France

Overview

Overview

- AIG Travel rates France as a LOW threat location; however, there are risks posed by civil unrest and crime.

France is located in Western Europe and shares land borders with Andorra, Monaco, Spain, Switzerland, Germany, Italy, Belgium and Luxembourg. France is a politically and economically stable country with well-developed infrastructure. The 67 million people of France are somewhat diverse with significant European ethnic populations, including Breton, Alsatian, Corsican and Basque minorities among others. There are also large populations of Indochinese, North African and West African people groups. While the majority of the population is Roman Catholic at about 60 percent, more than 23 percent of the population considers itself irreligious; additionally, France has the largest European populations of Muslims, Jews and Buddhists. Due to the country’s extensive tourism sector, which draws tens of millions into France every year, amenities and facilities have been developed to cater to such travelers.

The current President is Emmanuel Macron of the centrist Republique En Marche! party founded by Macron in 2016. President Macron appointed the center-right mayor of Le Havre, Edouard Philippe, as his prime minister; their party also won a historic majority in June 2017 parliamentary elections. Macron defeated National Front candidate Marine Le Pen during a presidential runoff held in May 2017. Although its candidate did not win, the nationalist Front National (FN) party has gained support in recent years, significantly increasing its vote share in 2015 regional elections and during the May 2014 European Parliament election. Political conditions in the country are stable and there are no major threats to the current political structure.

The threat of terrorism remains a moderate concern in France, despite several prominent terror attacks which have occurred since January 2015. The country’s continued military involvement in operations against the Islamic State (IS) militant organization in Syria and Iraq increases risks for Islamism-motivated terrorism in the country. French authorities take the threat of terrorist activity very seriously, and security measures have been notably heightened in France in the wake of the 2015 – 2017 attacks. To illustrate, a state of emergency began in November 2015 and was extended through November 2017 until the introduction of a new security law, which made permanent several state of emergency measures. The law grants several new powers to the government including the ability to: close suspicious places of worship, conduct emergency searches of persons or residences, remand suspects under house arrest and extend border controls to domestic train stations and airports. Despite these measures a moderate risk for terror-related attacks, including rare, large-scale incidents, remains in the country. Domestic terrorism by the group National Liberation Front of Corsica (FLNC) is a minor area of concern.
Demosntrations organized by political parties, labor unions and syndicates, student groups and other organizations occur relatively frequently and are prompted by various social, economic and political issues. Following the 2008 global economic downturn, many European countries experienced debt crises and sought to ameliorate its effects with spending cuts, tax increases and legal reforms. European nations, including France, subsequently experienced heightened levels of civil unrest in response to these unpopular measures. Additionally, France’s hardline stance on religious symbols in the public sphere as well as certain social issues involving local immigrant communities have sparked demonstrations as well as violent protest actions over the last year. While a majority of all demonstrations in France are peaceful, both planned and sporadic protest actions can result in clashes with police, rock throwing, the use of Molotov cocktails and other violent acts.

Crime is a moderate level risk in France. While violent crime is relatively rare, nonviolent crime is more common especially in major cities such as Marseilles, Nice and the capital Paris. The most common form of theft is pick-pocketing, with purses, wallets and smart phones as the most common targets. Crime, both violent and nonviolent, is much more common in economically-depressed suburbs, known as banlieues, which are often areas with high concentrations of immigrant population groups. Organized crime is generally confined to trafficking of illegal goods in southern France and urban centers; however, in recent years, there has been a rise in organized crime activities on the island of Corsica.

**Political conditions**

**Political**

- **Political risk in France is LOW; the country is politically stable, despite some economic concerns and unpopular austerity measures, which have sparked some political and civil backlash.**

France is a peaceful democratic republic with a semi-presidential system. President Emmanuel Macron of the centrist Republique En Marche! party won the election by defeating the FN candidate during a May 2017 presidential runoff. President Macron appointed the center-right mayor of Le Havre, Edouard Philippe, as his prime minister. The two currently enjoy a historic majority in the National Assembly following massive wins for Republique En Marche! in June 2017 parliamentary elections that pushed out a Socialist government. Macron, a former economic minister in the socialist government from 2014 - 2016, ran on a platform to deepen integration with Europe and a reform package to loosen France’s strict labor regulations.

