

FRANCE

GEOGRAPHY

France is a country located in Western Europe. It borders with Belgium and Luxembourg to the north-east; with Germany, Switzerland, Italy and Monaco to the east; with Spain and Andorra to the south-west. It is bathed by the Mediterranean sea to the south (where it has an important island: Corsica) and the Atlantic Ocean to the west (the Bay of Biscay) and to the north (the English Channel). Because of its form this country is often called “the hexagon”.

France also has other territories, which come from its colonial era: in the Caribbean, in South America, in the Indian Ocean, in the Pacific Ocean, in the Atlantic Ocean and in Antarctica. They have different types of administrative relationships with the central country. In this work when we talk about France we refer to European France. France covers about 550 thousand square kilometres, having the largest area among European Union members. France possesses a wide variety of landscapes, from coastal plains in the north and west to the mountain ranges of the Alps in the south-east, the Massif Central in the centre south and the Pyrenees in the south-west. France also has extensive river systems such as the Seine, the Loire, the Garonne, and the Rhone.



HISTORY



Even if it is extremely limiting to summarize the French history in few words, we can say that the first historical records appear in the Iron Age, when what is now known as France made up most of the region known as Gaul to the ancient Greeks and Romans. In 51 B.C. Gaul was under Roman domination that brought Latin culture to France and indirectly to the subsequent Christianization. After the decadence of the Roman Empire, Gaul was subject to Germanic raids: the Alemans, the Burgundians and particularly the Franks. Most regions that make up present-day France were united under *Clovis* in 507, king of the Franks. The kingdom expanded further and was erected to empire under Charlemagne. During the Hundred Years' War, another important protagonist of French history was *Joan of Arc* (1412-1431), a national heroine and a Roman Catholic Saint, who led her army to

important victories. The most important historical events are: The French Revolution in 1789 with its principles of liberty, equality and fraternity and the advent of *Napoleon Bonaparte* in the next century. General *De Gaulle* led the French Army during World War II and became its first President in 1959. Since then France has been a leading member in the UN, the European Union and NATO, and still remains a strong economic, cultural, military and political influence in the 21st century.

POLITICS

The French Republic is a unitary semi-presidential republic with strong democratic traditions, in which the President of France, currently *Nicolas Sarkozy*, is head of state and the Prime Minister of France, currently *François Fillon*, is the head of government. The constitution of the Republic was approved by referendum on 28 September 1958. The French parliament is a bicameral legislature comprising a National Assembly and a Senate. The Senate's legislative powers are limited; in the event of disagreement between the two chambers, the National Assembly has the final say. The government has a strong influence in shaping the agenda of Parliament. French politics are characterised by two politically opposed groupings: one left-wing, centred around the French Socialist Party, and the other right-wing, centred previously around the Union for a Popular Movement. The executive branch is currently composed mostly of the Union for a Popular Movement.



ECONOMY

Today France and Germany form what is often referred to as the “core countries” in favor of greater integration of the European Union. France is the fifth world economic power: some areas of strength are transport, telecommunications, pharmaceuticals but also the banking sector and tourism. The most performing industrial sectors in France are: construction , agro-industry with *Danone and Nestlé*-France, auto industry with *Peugeot, Citroen and Renault*, insurance, fashion and luxury industry with *Chanel*. In addition to the Paris area, important industrial cities are Metz, Saint-Etienne, Bordeaux, Strasbourg and Nantes. In the banking sector the main French banks are: *Crédit Agricole, Société Générale and Banque Nationale de Paris*. *Air France* is the world's largest airline company and *Michelin* is the world's tires leader. France is the world-leading country in nuclear energy. France is the fifth goods exporter in the world, but the first producer and exporter of agricultural products in Europe. It is the world's second largest agricultural exporter and is currently expanding its forestry and fishery industries. France's competitive advantage is mostly linked to the high quality and global reputation of its products. It is the world's most popular tourist destination with 75 million tourists a year.



CULTURE

The French culture is rich, varied and ancient, and reflects its regional cultures and the influence of waves of immigration which occurred during various periods. Paris, the capital, has long been an important cultural center welcoming artists from all backgrounds, and today has the largest number of cultural sites in the world. This rich culture has made France, and Paris, the first resorts in the world.

As regards painting, in the second part of the 19th century, with the development of new styles of painting like Impressionism and Symbolism, France's influence became very strong. The most famous painters of the period were *Manet, Degas* and *Matisse*. Most of the masterpieces of these painters and others created before the 18th century are displayed in the *Musée du Louvre*, while modern works are presented in the *Musée National d'Art Modern*.

Let me turn now to French architecture. The most famous French *château* is the Palace of Versailles. It was the center of political power in France from 1682 until the 1789 after the beginning of the French Revolution.

Versailles is therefore famous not only as a building, but as a symbol of the system of absolute monarchy of the *Ancien Régime*. The other French symbol is the Eiffel Tower, a wrought iron lattice tower built in 1889 as the entrance arch to the 1889 World's Fair. It's the tallest building in Paris and the most visited paid monument in the world. It's named after the engineer Gustave Eiffel.

In conclusion I'd like to discuss about the cinema. France has historical and strong links with the cinema. It is two Frenchmen, Auguste and Louis Lumière who created the cinema in 1895.



FOOD AND DRINKS

Italy is considered an important country for taste and gastronomy, but France, like Italy is very important and can be defined as a strong institution of culinary culture. Many fine wines, great cheeses and desserts are of French origin, and all products are universally known and appreciated thanks to the work of French internationally renowned chefs. Since each region of France is characterized by different specialties, we are going to mention some typical food of some of them, because you can't speak about "French cuisine", but Lyonnais cuisine, Basque, Alsatian, Provençal, Breton, Languedoc etc. cuisine. We begin with Île-de-France and Paris, and we do it by talking about the unmistakable baguette: it is a bread that should measure 70 cm in length and 6 in diameter, is classified as one of the most important Parisian symbols .

Another important food is French meat and when we speak about this, we think of Normandy. This region is also famous for cheeses called Camembert, Pont-L'èveque and Livarot . A typical Normandy fruit is apple. When you distil cider we obtain Calvados, the famous apple brandy that is made with sour, bitter and sweet apples. In Britain galettes and crêpes are a real deliciousness: they are both prepared using the same techniques, but while the former are salted, the latter are sweet. Among foods that best express the characteristics of the Picardie cuisine, we found Maroilles, a cheese which is unique for its perfume and fatty and soft dough. Finally ,another specialty is Chantilly cream: sweetened whipped cream flavoured with vanilla.

