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Relax R C Companion
Traveling Since 1973

Etiquette & Expectations

The French people are formal, polite, and always like to be prepared so they can give you the very best service. This can feel weird and awkward to Americans, but if you learn a few of the rules, you can play the game, have good interactions, and enjoy your wonderful trip.

The Number 1 Rule
(Everywhere in France)

Always say "*Bonjour*" (Hello/ Good day) when you enter any establishment or before you make any transaction. This applies to entering a shop, a hotel, a restaurant, or a museum. It applies to getting a taxi. It applies to asking for help or directions. It applies to sitting down near someone in the park. It applies to entering a restaurant and greeting other diners. Or to entering the laundromat and greeting all the other patrons. By saying ***Bonjour*** everywhere you go, politeness has just paved the way for pleasant interactions.

The 2nd most important word in France is "***Merci***" (Thank you). Try to always say ***Merci*** to anyone who helped you or provided a service.

Even if you don't speak French, as long as you remember to always start with "*Bonjour*" (Good morning / good day) and end with "*Merci*" (thank-you), these 2 words will show respect and goodwill to the French people you are interacting with and will create a much more pleasant travel experience.

If you want to learn more French before you go to France, you can watch some YouTube videos, or play with DuoLingo, Quizlet, or some other language learning app. But our favorite conversational style language-learner is taught and produced by Michel Thomas. He's quite brusque but very effective.

Scan QR code for more info or use https://www.michelthomas.com/learn-french/

Service
(Hotels, Dining/Restaurants & Shops)

Hotels
Hoteliers are educated, professional people who often speak 3-5 languages. They will help you make dinner reservations, find a taxi, and can recommend local attractions.

If you arrive prior to check-in time they will help you store your luggage and let you use the lobby restroom until it is time to check in.

Pro tip: most boutique hotels have been retro-fit with a tiny elevator. Often only your luggage fits (and maybe one person). Plan to use the stairs most of the time.

Dining
A few important rules.
1) Never ask to split a meal or the bill.
2) Choosing the special (*plat du jour*) is a great choice.
3) Stay at your table for as long as you want. When you are ready to pay and leave, you can either signal your wait-staff and ask for "*L'addition, s'il vous plaît*" (the addition / the bill please) or you can go directly to the counter to pay. Tipping is not required.
4) Meal times are very specific. 12-2 pm for lunch; 7pm at the earliest for dinner (19:00 for the 24-hour clock).

What to expect at a meal (*repas*).
Breakfast / *Petit-déjeuner*: France does not have diners with unlimited coffee and huge plates of food. They have *pâtisseries* (bakeries) with *croissants* and other pastries, and tiny cups of *espresso* or *cappuccino*. If you prefer a bigger breakfast, you can take advantage of the hotel's breakfast option. Make sure to pre-arrange this with your hotelier. There might be a hot water kettle or a Nespresso maker in your room, but not always.

Lunch / *Déjeuner*: It's very easy to find a *café, bistro*, or *brasserie* for lunch. You will see them everywhere with their charming tables and chairs set up into the sidewalk. Take advantage of the culture and take your time over lunch. Giant salads, pasta, big sandwiches, or *steak-frites* (steak and fries) are great choices for lunch. Order a pitcher of rosé wine (*un pichet de vin rosé - petit ou grand*), eat a big meal, and get an *espresso* afterwards. Lunch is the best priced meal of the day.

Happy Hour: There is a big culture of ***apéros / apéritifs,*** which are after-work/late afternoon drinks and snacks at sidewalk *cafés* & *brasseries*. Usually only small snacks like olives, nuts, or chips are served. But sometimes you can order fries or pizza too. Be prepared for cigarette smoke.

Dinner / *Dîner*: Service starts at 7 pm (19:00) at the earliest and it's very important to make a reservation. Some restaurants won't even let you sit down if you don't have a reservation. The reason for this is that they want to be prepared for the number of guests and they want to provide excellent service.

A great way to enjoy a traditional French meal is to choose "*Le Menu / La formule*" or The Menu, which is a fixed price for a set meal. You can choose between 2 or 3 appetizers (*entrées*), 2-3 mains (*plats*), and 3-5 desserts (1 choice per category). Usually the daily special (*plat du jour*) is styled like a menu choice in that you also get an appetizer (*entrée*) and a dessert. The special is often the best meal. But if neither the special nor the menu appeal to you, you can order "*à la carte*," meaning you can order a single/stand-alone dish.

Food & Dining Pro-tips:
1) Meat in France is never cooked as long as meat in the United States. And you do not get to choose the amount of "done-ness" in pork, chicken, lamb, duck, or rabbit. You **can** request done-ness for beef. Ask for *saignant* (very rare / bloody), *à pointe* (Americans would consider this rare but it means "to the point of"), or *bien cuit* (which means well done, but Americans would consider this medium-rare). Do not use the words **medium rare**. They will hear **rare** and you will receive a purple steak.
2) If you don't like meat, the fish is almost always delicious, but vegetarian options can be hard to find, and food sensitivities can be very difficult to accommodate.
3) If you've ordered an appetizer (*entrée*), your main course (*plat*) will not be served until everyone at the table has finished their *entrée*. This makes it difficult to order an *entrée* in place of a main (*plat)*.
4) To get regular tap water, order *une carafe d'eau*.
5) Just like at lunch, you will not be rushed from your table. Sit back, take your time, and enjoy.
6) Your wait-staff is not ignoring you, they are letting you enjoy your dinner.
7) A reminder: do not ask to split a meal or a bill.
8) Ask for "*L'addition*" when you want the bill and DO tell the waitstaff if you want to pay by credit card. It is also acceptable to get up and pay at the counter. Tips are not necessary, but a few euros to indicate excellent service are welcome.

Shops
There are many delightful shops in France: specialty shops for pens & paper, book stores, house-hold goods, clothing, antiques, bakery/dessert-coffeeshops (*patisserie*), *chocolaterie*, bread makers (*boulangerie*), cheese shops (*fromagerie*), tea shops, and on and on.

This brings us back the **#1 Rule: Always say *Bonjour***. Look at the shopkeeper when you enter their domain and say, *Bonjour*! And then look around and see the other patrons and say *Bonjour* to them too.

If you are at a store where browsing is an option, go ahead. But if you are at a store where you must be waited on by the staff (such as a bakery or cheese shop), prepare to wait your turn. Don't get miffed if the service seems slow. The proprietor knows you are there and they will get to you in the order in which you entered the shop.

Note how the proprietor is giving ALL their attention to their current customer. When it is your turn, you will get all the attention too. Take as much time as you want. You are allowed to ask for tastes (in a cheese shop) and to ask questions in any shop. Enjoy!