Macron and his legislative majority have achieved significant governmental reforms that are likely to continue through 2018. In November 2017 he signed a new security law granting several new powers to the government including the ability to: close suspicious places of worship, conduct emergency searches of persons or residences, remand suspects under house arrest and extend border controls to domestic train stations and airports. In late 2017 and early 2018 Macron delivered on campaign promises to liberalize labor laws in France by passing two separate reform packages. The second package was designed to improve nationwide employment by expanding unemployment protections, increasing apprenticeship programs and simplifying job training. The first round of labor reform eased hiring and firing restrictions. These and other Macron reforms have sparked significant protest responses, but President Macron is showing particular resolve toward labor reform. Other major political moves expected in 2018 include additional labor reforms, educational consolidations, EU reforms, laws controlling Islamic radicalization and the creation of a national service program.

Although the right-wing FN candidate did not win the presidential election, its candidate advanced to the runoff election for only the second time, continuing a rise in the party’s fortunes at the expense of the conservative Les Republicains (LR) party. Prior to the presidential election, the FN party also took nearly a quarter of the popular vote in the May 2014 EU Parliamentary election in part due to the rising concerns regarding EU associated politics. The FN calls for reforms to the Schengen Agreement, as well as increased
restrictions on immigration to France and to establish greater economic protection for French industries. In addition, recent terror attacks increased such demands and have boosted the FN support base.

Cultural tensions surrounding largely West African and Arab immigrant populations have increased in recent years, especially as this segment of the population continues to grow. Allegations of police brutality against these individuals have sparked violence in the past. In addition, security forces occasionally carry out protests against violence allegedly caused by immigrant groups. In many instances, immigrants from former French colonies are living in banlieues (suburbs) marked by poverty, high crime and limited opportunity for either economic advancement or integration into French society. Major civil unrest has occurred in the banlieues, most recently in 2013, as a result of poor living conditions, a lack of job opportunities and allegations of discrimination by security forces. France is a strictly secular republic, and the principle of laicism is a core concept of the constitution; many forms of religious apparel, notably the niqab, or full face veil, Sikh turban, stars of David and crosses were banned from public schools in 2004, which critics allege is motivated by anti-immigrant racism. The poverty and violence in the banlieues have made them a target for anti-immigrant and xenophobic right wing political parties, and some blame immigration for some of France’s economic struggles. Partially attributable to anti-immigrant sentiment are the recent gains of the right wing anti-immigrant and Euro-skeptic FN party.

There are a number of French overseas territories with varying legal statuses and levels of autonomy, but all are considered to be part of France and have representation in the Senate and the National Assembly. For example, French Polynesia has its own president and has broad power to make local laws, while New Caledonia has a special status within France. Power is being devolved to New Caledonia and the territory may choose to become independent through a referendum sometime before 2018. In addition to the territories, the French overseas departments of French Guiana, Martinique, Reunion, Mayotte and Guadeloupe have the same status as departments in metropolitan France.

Corruption

- **Corruption is a LOW concern with the majority of allegations centering on political funding and organized crime activity.**

Corruption is considered a low-level issue in France; however, concerns largely stem from a lack of regulation regarding political funding and bribery of government officials. Politicians are not compelled by law to divulge conflicting interests and are not required to be transparent with respect to political funding or lobbyist groups. Corruption allegations severely damaged the 2016 presidential campaign of conservative candidate Francois Fillon. Fillon, who had once campaigned as an anti-corruption “Mr. Clean”, saw his promising campaign flounder after allegations emerged he had paid family members hundreds of thousands of USD in state funds over at least 15 years for fake state jobs.

Bribery is not a systemic issue and is unlikely to affect daily life; however, it does exist particularly in areas with heavy organized crime influences, such as Marseilles. Incidents of bribery are usually limited to criminals bribing officials, such as police officers, as a means to aid the organization’s criminal activities. Marseilles, in particular, has a reputation for police corruption with a notable 2012 scandal that led to the arrest of dozens of officers for their involvement with organized crime. Overall, however, the police are not perceived to have high levels of corruption.

