 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

### Pre-departure (just for fun!) readings

<a href="http://www.afs-fr.org">www.afs-fr.org</a>	AFS France website
<a href="http://www.franceguide.com">www.franceguide.com</a>	French Tourist Office website
<a href="http://www.alliancefr.org">www.alliancefr.org</a>	Website of the « Alliance Française »
<a href="http://www.tourisme.fr">www.tourisme.fr</a>	Links to websites of the different French regions
<a href="http://www.doucefrance.com">www.doucefrance.com</a>	Links to websites about French culture
<a href="http://www.france.diplomatie.fr">www.france.diplomatie.fr</a>	Website of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs (click on « Découvrir la France »)
<a href="http://www.radiofrance.fr">www.radiofrance.fr</a>	Portal of different French national radios
<a href="http://www.rfi.fr">www.rfi.fr</a>	Website of Radio France Internationale (if you want to listen to French radio in your own language)

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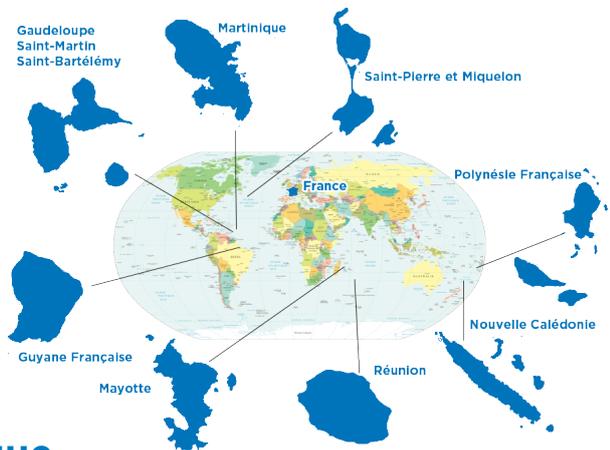
# Facts and Culture

## Geography

« La France métropolitaine », also known as « la métropole » is the French territory situated in Europe. It's about 544 000 km<sup>2</sup>. This is opposed to « la France d'outre-mer », also known as « les DOM-TOM » which is composed of all the French territories situated outside of Europe, such as la Nouvelle-Calédonie (in Oceania, near Australia), la Réunion (near Madagascar), Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon (near Newfoundland, Canada) etc. There is no AFS chapter in these territories.

La France métropolitaine is divided into 22 « régions », including the isle of Corse, each of them with its own culture, food and traditions. « La région parisienne » (Paris area) is often opposed to « la province » (everything which is not in the Paris area!), which « les provinciaux » (people living in province) are very irritated about!! Note that 80% of our placements are in rural areas.

There are 65 million people living in France.



## Politique

French people love talking about politics, even among teenagers. You'll witness people getting into big fights about politics but still remain close friends!!

The French political system is mainly composed of the executive power (« le Président » and his « gouvernement ») and legislative power (« Sénat » and « Assemblée Nationale »). The President is elected directly by the French citizens who are « majeurs » (meaning over 18 years old), for 5 years, and no more than twice. The current President of France is François Hollande.

The next presidential elections will be in April and May 2012. Elections always take place on Sundays, and there are always two rounds (« premier tour » and « deuxième tour »). The two main political parties in France are « le PS » (moderate left wing) and « l'UMP » (moderate right wing).

France has been a member of the European Union (« Union Européenne ») since its creation in 1957, along with 26 other countries. A 28th member, Croatia, should join in 2013. The European Parliament is situated both in Strasbourg, France and Brussels, Belgium.



## Weather

The weather in France is temperate generally with a range of temperature from -5°C on winters in the North to 35°C on summers in the South. There are four distinct seasons: l'automne, l'hiver, le printemps, 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. On winters, it gets pretty cold in the mountains and in the North and North-East, so make sure to pack several warm sweaters, gloves and a woollen hat. Bretagne is known to always be rainy. It often snows at least a little almost everywhere a few days a year. The weather gets globally warmer around April. But as we say, « En avril ne te découvre pas d'un fil, en mai, fais ce qu'il te plaît ! » (in April, don't take any clothes off, in May, do whatever you like!). For more information about the weather, you can go and check the website of Météo-France on [www.meteofrance.com](http://www.meteofrance.com).

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)

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## Food

Food is a very important part of French culture. The French love to eat and spend a lot of time « à table », especially with family and friends. They will expect you to taste and try everything they cook or buy, but will be cautious not to offer you again food that you disliked.

French cuisine is very diverse, and there are many food specialties in every « région » : « 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 stinky cheese! You have to love food to love France!

