

STUDENT TRAVELER HANDBOOK

GUIDE FOR STUDENT TRAVEL TO FRANCE



WITH VISTAS IN EDUCATION INC.

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This book is property of:

Name:

French Teacher:

School:

We have prepared this handbook for students who will be traveling with VIE.

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TRAVELING TO FRANCE WITH VIE

VISTAS IN EDUCATION, INC. has organized student travel since 1976. We are excited that you are joining our program this year! We're sure you'll have a fantastic experience with many adventures you'll never forget.

We hope this Student Handbook will help you to prepare for your trip to France.



Throughout your Travel and LA VIE EN FAMILLE family stay program, please keep in mind:

You are a representative of your country. Be courteous and conscious of your role as an American “ambassador” in a foreign country.

Have an adventurous spirit! Experience many new sights, sounds and tastes.

Remember that in France, people speak French, not English! Use your language skills—your efforts will always be appreciated.

“I learned a lot about the French culture, foods and people! It was an amazing experience and really opened my eyes to everything! It reminds me of how different people are, and how you have to respect different traditions. I'd do it all over again!”

Katie, Wisconsin



10 TIPS FOR THE SAVVY TRAVELER



TRAVEL SLOWLY . . .

Take time to absorb the beauty of a mountain or a cathedral.

TRAVEL HUMBLY . . .

visit people and places with *reverence* and *respect* for their ways of life.

TRAVEL LIGHTLY . . .

leave your life in the States behind for a while to experience a different way of living.

TRAVEL COURTEOUSLY . . .

the ability to say “thank you” in any language is priceless.

TRAVEL INTELLIGENTLY . . .

know where your passport and money are at all times. Always be aware of the situation around you.

TRAVEL CURIOUSLY . . . do not expect to find things as you have them at home. You left home to discover new things.

TRAVEL with imagination. . .

TRAVEL with humor...

TRAVEL PREPARATIONS

PASSPORT

If you do not have a valid passport or if it expires soon, please apply for a new passport immediately.

Please note: **Passports MUST be valid for more than six months past your return date.**

It is the participant's responsibility to be sure all their own traveling documents are in order to travel to France.



All participants (including adult participants) are required to supply VIE with a legible copy of their **valid passport***.

Copies of passports **must be uploaded directly on your VIE registration site** as soon as possible or before November 15 for Spring traveler's and by January 15 for Summer traveler's. It can take 2-5 months to receive a new or renewed passport. Please plan accordingly in order to have the passport copies to VIE by the above dates.

****Valid Passport:** According to the U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Consular Affairs; to travel to France a passport "must be valid for a minimum of six months at entry, and valid for an additional three months beyond your planned date of departure from the Schengen Area" (France being in the Schengen Area).*

VIE recommends that your parents keep a copy of your passport at home as well as keeping a copy on your phone or sent to yourself by email. VIE also keeps a copy of all passports on record, should a passport be lost or stolen).

VIE advises you to travel with your VIE passport pouch, designed to hold your passport, credit cards, and money. Always wear your passport pouch under your clothing!

While in France be sure to check your passport often to make sure you haven't left it behind or misplaced it. A person without a passport is a person without a country! You must tell your teacher immediately if your passport is missing.

VISAS

At this time a visa is not required for U.S. citizens traveling to France; we will notify you if this situation changes.

Non-U.S. citizens must contact their nearest French Consulate immediately for any necessary visas. VIE is not responsible for obtaining visas for foreign citizens; however, VIE will provide any necessary documentation to help in obtaining a visa, upon request.