The non-governmental organization Transparency International, responsible for monitoring global corruption levels, issued a Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) for 2017 measuring levels of perceived corruption globally. Report scores range from a scale of 0 to 100, with 0 indicating highly corrupt and 100 indicating little corruption. The report gave France a score of 70 and ranked the country 23 out of the 180 countries and territories that were assessed, indicating France has low levels of corruption. The score reflects a minor decrease in perceived levels of corruption, as the country received a rating of 69 in 2016.
Security issues

General crime

- Crime is a MODERATE concern in France. Petty crime and crimes of opportunity are of particular concern in urban areas, especially on public transportation, in airports and tourist areas.

Most crime in France is non-violent and petty in nature, with the highest concentrations of crime occurring in urban areas such as Paris and Marseilles. Criminals target victims across urban locations, but particularly in tourist-oriented areas. Pick-pockets are active at landmark sites, such as the Eiffel Tower and Sacre Coeur Basilica in Paris, and are also prevalent at the country’s many tourist destinations. Popular transit routes connecting Paris Orly Airport (LFPO/ ORY) and Charles de Gaulle Airport (LFPG/ CDG) with the city as well as the capital’s metro and public transportation lines are regularly targeted by thieves that often steal items from victims and make their escape just as automatic doors are closing. Similar tactics are used in elevators and on escalators as well. Transportation hubs in Paris with the highest petty crime rates include Gare du Nord, Chatelet les Halles and Barbes. In crimes of opportunity perpetrators often take advantage of inattentive shoppers or distracted restaurant patrons or individuals who do not seem to be familiar with their environment. Petty thieves are not generally part of larger organized criminal enterprises and generally work alone or in small groups.

In an action highlighting the national crime threat, five armed men carried out a raid of a luxury hotel in the capital Paris in January 2018. The men, armed with hatchets, entered a hotel in central Paris and smashed display windows holding jewelry. While three men were arrested on site, two others fled the scene with more than 4.75 million USD worth of stolen jewelry. No injuries were reported in the incident, but the theft illustrates the threat of both low- and high-profile crimes against luxury locations or foreign nationals perceived to be wealthy or vulnerable. In November 2017 criminals in a Paris suburb used tear gas to rob 40 Chinese tourists aboard a bus. Chinese, Korean and Japanese tourists are frequently targeted for petty crime in France. In May 2017 criminals targeted a group of Saudi nationals walking on a central Paris sidewalk, robbing them of luxury goods worth one million USD. Most crime in France is non-violent and petty in nature, with incidents of pick-pocketing and bag-snatching more common in country than such high-profile incidents. The highest concentration of crime occurs in urban areas such as Paris and Marseilles against individuals perceived to be wealthy or vulnerable.

Crime against vehicles is also an increasing problem in France. Vehicles are often robbed or targeted for vandalism, particularly in in suburban areas nationwide and in the rural areas near the southern border with Spain and the eastern border with Italy. Vehicles may also be targeted during protests or mass criminal actions. For example, more than 1,000 vehicles were set ablaze during the night of 31 December 2017 in random attacks that took place nationwide. Many French people take long vacations in August and December; these months see corresponding rises in break-ins and home burglaries as thieves target residences believed to be empty.

Suburban areas of major cities, known as banlieues, are frequently home to higher levels of crime than surrounding areas. Banlieues are often home to predominantly low-income immigrant populations; many of these immigrants are from the Maghreb and sub-Saharan Africa. High levels of poverty in these areas contribute to elevated crime risks. Vehicle robberies have also been reported in these areas where cars driving through such neighborhoods are stopped at gunpoint, mugged and/or carjacked. Overall crime risks are elevated in these areas and visitors should avoid travel in and around banlieues.

Violence directed at synagogues, Jewish-owned businesses and Jewish individuals resulting from the recurring Israeli-Palestinian conflict occurs sporadically. Many attacks in recent years — as in the April 2017 murder of Jewish woman in Paris -- have been carried out in retaliation for violence experienced by Muslims in the Middle East and often coincide with pro-Palestinian rallies. These incidents are also aggravated by the
Organized crime is reportedly most prevalent on the southern island of Corsica and the southern city of Marseilles where organized criminal syndicates operate. Organized crime groups are typically active in drug trafficking, drug dealing, human trafficking and other areas of criminal enterprise. While they are often involved in bank robberies and may take cuts from general criminal activities in areas they control, the day to day lives of individuals within the area are largely not affected by organized crime groups.