Your meals will be generally as follows:

-  « Le petit-déjeuner » (breakfast): warm drink, bread and butter, marmalade or Nutella, milk and cereals.
-  « Le déjeuner » (lunch) (between 12 pm and 2 pm): taken at « la cantine » (school cafeteria) during week days.
-  « Le dîner » (dinner) (between 7 pm and 9 pm): very important family time. Make sure to respect dinner time, and to always ask permission if you have to skip dinner.

Make an effort to participate in the conversation, ask questions about the other family members' days, and to also tell about your day.

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

- « L'entrée »: soup, raw vegetables, salad
- « Le plat principal »: warm meal with fish or meat, vegetables and starch
- « Le fromage »: cheese
- « Le dessert »: fruits, yogurts, sometimes a home-made cake
- There is always « du pain » (bread) on the table. People usually drink plain water and adults might drink a few glasses of wine.

And also:

- « Le goûter » is a very light meal taken after school between 4 and 5 pm, mostly by children, and is composed of fruit juice and cookies.
- « 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...



## Euro

is the same money for 16 other countries in Europe: Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain.

Each country has a personal 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.

1. Finland
2. Malta
3. Germany
4. Spain
5. France

## Money & prices

The currency used in France is « l'Euro » (symbolized by €) and, in early May 2013, the exchange rate was 1€ = 1,31 US\$.

France is known as a pretty expensive country, you should plan a minimum budget of 80€/month to cover your personal expenses (beauty products, club activities, school trips, clothes, time out with friends: movies, coffee place, etc.). It is often possible for our AFS students to open a bank account in a French bank, however you will be provided with a withdrawal card only. We recommend you to bring an international withdrawal card, or at least a few travellers cheque (instead of a huge amount of cash) because opening a bank account might take a few weeks.

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!

- Un café au bistrot: 2,50€
- Menu Best of Big Mac (McDonald's): 6,10€
- Public (weekly gossip papers): 1,50€
- L'Equipe (daily sport newspaper): 0,95€
- Downloading one song from i-Tunes: 0,99€
- Movie ticket: 10€
- H&M pair of jeans: 30€

## About France

## Big events in France

### Sports

The French like national sport events especially « Rolland Garros » (tennis tournament taking place in Paris every year in May), « le Tour de France » (annual bicycle race taking place in July throughout France and ending by a speed race on « Les Champs-Élysées ») and any soccer games, especially « l'Euro » and « la Coupe du Monde », both taking place in June and July every four years, the next Euro cup being in 2012.

### Le 14 juillet

French national day (« Fête Nationale »), commemorating « la prise de la Bastille » (storming of the Bastille fortress-prison) in 1789. This event symbolically represents the beginning of the French revolution and the end of absolute monarchy. On the morning of July 14th, you can watch the traditional military parade on « les Champs-Élysées ». At nights, « feux d'artifice » (fireworks) and « bals des pompiers » (popular dances organized by fire stations) 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 « muguet » (lily of the valley flowers) as a « porte-bonheur » (lucky charm).

### Noël (Christmas)

This Christian celebration is big for almost every family in France, even for non-believers. Towards the end of November, cities decorate their streets with Christmas lights, and media is crazy about Christmas. But most of all, it's a time you'll have to share with your family, and it will be expected that you give a small present to each close family member that you will have met by then. Christmas dinner is often composed of « foie-gras », « huîtres », « dinde aux marrons », « bûche glacée » and of course « champagne ».

### Popular Culture

1. Yannick Noah (retired tennis player who won Rolland Garros in 1983 and now a popular singer)
2. Zinedine Zidane, also known as Zizou (retired soccer player who was in the team when France won the world cup in 1998)
3. Omar Sy (French actor, his new movie « Intouchables » is the 3rd most successful movie ever in the French Box-Office)
4. Jean Dujardin (French actor who won the Best Actor Oscar in 2012)
5. Simone Veil (Auschwitz survivor and former Health Minister who legalized abortion in France in 1975)
6. Edith Piaf (French singer from the mid-20th century whose most famous songs are classics known by every French person)
7. Johnny Hallyday (most famous and popular French singer whose career started in the early 60's and is still going on nowadays)
8. Jeanne d'Arc (The Hundred Years' War national heroin - Poster from The Messenger, in French « Jeanne d'Arc », a Luc Besson's movie with Milla Jovovich)
9. Charles de Gaulle (head of Resistance during WWII and French President from 1959 to 1969)
10. La grande vadrouille (one of the 3 most successful French movies ever, released in 1966, with Louis De Funès and Bourvil)
11. Mai 68: largest protest and general strike ever in France, which led to major reforms and social progress



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## Religion

Although France is traditionally a Catholic country (and you can see this by the impressive number of Catholic churches everywhere in France, and by the many Catholic events that are national days off such as Easter and Assumption), 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, but probably nowhere else, so be aware that you won't automatically be able to attend religious services.