CUSTOM & AIRPORT SECURITY INFORMATION

Please note that anyone under the age of 21 may not bring back any alcohol into the U.S.A

Information on customs restrictions (what can and cannot be brought back into the US) can be found at the official U.S. Customs' website: <http://travel.state.gov/>

Up-to-date information about security measures at U.S. airports can be found at the official Transportation Security Administration's website: <http://www.tsa.gov>

All VIE traveler's must follow the TSA's restrictions on what items are prohibited in checked luggage and/or carry-on luggage: <https://www.tsa.gov/travel/security-screening/whatcanibring/all>

Please be sure to follow the TSA's restrictions on what items are prohibited in checked luggage and/or carry-on luggage. Remember to leave your checked luggage unlocked as security personnel will be screening your luggage. Any locks may have to be broken if TSA cannot open your bags by any other means.

INSURANCE

As a participant in a VIE Travel and LA VIE EN FAMILLE program, you automatically receive limited secondary medical insurance.

Before traveling to France, you need to contact the company that provides your regular primary medical insurance. Ask what kind of primary care coverage you have. It is your responsibility to make sure that you know the procedure to follow in case you must use your own medical insurance.

If you need to seek medical treatment in France, you will pay all expenses incurred for your medical treatment. Save all receipts and bills in order to file a claim with the Insurance upon return to the U.S.

More information will arrive from VIE closer to your departure date.



PACKING

WHAT ARE VIE'S BAGGAGE RESTRICTIONS?



Remember that hotels do not always have elevators and travelers will have to carry their luggage up and down narrow and steep staircases.

Also, buses **DO NOT** have room for more than one suitcase and a carry-on bag per person!

REMEMBER TO PACK LIGHTLY!

Please note that VIE's baggage limits are based on both *airline restrictions* AND *weight* limits for bus travel within France. Therefore, these limits must be followed above and beyond any guidelines set by individual airlines.

- **ONE suitcase** (maximum size—L + H + W must not exceed 62"; maximum weight must not exceed 45 lbs.). We strongly recommend a suitcase with wheels. You may want to bring a small lock to keep your suitcase locked while at hotels; however, you must not lock your luggage at the airport due to security screenings. VIE will provide a name tag for your suitcase, make sure to use it.
- **ONE carry-on bag** that will fit under the airplane seat (maximum size — L + H + W must not exceed 45"). Attach a name tag to your carry-on. Remember to pack things you may need in case of a delay or if your luggage is lost.

PACKING TIPS

Packing is a major concern for all travelers. You should plan to layer clothing as changes in temperature can occur quickly from region to region. Even for summer trips, pack a sweater and light jacket in case of cool or inclement weather.

A small backpack or tote bag can be handy. It can be packed in your suitcase and used to carry your camera, an extra sweater, etc. for daytime excursions on foot. When you return to the U.S., you can use it to pack souvenirs if you run out of space in your suitcase.

Plan carefully and pack items that can be mixed and matched. Cotton knits that don't need ironing are ideal.



We will provide one VIE luggage tag for each traveler's checked suitcase, but they should also put their own name tag on their carry-on. Their name and contact information should be attached securely **inside** each item of luggage as well.

WHERE SHOULD TRAVELERS KEEP THEIR MONEY AND PASSPORT?

If you have traveled to France before, you know that it's not the best idea to carry your money in a purse, in your backpack, or in your pockets. It's best to have travelers carry a money holder which will allow them to keep their passport and money hidden, especially if traveling on any public transportation or in crowded areas. VIE will send Passport Pouches for each participant with the Pre-Departure materials. We highly recommend not leaving any valuables in the hotels!



CAN TRAVELERS BRING ELECTRICAL APPLIANCES TO FRANCE?

We strongly suggest that you leave all electrical appliances (like hairdryers and curling irons) at home. Small hotels cannot usually stand such an overload on their electrical systems. If you do bring these items along, they will need an adapter and a converter (220V).

WHAT NOT TO BRING:

DO NOT bring any electrical appliances. Your regular hair dryer, curling iron or electric shaver do not have the proper current and will not plug into electrical outlets in Europe. If you have to use an American electrical appliance while in France, you will need an adapter and a converter (220V). Please note that butane hair curlers are no longer allowed on airplanes.