**Terrorism**

- **Terrorism remains a MODERATE risk in France due to several prominent terrorist attacks and threats of new attacks. Extremist Islamists see France as a potential target for a number of reasons, including the country’s military engagements in Muslim countries and the perceived discrimination against French Muslims.**

The threat of terrorism within France is a moderate risk. Since January 2015 there have been several prominent terrorist attacks in various parts of the country. The most recent attack occurred on 23 March 2018 when an individual carjacked and killed a man before shooting at police and taking hostages in a grocery store in southwestern town Trebes, killing three people in the attack. A fourth individual, a policeman who swapped places with a hostage, also died later of his wounds. In October 2017 an individual at the central Marseilles-Saint-Charles train station in the second city cut the throat of one woman and fatally stabbed a second before being apprehended by police. Both attacks were claimed by the Islamic State (IS) militant group. Similar attacks have occurred multiple times in France in recent years, and authorities say two advanced attacks were foiled from January – February 2018. The most recent major incident occurred in July 2016 when an individual suspected of being linked to IS drove through a crowd of people celebrating Bastille Day in Nice; the incident resulted in 87 deaths and several injuries. Although these attacks are prominent and notable in their scale and impact, the overall terror risk for the country remains moderate. French authorities take the risk of terrorism seriously and respond to such threats accordingly.

France’s terror alert system is currently at level 2 of 3, meaning there is a risk of attack. In the wake of previous attacks, France implemented a state of emergency for nearly two years and in November 2017 permanently instated stringent counter-terrorism and security measures similar to a state of emergency into national law. Border and airport security has been beefed up as authorities conduct meticulous security checks; associated delays are notable in these locations. Military and police presence has also been increased in Paris and other major cities as well as in border crossing zones. Authorities have also been conducting coordinated anti-terror crackdowns and have been working closely with Belgian authorities, especially as several of the attackers are believed to have links to terror networks that span into neighboring Belgium. Recent counter-terrorism measures have resulted in the arrest and detention of numerous individuals with ties to Islamist militant groups in the Middle East, or individuals returning from war zones in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. These arrests not only highlight the ongoing terror risk for the country but also depict the stringent efforts by French authorities to address this risk.

Also, since 2014 and especially following the November 2015 attacks, France has been involved in air strikes against the IS) in Syria and Iraq. France also invoked an emergency EU pact demanding European allies assist in anti-terror efforts against IS. EU countries have vowed their support and increased coalition attacks against IS in Syria and Iraq are likely in the short to mid-term.

As a consequence, IS has leveled threats against civilians of the coalition members, including France. Authorities also anticipate a heightened risk from hundreds of French nationals who fought in the Middle East and are expected to return to France. In addition to these IS risks, France has also been threatened with retaliatory attacks by other terror groups such as al-Qaeda for its involvement in Afghanistan and Mali. While IS has recently played a more prominent role on the global terror front, al-Qaeda and their capabilities cannot
be ruled out and also remain a threat to France.

In addition to transnational threats, there is a low-level risk of domestic terror attacks. Until June 2014, the National Liberation Front of Corsica (FLNC), which authorities blamed for many violent attacks and bombings in southern France, waged a small-scale separatist campaign. The FLNC is a Corsican nationalist group that seeks independence for the island of Corsica from France. In the past, the group perpetrated a majority of their attacks in Corsica and occasionally in southern France including Marseilles; however, the group has not carried out major operations for several years either in Corsica or southern France. Over the past decade FLNC operations were primarily confined to low-level property attacks against rival criminal organizations and in 2014 the group announced it would lay down its arms and reject all violence. However, the group continues to politically advocate for increased autonomy for Corsica.