French people are most of all very attached to « la laïcité » (secularism) since the separation of State and Church in 1905. If you are a believer, you'll have to be extra careful to keep your faith to yourself as French people hate to have the feeling that they are being proselytized. It is now common opinion that faith is a private matter that should never be shown and discussed in the public area.

## La bise

French people « se font la bise » (kissing on cheeks) to say hello, but only on certain situations! You do, to say hello and goodbye, with friends and family members. Two men might or might not. Depending on the region, you give 1, 2, 3 or 4 kisses! Just look around and do the same! You never kiss teachers or any adult you have not been presented as a close relative acquaintance of your host family.

## Strikes

France is known for often being on strike due to our labour Unions history, we sometimes joke that « la grève » 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 also go on strike sometimes. French people also often take part to « les manif' » (protests) and there are hundreds organized all year long to show dissatisfaction or to claim demands.



## Politeness

Even if it can be seen as surprisingly old-fashioned, note that French people are very attached to « la politesse » (being polite). They will expect that you always say « s'il-te/vous-plaît » (please) and « merci » (thank you) and « de rien » (you're welcome) as well as « bonjour » (hello) and « au revoir » (goodbye).

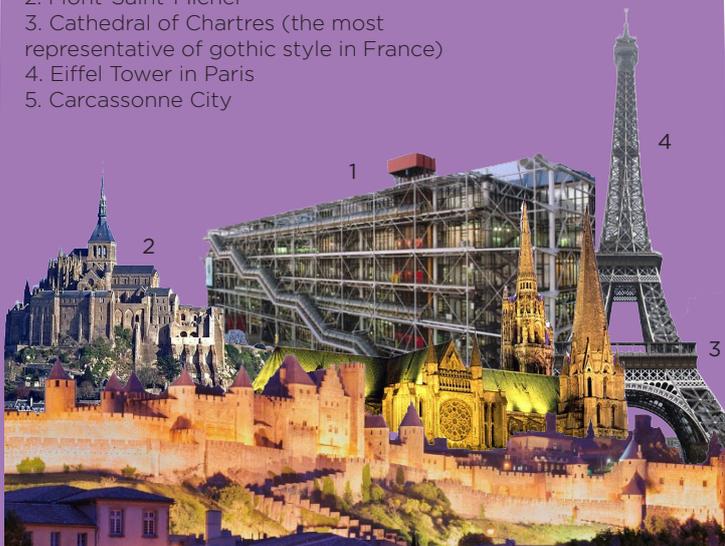
Any adult that you don't know will have to be addressed with the « vous » form until you are formally authorized to « tutoyer » (saying « tu »). They will also expect good manners during meals. When pouring yourself a glass of water, offer to do it for the others, never help yourself/start eating without being invited to do so, or take the last piece of food, or leave the table without asking. Make sure to help clear the table and do the dishes without having to be asked to do so.

## Réductions (student rates)

When going to a museum, an exhibition or to the (movie) theater make sure to check the possible « 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 citizens aged less than 26.

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.)

1. Beaubourg Georges Pompidou, Contemporary Art Museum in Paris
2. Mont-Saint-Michel
3. Cathedral of Chartres (the most representative of gothic style in France)
4. Eiffel Tower in Paris
5. Carcassonne City



## 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 « les congés payés » (annual 5-week paid vacations), many French families take the occasion to visit another part of France. In case of an expensive trip (like ski trips), you might be asked to aid financially, this will have to be clearly discussed with your host family. You might also have the opportunity to take school trips. Also, during school vacations, you might ask your local volunteers to help you find another French host family in another chapter so that you can visit a different area. All those trips are AFS approved, but in 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 instance links Paris to Marseille in 3 hours.

## 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 adaptation:

- One single independent trip can be allowed during your program.
- Year-program students alone can be allowed an independent trip. They are strictly forbidden to short term-programs students.
- Independent trips can not take place before Winter vacations.
- Independent trips can not be organized during school periods.
- Independent trips can not last more than 10 days.
- Independent trips in the Netherlands are forbidden.
- Independent trips must take place under safe conditions. For instance, hotel accommodations and night train without family members or family adult friends are forbidden.
- Independent trips plans must be formally notified and submitted for authorization to your local volunteer at least one month before, and you'll have to supply this request with detailed information such as dates, places, transportation, accommodation, contact details, etc. AFS will not allow any trip without the consent of your local volunteer who will inform the national office of their final decision.
- Independent trips must be authorized by your natural parents who 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.

