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## **France – The Facts & Figures**

### **Country Profile**

France, officially the French Republic, is a country whose metropolitan territory is located in Western Europe, although the republic also comprises various islands and territories located in other continents. Metropolitan France extends from the Mediterranean Sea, to the English Channel and North Sea, and also from the Rhine to the Atlantic Ocean. French people often refer to Metropolitan France as *L'Hexagone* (Hexagon) because of its geometric shape. France itself is divided into 96 administrative departments, each governed by a locally elected council. Each department is further subdivided into cantons and communes.

France is bordered by Belgium, Luxembourg, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Monaco, Andorra and Spain, as well as being directly linked to the UK by the Channel Tunnel, which passes underneath the English Channel, running from Kent to Coquelles. With a population of approximately 64 million people, France is the 23rd most populous country in the world. Many of these residents can be found in France's largest cities, including Paris, Marseille, Lyon, Toulouse, Nice and Nantes.

### **Landscape and Climate**

The north and west of France are largely covered by rolling hills and river valleys, drained by several major river systems; The Seine, Marne and Somme (which flow north into the English Channel) and the Garonne and Loire (which flow west to the Atlantic). In contrast to the rest of the area, Brittany, the most northwesterly part of France, is famous for its rocky coasts and salt marshes.

The central area of France, offers an entirely different landscape, based around the high plateau, known as the Massif Central. To the east of the Massif Central is the valley of the Rhône River, which flows south into the Mediterranean, at its mouth, widening into a flat delta.

Most of France's mountainous regions are located close to its borders; with The Pyrenees marking the border with Spain, The Alps and the Jura rising in the southeast, on the border with Switzerland and Italy and the Vosges, a forested, mountainous area

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near the border with Germany. Mont Blanc in the French Alps, at 4,810 metres, is Western Europe's highest peak.

France's climate, which varies by region has a mainly Atlantic influence in the north and west, where westerly sea winds bring humidity and mild winters. The east however, has a more typical Continental climate, with cold, clear winters and hot, often stormy, summer seasons. The very popular south enjoys a Mediterranean climate, with hot, dry summers and mild moist winters, often punctuated by strong winds. The Rhône Valley has it's own microclimate, which is known for the *mistral*, a cold wind from the north, which is the cause of bitter winter weather.

### **Interesting facts**

Metropolitan France covers an area of 551,695 km<sup>2</sup>, with it's lowest point in the Camargue, at 2 metres below sea level. With very high numbers of foreign visitors, many popular tourist sites have developed. Among the most popular are The Eiffel Tower, which has an average of 6.2 million visitors per year, the Louvre Museum (5.7 million), Palace of Versailles (2.8 million), Orsay Museum (2.1 million), Arc de Triomphe (1.2 million), Centre Pompidou (1.2 million) and Mont-Saint-Michel (1 million).

### **Currency**

France is one of the original EU countries, which on the 1<sup>st</sup> January 1999, irrevocably established the conversion rate between it's national currency, the Franc and the euro, helping to create a monetary union with this single currency, officially giving birth to the euro. Euro coins and banknotes have since been in circulation since the 1<sup>st</sup> January 2002.

### **Language**

French (*français*) is a Romance language, spoken originally in France, Belgium, Luxembourg and Switzerland. Today, about 300 million people around the world speak French, as either a native or second language, resulting in significant French speaking populations in 54 countries.

Descended from the Latin of the Roman Empire, along with languages such as Spanish, Italian, Catalan, Romanian, and Portuguese - the development of the French language was further influenced by the native Celtic languages of Roman Gaul and by

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the Germanic language of the post-Roman Frankish invaders. The resulting modern French language is recognised as the official language in 41 countries, most of which form what is known in French as '*La Francophonie*', the community of French-speaking nations. French as a foreign language, is the second most frequently taught language in the world, after English.

## **Where in France?**

### **Paris**

Paris is the capital and trendsetter for the rest of the country. A significant percentage of French business is conducted there, with government and political offices also in residence. Culturally, Paris is home to famous museums, opera houses, galleries and countless cinemas, theatres, bars and restaurants. Much as you would expect from a capital city, property prices in central Paris are comparatively expensive. However, in some of the upcoming districts and the outskirts, property prices are exceedingly reasonable, especially when compared with other world leading capital cities such as London.

### **Central and southwest France**

Further south, lies the Loire, well known for its vineyards, extravagant chateaux and beautiful rivers. This is a land where time seems to have stood still for a couple of centuries, capturing the imaginations of many foreign buyers. Further south still, is the Dordogne, a beautiful region, full of traditional rich coloured stone cottages, surrounded by green hills and dales.

### **The south coast**

Towards the Italian border, on the South coast of France, lie the cosmopolitan cities of Montpellier and Marseille, leading to the famous and well loved Côte d'Azur and Provence. For many people the inherent glamour and sophistication of southern France captures the imagination – as a result, property prices in many areas are akin to those found in Paris.

The above information is prepared to the best of our knowledge. Edison Ford accepts no liability for errors or omissions.