Conflicts

**Conflict is a LOW concern in France despite nationalist movements, military actions in Africa and the Middle East and disputes over overseas territories.**

Conflict at home, abroad and in overseas territories presents a low risk nationally. While there is no significant threat of conflict in country, nationalist movements and French military activities in Africa and the Middle East as well as disputes concerning overseas territories do affect national politics and the threat of terrorism. There are multiple low-profile nationalist movements in France. While issues concerning Basque and Breton separatism have reduced in recent years, the Mediterranean island of Corsica has a growing nationalist movement that results in occasional civil unrest. The island possesses a low level of autonomy as an official territory, but a growing nationalist party has carried out multiple protests in recent months, most recently in February 2018.

France actively participates in military actions against the Islamic State (IS) militant organization in Iraq and Syria. France notably increased targeted aerial attacks against IS in Syria following the November 2015 terror attacks in Paris, which have been attributed to the terrorist group. France’s direct involvement and increased targeting of IS has the potential to further escalate risks of possible retaliatory attacks against France and its citizens in the short to mid-terms.

In 2018 Macron pledged to step up military action in North Africa, particularly in Libya, in an effort to root out the active slave trade. The government is seeking to work with Italy and other EU powers to coordinate military action against slavery. From 2015 – 2018 France has maintained increased military activity elsewhere on the African continent primarily with bases and troop presence in Mali as part of the country’s regional security and peacekeeping operations. The military has also maintained active involvement in Somalia and other former French colonies including Burkina Faso, Central African Republic (CAR), Chad, Cote d’Ivoire and Niger. Military intervention in Africa has drawn terror attacks, such as 2 March attack against the French embassy and other interests in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. It also exacerbates terrorism risks within France as this sort of continued military engagement could heighten anti-French sentiment among terror groups and African immigrant communities in France.

France also faces multiple low-profile disputes with overseas territories. For example, Madagascar claims multiple Indian Ocean islands controlled by France. The department of French Guiana also faces a territorial dispute with neighboring nation Suriname. Despite these issues, there is little threat of such disputes resulting in violent conflict.

Civil unrest

**Civil unrest is a MODERATE concern in France. Protest actions occur frequently in response to a multitude of issues, such as ongoing austerity measures, and regularly cause transportation disruptions.**
France has a long history establishing protest actions as an acceptable form of civil discourse, and labor actions regularly draw thousands of participants. Such actions commonly include industry work stoppages, gatherings and marches by civil society groups and activists which have been prompted by labor, international or domestic policies. Many union and syndicate strikes and demonstrations are announced well in advance and garner additional support from other aligned labor groups. Transport and airport workers frequently go on strike, which can severely disrupt travel. France has an extensive and well-developed rail network that has large ridership, and France’s popularity as a tourist destination means that airport, rail or other transportation strikes can cause large delays across Europe. Political, labor and cultural issues are likely to be the cause of significant demonstrations throughout 2018. For example, unions in all employment sectors, taking issue with government labor reforms designed to liberalize the economy, carried out major protests in early 2018; widespread protest actions on 23 March 2018 caused severe transit disruptions and included street protests of up to 500,000. Such actions are expected to worsen through mid-2018. Additionally, clashes between rival sporting fans sometimes occur during and following soccer games.

Demonstrations will occasionally result in violence. Unrest deteriorating into riots has transpired in recent years, and has largely occurred in suburban locations populated by immigrants. For example multiple cases of alleged police brutality have resulted in violent demonstrations involving clashes with security forces, typically during evening hours. Activists claim security forces regularly profile against individuals of North African or Arab decent in the lower-income suburban areas of Paris and Marseilles. Mediation between the government and marginalized groups has reportedly occurred without substantive results. The rise of right-wing political groups has the potential to further the implementation of anti-immigration legislation and the marginalization of Muslim and immigrant communities.

France also has a history of student activism, and students in France demonstrate frequently. Similar to union demonstrations, recent university student protests have been in opposition to educational consolidations and to austerity cuts, such as changes to the cost structure of university and in opposition to deregulation of the labor market. Social issues, such as immigration, can also prompt unrest among the country’s student population. In early 2018 students carried out multiple strikes and protests nationwide against the president's social programs and labor reforms. Student groups blocked roadways and clashed with police in both Paris and Nantes in early 2018.