## Visits from your natural family

The experience on which you are embarking is one of slow adaptation to a new environment. Therefore, in order to avoid switching back and forth from the French culture to your own, we do not favor visits from your natural family during your stay nor do we favor trips with your natural family or friends from home, especially during family times such as Christmas. This is also a mark of respect towards your host family. However, a visit from your natural family can be tolerated towards the end of your program. This visit must be approved in advance by your host family, local chapter and AFS Vivre Sans Frontière. In the case that your family wants to visit, tell them to contact the AFS office of your native country. Please, also note that your host family must not feel obligated to host your natural family and that it is more polite for your natural family to seek their own accommodation.

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

## Visa and travel abroad

Any AFS student coming to France is requested to have a passport valid until the end of the AFS program. Moreover, a visa is mandatory for most non-Union European citizens coming to France for more than 3 months. It will be issued by the French consulate of your home country and your AFS office will help you throughout the application process. Most likely you will have to apply for a « visa mineur scolarisé ». Please note that although circulation is facilitated among the Schengen countries, your visa to France will not necessarily allow you to enter another European country.

If you have the opportunity to travel abroad, 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. Thus, make sure to always get a written confirmation from the country Embassy or one of its consulates. Every country has its own immigration and entrance laws and AFS France cannot be held responsible for your being unable to enter a foreign country other than France.



## Safety Issues

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# 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 on public areas ;
- No hitch hiking ;
- No use of any drugs ;
- No binge drinking ;
- No breaking of the law.

## Sexual behavior & harassment

You might find that French teenagers are generally physically close (boys and girls openly hold hands, hug and kiss) and talk about sex a lot, but it does not necessarily mean that they actually have sex! You have to be sure of what you want 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 « planning familial » center available in most cities. Always use protection in case of sexual activity.



In some situation you might feel unsure whether you are being sexually harassed or not. Your host family, friends and volunteers will be able to tell you what is considered a normal behavior in France and what is not. 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, if necessary, protest loudly to intimidate the person.

## Aggressions

France is not a particularly dangerous country. Of course delinquency and crimes are a reality as in any other country. Although there may be well-known problems as ricketing and bag snatching, they are far from representing the daily life of French people.

To avoid problems, do not carry a large amount of money, do not show your wallet or expensive items (cell phones, i-pods, etc) on the street and public transport, keep your bag closed and under your supervision in crowd places. Do not bring expensive items to school and do not leave expensive belongings (bike, bag, etc.) out of sight. (**Remember AFS does not have an insurance against theft!** Stolen items will not be reimbursed by our insurance.) Keep a copy of your passport and visa on your wallet, and keep the originals in a safe place. Do not answer to strangers who are obviously 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 nights.

If you feel you are in danger or being followed, enter 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 (which you should also systematically do when you use a cab).

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

## Emergency phone numbers in France

112	Emergency number
17	Police
18	Firemen
15	SAMU (emergency medical care)
3624	SOS Médecins (doctors permanence)
118 712	Directory assistance

## 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 (eye and dental care except if due to an accident, 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 send you to « le généraliste » (family doctor) who will send you to a specialist if necessary. Your host family will pay for those charges and we will reimburse them. Direct payment can be made from our office in case of expensive medical care (hospitalization, surgery, etc). 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. You might have the occasion during family events to taste wine and Champaign, but don't feel obligated to drink if you don't want to. It is also common for French teenagers to drink alcohol during parties. Any inappropriate behavior with alcohol, including getting drunk, will lead to an early return in your home country.

### Smoking

You'll notice that smoking is a common habit in France, even among teenagers (but generally not with parental approval!). More and more smoking French parents smoke outside the home or by the window. It has been forbidden in France to smoke in public areas since 2007. Unless you have specifically noted in your application that you are a smoker, your host family will expect you to be a non-smoker. 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 « mineurs » (aged less than 18).

Don't start smoking while in France!

### Drugs

Any drug use means 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, even just to try. Try to avoid situations in which you know there will be marijuana.

