



Focus On FRANCE

School Program

“During my year in France, I gained many things and, most of all, a ‘second’ family, with whom I feel as close as with my natural parents. I like them very much, and we keep seeing each other each year. They’ve done incredible things for me and my family after the earthquake that took place in Turkey in August 1999.

“So even after five years, you can imagine how close we are! I like the French very much and since I came back from France, every time people ask me where I come from, I answer I was born in Turkey, but I am a ‘French-speaking Turk!’”

Emrah, participant from Turkey

Paris may be a pinnacle of urbanity, but France is also an agrarian nation. Its relatively flat countryside, well irrigated by rivers and canals, makes agriculture one of France’s chief industries. French farmers and winemakers take as much pride in the quality of their products as Parisian couturiers take in their designs. In both cities and towns, the French are certain that their culture is unrivaled—after all, it gave the world Gothic architecture, Impressionist painting and music, Existentialist literature and philosophy—and tourists seem to agree. France attracts more foreign visitors annually than any other nation because of its historic towns and castles, world-class museums, Lucullan food and wines, comfortable climate and sybaritic beaches. The French are friendly to visitors, if formal and polite. At the same time, confident of their cultural clout, they can be surprisingly direct, even blunt in expressing their opinions about politics, the arts, food, fashion and proper behavior.

AFS & Your Experience

In France, AFS is named AFS Vivre Sans Frontière, which means roughly “being a citizen of the world” or “living without borders.” It has been part of the AFS network since 1947, the first year of AFS exchanges. AFS France, with its 26 local chapters, hosts about 450 students from as many as 30 countries each year.

AFS will be at your side throughout your intercultural exchange. Even before leaving your home country, you will participate in organized AFS orientations and have the assistance of experienced AFS volunteers. Once in your host country, you can rely on your local volunteer contact and other chapter volunteers to support you in your experience. Together we will ensure that you have an incredible experience abroad.

Landing in France

Your flight will arrive in Paris, the capital of France. After the plane lands and you collect your baggage, you and your fellow AFSers will pass through customs and be met by AFS France staff and volunteers.

Arrival Orientation

After you have spent many long and tiring hours traveling, the two-day arrival orientation, organized by staff and run by volunteers at a location near Paris, will give you a chance to relax, meet other AFSers from around the world, ask questions and learn about AFS in France as well as about French culture. In order to ensure the security of your belongings, during the arrival orientation participants will have limited access to their luggage. For this reason we ask that you pack an overnight bag, including a change of clothes, toiletries and a towel.

Living in France

Lifestyle and Family Living

The French are extremely proud of their language, culture, heritage and nation. They are also interested in learning about life in other countries, so you can expect to be asked about the history, customs and government of your country.

The nuclear family is the most important element of French society. The father is the authority figure in the household and treated with great respect. Traditionally, caring for the children and managing the household is the responsibility of the wife, while the husband is more occupied with work outside the home.

Children are required to observe the rules of the household, to help with household chores (even if they are not directly asked) and to participate in their family's leisure activities. Showing feelings, expressing satisfaction and gratitude are customary in France.

French people like to laugh and joke with everybody; they may make fun of the way foreigners speak French or of customs that are unfamiliar to them. They do not mean to be nasty, it is just part of their culture!

Most AFSers are placed in rural areas where this pattern of family structure is most likely to exist. AFSers should be aware that most French families have pets who spend at least part of the time in the house. Host families in France, like all AFS host families worldwide, are not paid. They open their homes to students in order to share their community and culture as well as to enrich their own family lives.

Dress and Appearance

French teenagers usually follow fashion trends, and the clothing standard at school is casual. For the winter months, you will need warm clothing such as a heavy jacket, sweaters and a raincoat. For summer, bring lightweight casual clothes and a bathing suit. An umbrella will also be useful. On special occasions, more formal dress is expected: for girls a dress or blouse and skirt; for boys a jacket, slacks and tie. No uniform is required for school.

Diet and Meals

Food is very important to the French. They like to eat and drink, and when they are not eating, they enjoy talking about food! This is part of the French culture, so you have to be ready to taste different varieties of cheeses as well as local specialties such as *foie*

gras, *escargots de Bourgogne* and *cassoulet*. You might also be asked to help prepare cakes or pancakes (*crêpes*).

In France, there are three main meals: breakfast is the smallest meal of the day and consists of coffee, tea or hot chocolate with toast, butter, marmalade and sometimes cereal. Lunch usually takes place between 12 p.m. and 2 p.m. If you cannot go back to your host family's home for lunch, you will have it in your school cafeteria.

Dinner is the most important meal: the whole family eats together, between 7 p.m. and 9 p.m. when everyone discusses what they have done during the day and other subjects.

A very light meal, the *goûter* is very often available after school for children. It's made of bread, butter, chocolate and juice. Dinner and lunch are warm meals and consist of three or four dishes served one after another: first course (soup or salad), main course (meat or fish and vegetables), cheese and/or dessert.