**Kidnapping**

- **Kidnapping is a LOW concern in France.**

Kidnapping is a not a commonly reported event in France. While the most recent data from 2016 indicates more than 190 kidnapping took place in France, the vast majority of them were domestic cases.

**Travel logistics**

**Entering the country**

**Entry Requirements**

- Citizens of EU countries require only a valid passport or a national ID card to enter France.
- Travelers from outside of the Schengen area are required to have a valid passport and may also require a Schengen area visa.
- Travelers who are not citizens of the EU and whose countries of residence do not have visa-free access to the Schengen nations are required to have a valid passport as well as a valid Schengen visa or a valid EU residency permit to enter France.
Political/Security Risks

AIG Travel rates France as a LOW threat location; however, there are risks posed by civil unrest and crime. Terrorism is a concern for France as highlighted by multiple terrorist attacks, which have occurred since January 2015.

- Political risk in France is LOW; the country is politically stable, despite some economic concerns and unpopular austerity measures, which have sparked some political and civil backlash.
- Corruption is a LOW concern with the majority of allegations centering on political funding and organized crime activity.
- Crime is a MODERATE concern in France. Petty crime and crimes of opportunity are of particular concern in urban areas, especially on public transportation, in airports and tourist areas.
- Terrorism remains a MODERATE risk in France due to several prominent terrorist attacks and threats of new attacks. Extremist Islamists see France as a potential target for a number of reasons, including the country’s military engagements in Muslim countries and the perceived discrimination against French Muslims.
- Conflict is a LOW concern in France despite nationalist movements, military actions in Africa and the Middle East and disputes over overseas territories.
- Civil unrest is a MODERATE concern in France. Protest actions occur frequently in response to a multitude of issues, such as ongoing austerity measures, and regularly cause transportation disruptions.
- Kidnapping is a LOW concern in France.

Infrastructure

Infrastructure in France is generally advanced and includes a reliable transportation network, widely available communications services and delivery of basic services. The mountainous regions of the Pyrenees Mountains in southwestern France and the Alps located along the eastern border have limited train services, but private and public bus services cater to these areas.

Telecommunications infrastructure, including high-speed internet, satellite television, mobile cellular service and power networks are well-maintained and efficient; although coverage can vary in mountainous regions.

Air travel

The two major international airports Charles de Gaulle airport (LFPG/ CDG) and Paris-Orly airport (LFPO/ ORY) are located in the Paris region of central France; however, smaller airports operate throughout the country. It should be noted that public transportation connecting to major international airports has been known to be targeted by petty thieves. Aviation companies in France have a good safety record and the industry is regulated by the rules of the central government and European Union. Security has been boosted at airports due to the general threat of terrorism facing the country.

Getting around

France’s extensive transportation network is considered modern and very reliable.

- **Road** – France’s roads are generally in good condition and driving is on the right-hand side of the road.
  - **Self-Driving** - Car rentals are available at airports and other transportation hubs and most cities. French drivers tend to drive more aggressively than some other western nations. All drivers in France are required to have international driving permits or a valid European driver’s license.
  - **Bus** - Local and regional buses operate across most of France typical with both public and private operators. Cross country buses are limited due to the well-developed rail system.
• **Taxi** - In urban areas taxis are widely available including all major airports.

• **Rail** - France has a vast rail system accessing all regions of France through a mixed system of public and private ventures. Access to parts of Pyrenees and Alps regions is more limited than other areas due to the mountainous terrain. France is linked to most of mainland and the United Kingdom via the Eurostar rail system with multiple speed options being available. Authorities have increased the presence of security forces at train stations and other infrastructure to maintain public safety after the November 2015 terrorist attack in Paris. Proactive security measures, such as raids or investigations, will occasionally result in delays on rail lines.

**Culture**

- France has a diverse population with varying cultural and linguistic backgrounds. French is the official language and spoken throughout the country; however, other minority languages are spoken within local communities. English is widely understood across most urban areas, but many people prefer to converse in French regardless of knowledge of second languages such as English.
- Immigrant communities in France have been surrounded with cultural tensions amid these communities’ allegations of police brutality, violent demonstrations, racially motivated attacks, organized crime and perceived systematic discrimination. Events relating to those issues have the potential to spark unrest within immigrant communities, which are largely concentrated in the suburban areas of major cities including Paris and Marseilles.
- When meeting and leaving, it is common for family, friends and even colleagues to exchange kisses on the cheek instead of shaking hands.
- Full-face veils which conceal the face are banned in all public places throughout France. The ban carries a fine and does not exempt tourists.
- Tourist attractions carry a higher risk of petty crime and individuals should maintain vigilance in these areas.