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# More facts about AFS

## AFS Intercultural Programs, inc.

HOME BASE: NEW YORK, USA

10 sending countries in the first AFS exchange program to the United States  
88 member countries  
960 professional staff members  
12,500 participants each year  
43,500 volunteers  
412,300 alumni

1947 Year of first AFS exchanges

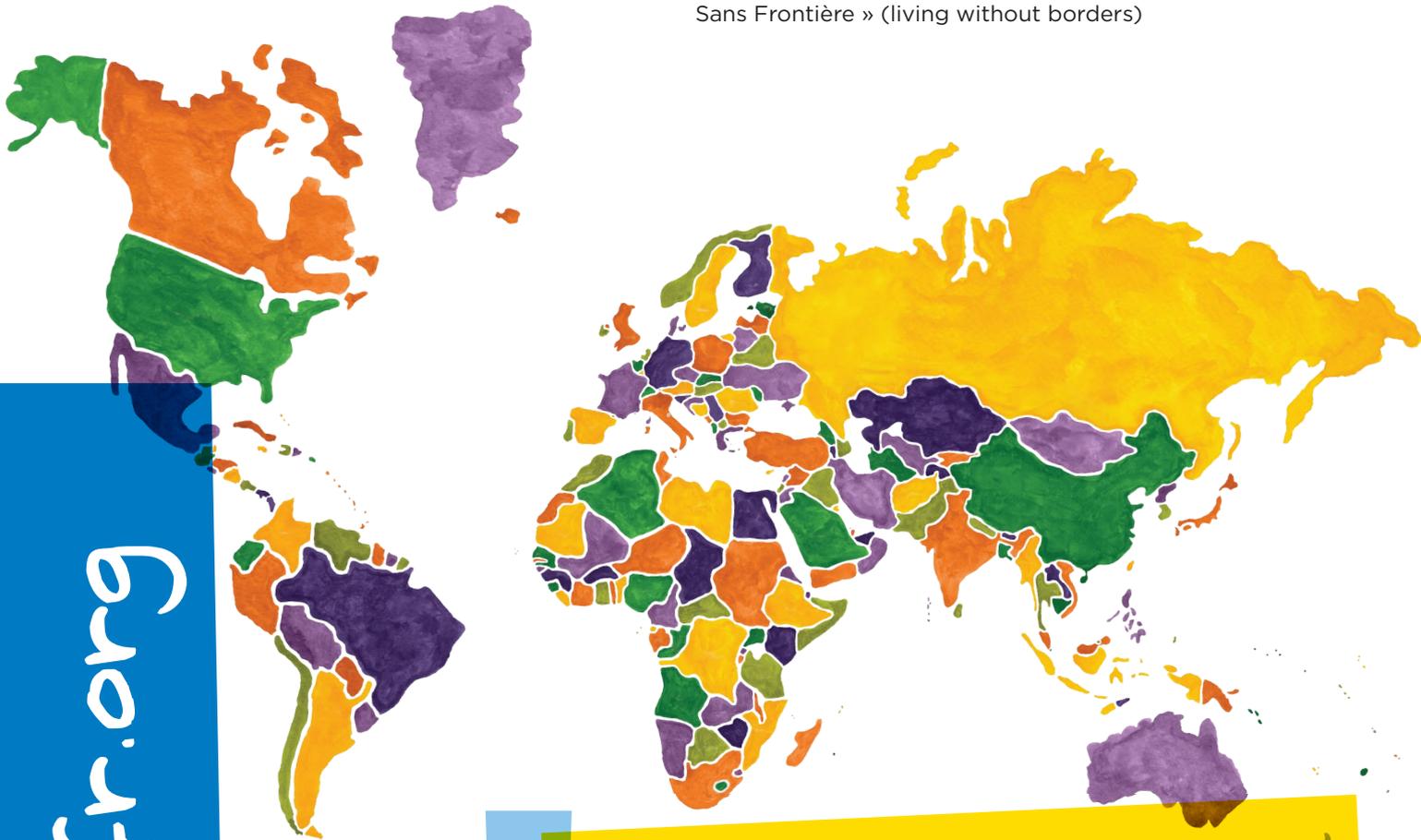
## AFS Vivre Sans Frontière (AFS France)

NATIONAL OFFICE: FONTENAY-SOUS-BOIS, FRANCE

16 professional staff members  
25 local AFS VSF chapters  
350 French students abroad each year  
550 unpaid volunteers  
450 foreign students in France each year

10700 French students sent abroad since 1947  
11500 foreign students hosted in France since 1947

1950 Year that France opened up its chapter of AFS, taking the name « le Comité français de l'American Field Service »  
1975 Year that AFS France's name was changed to « Vivre Sans Frontière » (living without borders)



[www.afs-fr.org](http://www.afs-fr.org)

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Programmes interculturels dans 50 pays