The French observe certain table manners such as not helping yourself before having been invited to do so, not leaving the table before the end of the meal, helping to clear the table and wash the dishes. For special occasions (Christmas, Easter and other holidays), the whole family gathers for special meals.

School

School is probably the best place for you to meet people and make friends during your stay in France. You will attend either a public or private high school with classmates of your own age. The course load in a French Lycée (school) may be heavier than what you have been familiar with at home. Some courses, in particular math and science, are taught differently from presentations in other countries. You may have the opportunity to discuss your course load and school situation directly with the Lycée administration, your host family or your local AFS volunteers.

The teacher-student relationship is quite formal but varies: some teachers will invite you into conversation during class while others may not address you directly. In the latter case, it will be your responsibility to ask questions at the beginning or end of class if you do not understand something. The school day is from 8:15 a.m. to 5 or 6 p.m. There are seven class hours daily with five- to fifteen-minute breaks between classes and a two-hour break for lunch. Wednesday and Saturday are usually half-day sessions. The school year is divided into seven-week terms separated by two-week vacations in late October, mid-December, mid-February and mid-April.

Students are enrolled in either the *Séconde* (10th grade), *Première* (11th grade) or *Terminale* (final year), depending on their age, school background and knowledge of French. Students with a limited knowledge of French will likely be placed with younger classmates. Classes vary among these three years. During *Séconde*, students take the same basic courses (history, math, science, language) or begin with vocational training, depending on their career interests. *Première* courses for students on the general education track are broken down into three sections: S - math, physics, and biology; L - literature, history, and languages; and ES - economics, math, languages, history and geography. The *Terminale* year is simply a continuation of the *Première* year courses.

The *Baccalauréat* at the end of *Première* is an oral and written examination of one's knowledge of the French language. The second part of the *Baccalauréat*, which covers other specific subjects studied during the year, is given at the end of *Terminale*.

Students who speak fluent French can take the French part of the Baccalauréat or all the exams. You can obtain a transcript or certificate of attendance, but you must attend school and classes regularly, complete the course work, do the homework and sit for the tests given during the year. While you attend school, you will also receive a report card at the end of each quarter.

Teen Life

Because schools place a heavy emphasis on academics, few extracurricular activities are offered during the week. However, some sports and drama opportunities are available on Wednesday afternoons and weekends. French teens, like most teenagers around the world, enjoy socializing by going to the movies or getting together at each other's homes or in local cafés. You can also ask your host family or local volunteer about local community organizations. This is a great way to learn more about your community and make new friends.

Soccer and rugby are popular, and many French people enjoy reading newspapers, magazines and books, and discussing current events.

AFS Activities

In addition to an orientation at your arrival, AFS France will provide you with several others. AFS orientations are a chance for participants to meet (often for a weekend or for a few days) and talk about expectations for the future program and past experiences. Orientations involve participating in group activities and self-examination. Sessions usually provide new information and ways of looking at things while also allowing participants to share points of view. AFS orientations are social, interactive and educational; bringing together young people from many countries and helping them to better understand their own intercultural learning experience.

AFS volunteers may arrange cultural and sports activities and excursions to local landmarks and places of interest. Four to six weeks into your stay, local volunteers will arrange a delayed arrival orientation. A regional mid-stay orientation camp will give you the opportunity to renew friendships and share and reflect on the experiences you have had during the first half of your stay. AFS pays the cost of orientations, and your travel expenses will be reimbursed. Last, but definitely not least, is the "End-of-Stay." You will get together with other AFSers right before you return home. The End-of-Stay is about looking back at your sojourn and sharing memories with other AFSers. It is also about thinking of the future and your return home.

Travel

Although it is natural for you to want to travel while in France, AFS is not designed as a tourist program. AFS offers the rare opportunity to be immersed in a culture and a country. It is likely, however, that you will have many opportunities to travel with your host family, school, community organization, local chapter or AFS France. We strongly discourage traveling on your own or with friends.

Spending Money

AFS recommends that about €2,000 in traveler's checks should cover a year's worth of spending needs. Some French banks make it possible to set up an account and will provide you with a withdrawal card, but not a credit card.

Host families are asked to pay only for ordinary family events in which you are expected to participate. When you do such things as shopping for yourself or going out with friends, the expenses are your responsibility.

Safety and Support

France is a safe country, and you should do well if you follow the normal precautions you would use in your home country. During your stay, local AFS volunteers will be available to assist you as you learn to live as a French person. In the event of an emergency, AFS staff can be reached 24 hours a day by you in your host country and by your natural family at home.

For the welfare of participants, AFS worldwide has two rules: no driving and no use of drugs for non-medicinal purposes. Any student who violates either of these rules will be automatically sent home. AFS Vivre Sans Frontière may have additional rules.

Health Precautions

In addition to the precautions mentioned above, AFS suggests that you discuss the health recommendations for France (which you can get from your government or easily find on the Internet) with your personal doctor, to determine what is best for you and your personal needs.