**Important Dates 2018**

- 1 January – New Year’s Day
- 30 March – Good Friday
- 1 April – Easter Day
- 2 April – Easter Monday
- 1 May – Labor Day
- 8 May – Victory Day
- 10 May – Ascension Day
- 20 May – Whit Sunday
- 21 May – Whit Monday
- 14 July – Bastille Day / French National Day
- 15 August – Assumption of Mary
- 1 November – All Saints’ Day
- 11 November – Armistice Day
- 25 December – Christmas
- 26 December – St. Stephen’s Day
- 31 December – New Year’s Eve

**Health concerns**

Medical facilities, both state-run and private ones, offer a good standard of care countrywide. However, not all medical personnel have a good knowledge of English, so the ability to communicate in French is advantageous. Pharmacies are available in all cities and towns, and basic medical supplies are readily
available. There are no specific vaccinations necessary for travel to the country. Doctors and hospitals often expect immediate cash payment for medical services from those not carrying a European Health Insurance Card.

**Natural hazards**

Natural hazards exist during year-round in specific geographical locations including the threat of forest fire, flooding and avalanches. During the summer months from May to October, the threat of forest fires exists in largely in southern France and the island of Corsica. Forest fires can occur suddenly due to human causes such as arson and from cigarettes or natural causes such as lightning, and depending on weather conditions such fires can spread with little to no warning. In periods of unusually heavy rainfall flooding can happen particularly in the Bouches-du-Rhone region, where river valleys and low-lying areas are susceptible to flooding.

From December to March severe winter weather can impact travel in mountainous regions such as the eastern French Alps. Additionally, avalanches and mudslides have occurred in the regions of Savoie and Haute-Savoie, and government warnings on such occurrences should be observed. Although the aforementioned hazards are most likely to occur during winter months, four skiers were killed in March 2018 when an avalanche struck a ski report in southeast France.

**Money**

- **Currency** - The euro is the official currency of France. The euro is divided into 100 cents. Banknotes are issued in 5, 10, 20, 50, 100, 200 and 500 euro denominations. Coins are issued in 1 and 2 euros and 1, 2, 5, 10, 20 and 50 cents.
- **Foreign Exchange** - Foreign exchange services are available at most banks, post offices and major hotels. Additional locations can be found in major tourist and urban areas. Exchange rates are fixed the commission a company charges is not, it is legally mandated that commission rates be clearly stated.
- **ATMs / Credit Cards** - ATMs are widely available. Credit and debit cards are accepted in most establishments in major cities.
- **Tipping** - Tipping has become more widespread in recent years, particularly in tourist areas, and tipping percentages vary between 10 to 20 percent of the bill.
- **Business Hours** - Most businesses observe an extended lunchtime period of closure with typical business hours Monday thru Friday from 09:00 to 12:00 and 14:00 to 18:00. Alternatively some major businesses are open Monday thru Saturday from 09:30 to 18:30. Banking hours are subject to regional norms; however, many banks open Monday to Friday from 09:00 to 12:00 and 14:00 to 16:00.

**Cultural factors**

**General**

France has a diverse population with varying cultural and linguistic backgrounds. French is the official language and spoken throughout the country; however, other minority languages are spoken within local communities. English is widely understood across most urban areas, but many people prefer to converse in French regardless of knowledge of second languages such as English.

**Cultural tension**

Immigrant communities in France have been surrounded with cultural tensions amid these communities’ allegations of police brutality, violent demonstrations, racially motivated attacks, organized crime and
perceived systematic discrimination. Events relating to those issues have the potential to spark unrest within immigrant communities, which are largely concentrated in the suburban areas of major cities including Paris and Marseilles.

