


# France Factsheet (Trek)

Currency	Euro (€)	Divided into 100 cents
Time	GMT + 1	i.e. when it is 12 noon in London it is 13:00 in Paris
Language	French	English is widely understood
Electricity	220v	two-pin plugs are widely used 

## PASSPORT & VISA

A valid ten-year passport is essential and, for British Citizens, needs only be valid for the duration of your stay, though it's always good practice to have at least three months' validity. Check the FCO's advice on entry requirements for France (and Switzerland if appropriate) to be sure: <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice>. Remember to check any regulations for countries you may transit during your journey. There is usually no visa requirement for British passport-holders, but please check current visa requirements on our website (<https://www.discoveradventure.com/essential-information#/get-your-visa>) and ensure you allow plenty of time.

## MONEY:

Euros can be obtained before you arrive in France, and it's recommended that you bring enough for the first few days with you. Currency can be exchanged at banks, bureaux de change and some large hotels, though you will usually get a better rate of exchange at ATMs (cash machines) – these are more convenient as they are not restricted to banking hours. Travellers' cheques are the safest way to carry money, but opportunities to change them during your trip will be limited. Most places accept the major credit cards; ATMs are widely available in most towns and cities. It's easy to change Euros to Swiss Francs in Switzerland, or get them in advance if you prefer.

### Tipping

Most restaurants and hotels automatically add a 15% service charge so a tip is not necessary, although another 2-3% is customary if the service has been especially good. If service is not included 15% is customary. Taxi drivers expect 10-15% of the fare. Tips of €1 are usually given to washroom and cloakroom attendants, and if you pop into a café to use their toilets, leave a tip to thank them.

## HEALTH:

### Vaccinations

We recommend you ensure your routine UK schedule of vaccinations is up-to-date (especially Tetanus) and check the Fit For Travel (<http://www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk>) website for further details. You should always check with your GP/travel clinic for the latest health advice, as they are made immediately aware of any updates in World Health Travel requirements.

### General

France is remarkably free of health hazards and it is considered safe to drink tap water, although if you know your stomach is easily upset by different minerals and changes in environment etc, it is inadvisable to do this. Drastic changes in diet experienced while travelling can often make you susceptible to minor stomach ailments, such as diarrhoea. On the trip itself, food is cooked and prepared to very high standards and you can eat with confidence – though adopt good hand-washing procedures to prevent bugs being passed around the group. Elsewhere, do not eat a meal if you think it has not been freshly cooked.

Sunstroke, sunburn and dehydration are always a risk on trips of this nature. Use a high sun factor cream or sun block – remember that you can burn even on cloudy days or when you feel cold. In the mountains, bear in mind the sun is also very strong even if you feel cooler, and windburn can also be a factor. Wear a hat and sunglasses, and ensure that you drink plenty of water or energy drinks to replenish your fluid levels. Try to avoid caffeine (remember it is also found in soft drinks.)

## SAFETY & SECURITY

While generally safe, visitors are advised to take precautions against petty theft and to ensure their personal safety, just as you would in the UK. Beware of thieves and pickpockets operating in busy areas such as bus stations, airports, markets, popular tourist sites and on the Metro in Paris. Use your common sense and don't flash any valuables around, including your watch and camera. You don't need your best jewellery and gadgets on this trip. It helps to wear a concealed money belt with your flight ticket, cash and important documents inside. Be careful at night and avoid walking or getting into taxis alone. Should you require further information see the FCO's section on safety & security for each country: <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice>

## WEATHER

In mountainous regions the weather can be very changeable. Climate is affected by altitude more than latitude; though it can be very warm during the day it can still get very cold at night and cold winds can spring up at any time. Rain is always a possibility and it may be windy in the valleys. As you trek through mountains you may start with a gentle wind behind you, and end with a fierce cold wind in your face. The weather and temperature at lower elevations can be dramatically different to a mountain summit or ridge, where it may be foggy, in cloud or much colder. The climate of the Mont Blanc Region in particular is known for its diversity.

The following table shows average min / max temperatures and rainfall (mm) for the main cities of our different trips in France (including Geneva for the Alpine regions.)

	May		June		July		August		September		October	
	Temp °C	Rain	Temp °C	Rain	Temp °C	Rain	Temp °C	Rain	Temp °C	Rain	Temp °C	Rain
Paris	10 - 20	57	13 - 23	54	15 - 25	59	14 - 24	64	12 - 21	55	8 - 16	50
Geneva	9 - 19	68	13 - 23	89	15 - 25	64	14 - 24	94	12 - 21	99	7 - 14	72
Chamonix	9 - 22	103	10 - 23	83	12 - 25	79	13 - 26	116	8 - 20	162	7 - 18	101
Toulouse	10 - 21	78	13 - 24	65	16 - 28	46	16 - 28	50	13 - 24	52	10 - 19	52
Luchon	10 - 20	102	13 - 22	94	14 - 24	75	15 - 26	98	12 - 23	56	9 - 19	68
St Girons	9 - 19	109	12 - 22	92	14 - 25	57	14 - 25	74	11 - 23	78	8 - 18	87

## LANGUAGE

French, unsurprisingly, is the official language in France, and also in Geneva. There are many regional dialects; Basque is spoken as a first language by some in the southwest of France, and Breton by some in Brittany, while some still speak Catalan and Occitan. Many people, particularly those connected with tourism in the major areas, speak at least some English but it is always polite and fun to have a few phrases handy from your phrase book!

Hello / Goodbye	- Bonjour / Au revoir	Yes / No	- Oui / Non
Please / Thank you	- S'il vous plait / Merci	How much?	- C'est combien?
I don't understand	- Je ne comprends pas	Sorry	- Désolé

1 - un	5 - cinq	9 - neuf	100 - cent
2 - deux	6 - six	10 - dix	1000 - mille
3 - trois	7 - sept	20 - vingt	
4 - quatre	8 - huit	50 - cinquante	

## CULTURE

Over 62 million people live in France; of these the majority (83%) is Roman Catholic. Protestants, Muslims and Jews make up the majority of the remainder.

Shaking hands and, more familiarly, kissing one or both cheeks (depending on region), are the usual forms of greeting. A ban on smoking in workplaces (including airports, railway stations, shops and offices etc) came into force in February 2007, and bars and restaurants joined the list a year later.

## RECOMMENDED READING:

Travel Guides (especially useful if extending your stay)

- France - Lonely Planet
  - Rough Guide to France
  - French Phrasebook - Lonely Planet
- There are also many books focussing on the Alps and Pyrenees

Fiction / Autobiography

- Tout Sweet - Karen Wheeler
- Love and War in the Pyrenees - Rosemary Bailey
- The Man who Married a Mountain - Rosemary Bailey
- Backpacks, Boots and Baguettes - Simon Calder
- Detour de France - Michael Simkin
- Talk to the Snail - Stephen Clarke
- How the English made the Alps - Jim Ring
- Killing Dragons: The Conquest of the Alps - Fergus Fleming