If you require any medical assistance during your stay, your host family or local volunteers will be ready to help find it. As an AFS participant, your medical expenses are covered for illness or injuries incurred while on the program, exclusive of pre-existing, dental or visual aid expenses.

Documents

You must have a passport that will be valid for six months longer than your intended stay. In addition to your passport, you also need a visa to enter and reside in your host country. Visas are obtained through the consular offices of your host country, and requirements often vary from consulate to consulate.

Consulates charge fees for their services, and obtaining your visa can be a complicated and lengthy process requiring a great deal of paperwork, patience and persistence. AFS will help you obtain the visa and provide you with instructions regarding the required documents.

Program Prices

Please [contact the AFS office in your home country](#) for information about program price and scholarship possibilities and what the program price covers for the various program offerings. In most cases the program price covers the following: round-trip international travel with your AFS group; travel in the host country to your host family; travel from your host family to your international departure point; AFS's medical plan; placement with your host; orientation in your home country and your host country; 24 hour emergency assistance in your home and host countries; a global medical assistance organization to support extreme emergencies; a network of trained volunteers who support you throughout your experience.

In order to keep costs low and provide good service, AFS utilizes a network of volunteers and staff in 50+ countries around the world. Volunteers need training, support and assistance from professional staff in each country. Other expenses you will

normally need to pay in addition to the program price: passport and visa fees, required inoculations, expenses for eyeglasses, contacts and dental care, school uniforms (where applicable) and personal spending money. Your housing and food are provided by your host family as part of their commitment to our program.

Country Information

Geography and Climate

France is located in the center-west of Europe. It is bordered by Spain to the southwest and by Belgium, Germany, Switzerland and Italy to the east. Its north coast lies along the English Channel; to the west is the Atlantic Ocean and to the southeast is the Mediterranean Sea.

In the Alps near the Italian and Swiss borders is one of Europe's highest peaks, Mont Blanc (4,810 m; 15,781 ft). The Vosges Mountains, which are covered by forest, are in the northeast, and the Pyrénées are along the Spanish border. Except for extreme northern France, the country may be described as four river basins and a plateau. Three of the rivers flow west: the Seine into the English Channel, the Loire into the Atlantic, and the Garonne into the Bay of Biscay. The Rhône flows south into the Mediterranean. For about 161 km (100 mi), the Rhine forms France's eastern border. In the Mediterranean, about 185 km (115 mi) east-southeast of Nice, is the island of Corsica (8,721 km²; 3,367 mi²).

France has a variable climate depending upon where you are. In the south, the climate is Mediterranean, very hot and dry in the summer and cool in the winter. Northeastern areas have a more continental climate with warm summers and colder winters; the northwest is temperate but very humid due to the Gulf Stream in the Atlantic Ocean. In the mountains, the weather is much colder with snow for many months of the year. Rainfall is distributed throughout the year.

Population

The French number about 60 million. Its population has diverse origins. Many people have settled in France at different times in history, including the Celts, Romans, Germans, Russians, Asians, Africans and North Americans. The population tends to vary by region.

Language

French is the official language but local languages are also spoken: Breton, Catalan, Corsican, Occitan, Basque, Alsatian and Flemish.

Government

France is a Republic, with a parliamentary democracy and strong presidential power. Since the re-election of Jacques Chirac as President of the Republic in May 2002, France has had a conservative government.

Religion

Ninety-five percent of the French population is Roman Catholic.

Launching Your AFS Experience

Evaluations by previous participants support our belief that those students who prepare prior to leaving have the best experience. In order to get ready, first make every effort to learn some key French words and phrases so that you arrive with at least some basic knowledge of the language.

To familiarize yourself further with life in France, make use of your local library and/or the Internet. A lot of general information is available about France and its culture.

Although each participant's experience is unique, we strongly suggest that you speak with a recent AFS participant to France. This person will be an excellent resource to you regarding living life as a French person. If you do not know any alumni, please contact your local volunteer or national AFS office. In addition, AFS France will provide you with a special packet of country-specific information.

French people will be curious about your home community. You may be surprised to find out how much they already know about your country. Therefore, it is also helpful to be as informed as possible about current events in your community and country.

If you have not already received a full AFS application packet, please contact your local AFS volunteer or national office to request one. We wish you a wonderful experience!

Curiously French

Did you know that the Statue of Liberty, located in New York, was conceived, designed and cast in Paris?

How to Apply

To become a participant in this country's School Program, contact your nearest AFS office. To locate an AFS office, go to <http://www.afs.org/contact>

Student age (upon arrival)	16y to 18y	
Country data	Size	547,030 km ² (211,153 mi ²)
	Population	59,329,691
	Official language	French
	Government	Parliamentary democracy
Currency	Euro 1€ = 100 cents	
Useful website	www.francetourism.com/ www.franceguide.com/	
AFS France	http://www.afs-fr.org/indexaa.asp	

AFS program destinations are not always available to residents of all countries. If a program interests you, please contact your nearest AFS office to find out if it is an option for you. You can locate your nearest AFS office at <http://www.afs.org/contact>