Dos and don'ts

- When meeting and leaving it is common for family, friends and even colleagues to exchange kisses on the cheek instead of shaking hands.
- Full face veils which conceal the face are banned in all public places throughout France. The ban carries a fine and does not exempt tourists.
- Tourist attractions carry a higher risk of petty crime and individuals should maintain vigilance in these areas.

Useful information

Useful information

- Public holidays
- Weather forecast
- Maps
- France Guide
- Electricity: 220 volts, 50 Hz; for the most commonly used plug types, please click here.

Contact details

Important contact details

- International dialing code: +33

Emergency numbers

- Police: 17
- Medical emergency: 15
- Fire: 18
- General European emergency number: 112

Embassies

Australian Embassy
4 Rue Jean Rey
75724 Paris
France
Tel: +33 1 4059 3300
Fax: +33 1 4059 3310
E-mail: consular.paris@dfat.gov.au

British Embassy
35, rue du Faubourg St Honore
75383 Paris Cedex 08
France
Tel: +33 (0) 1 44 51 31 00
Fax: +33 (0) 1 44 51 31 09
Email: France.Enquiries@fco.gov.uk

**Germany Embassy**
24 rue Marbeau
BP 30 221
75008 Paris
France
Tel: +33 (0) 1 53 83 45 00
Fax: +33 (0) 1 53 83 45 02
Email: info@paris.diplo.de

**Mexican Embassy**
9 rue de Longchamp
75116 Paris
France
Tel: 01 53 70 27 70
Fax: 01 47 55 65 29
Email: embfrancia@sre.gob.mx

**United States Embassy**
2 Avenue Gabriel
75382 Paris
France
Tel: +33 1 43 12 22 22
Fax: +33 1 42 66 97 83
Email: citizeninfo@state.gov

**Health advisory**

**Health infrastructure**

Public and private healthcare are of a good standard nationwide on par with facilities present in other western nations. Medical staff may not have a good working knowledge of English particularly in smaller facilities. Immediate payment may be required for medical services. Pharmacies are present in most areas with medical supplies being readily available. Doctors and hospitals often expect immediate cash payment for medical services from those not carrying a European Health Insurance Card.

**Pre-travel recommendations**

The following vaccinations are recommended or required if traveling to France:

- Hepatitis A (recommended)
- Hepatitis B (recommended)
- Rabies (recommended for persons spending extensive time outdoors or in close contact with animals)

It is also important to ensure that routine vaccinations are up to date for diseases including influenza, polio, measles, mumps, rubella, diphtheria, pertussis and tetanus.

Approximately four to six weeks prior to the intended departure date it is advisable to visit doctor or clinic that specializes in travel-related medicine. This should allow the necessary time for any vaccinations prescribed by the doctor to take effect. If travel is to be undertaken in less than four weeks, a visit to a medical professional is still recommended.
Comprehensive medical insurance, including provision for medical repatriation or evacuation, is strongly recommended. An appropriate supply of any prescription medication should be taken for the duration of the trip; this should be accompanied by a written doctor's instruction, explaining the need for the medication and justifying the quantities required.

**Significant diseases**

The following are some of the more significant diseases that might affect travelers to the country:

- A high-profile outbreak of Salmonella began in December 2017 due to tainted infant formula that was widely distributed in France and abroad. Authorities dealt quickly with the outbreak, recalling the tainted products and initiating an investigation. However, dozens of people were infected, and additional outbreaks are possible.
- Rabies, a viral infection that can affect animals and humans, is present in bats in France; this poses a risk of transmission to humans. There is considered to be a slightly elevated risk from the disease in Gers, Normandy and Seine-et-Marne.
- Measles: A resurgence of measles has been observed since 2008, leading to more than 22,000 cases since that time. The outbreak appears to be related to insufficient vaccination coverage.

**Food and water safety**

Tap water is safe to drink throughout France, but the bottled water remains the best option for potable water. Unpasteurized dairy products should be avoided if possible; unpasteurized milk should be boiled before consumption, or powdered or tinned milk should be used as an alternative.

**Emergency response**

The emergency number for an ambulance in France is 15; for police it is 17, and for fire and rescue services it is 18. The EU general European emergency number 112 can also be used for all services; however, this number cannot necessarily be reached from all cell phones. The service provides good coverage and response times countrywide.