DO NOT bring many very short skirts or shorts. While visiting places such as cathedrals, most will not let you in unless your knees and shoulders are covered. This is a sign of respect.

DO NOT bring any expensive jewelry or other expensive personal belongings. These items will be safer if left at home.



WHAT TO BRING ON THE PLANE IN YOUR CARRY-ON:

- Medications & prescriptions
- Camera
- Essential personal items: eyeglasses or contact lens case, one set of clothes
- Emergency phone numbers (including numbers for ATM card, and credit cards if lost or stolen)

In case your baggage is delayed, you will want to have these important items with you!

Carry-ons must comply with the 3-1-1 rule set by TSA (tsa.gov)

MISCELLANEOUS:

- Lightweight wallet / coin purse for change
- Plastic bags for wet or dirty clothing
- Sunglasses / Sunscreen
- Watch & travel alarm clock
- Adapters, and/or Universal Chargers
- Small umbrella
- Hand wipes or antibacterial gel

WHAT TO PACK IN YOUR SUITCASE:

CLOTHING:

- Two pairs of jeans and/or pants
- Two pairs of comfortable walking shoes
- Several shirts (short & long-sleeved)
- Sleepwear & slippers (hotels are sometimes colder at night than what Americans are used to)
- Underwear and socks
- Swimsuit/small beach towel
- One sweater
- Windbreaker – waterproof!
- One nice outfit to wear for special dinner or outing with host family. Boys: dress shirt & dress pants. Girls: dress or skirt with nice shirt

TOILETRIES: ** Pack toiletries in zip-lock bags to prevent leakage.

- Toothbrush & toothpaste
- Shampoo & conditioner
- Body wash
- Deodorant & razor
- Hairbrush / comb
- Contact solution if needed
- Feminine hygiene products
- Medications and copies of any medical prescriptions
- An extra pair of glasses or contact lenses. A prescription for replacement.

IN PASSPORT POUCH:

- Dollars/ Euros/ debit or credit card
- Passport and student ID card

MONEY

VIE suggest bringing a combination of these sources of money while in France:



CASH – We recommend that students bring \$100 in euros (cash) to tide them over until they are able to use a cash machine to withdraw money. Foreign currency can be bought at most major banks in the United States. Banks can usually order euros if they do not have any on hand.

CARD – Credit and Debit cards can be very convenient, as long as the student knows in advance the PIN number and how to use the card at a cash withdrawal machine. Only 4-digit PIN numbers will work in France. They should check with their bank to make sure the card can be used internationally and what service fees or currency conversion fees might apply.

Please bring only MasterCard or Visa, as most places do not accept AMEX or Discover. We strongly recommend carrying an alternative source of funds, as cash machines may have issues, and cards can be lost or declined.

BUDGETING FOR EXPENSES

For our programs, we recommend a **minimum of \$50 per day for expenses**: lunches, beverages at dinner, snacks, dinners in Paris, métro tickets, postage and optional activities.

If you are planning on doing any shopping for yourself or gifts and/or souvenirs, you will have to budget additional money. Use good judgment in your spending habits throughout your trip.

TIPPING

Tips for the tour guide and bus driver are not included in the program price. The teacher will collect from students the appropriate amount for the group's program to give to the driver & guide in France. VIE recommends a minimum of 20€ to 30€ per traveler, to be divided evenly.

MONEY VOCABULARY

Cours de change	exchange rate
Carte de crédit	credit card
Carte bancaire	bank card
Distributeur automatique	ATM (cash machine)

COMMUNICATION

COMMUNICATION TO & FROM FRANCE

While with your French families, you should always ask the family's permission to use the house phone and let them know if you are calling someone in France or if you need to call someone in the United States.

Your parents should keep a copy of the Hotel List with addresses and phone numbers of the hotels and your French host family, as well as emergency contacts.

To call the U.S., you must first dial 001 before the area code, (example: 001 555 888 1234).

When calling home, remember that it is 6 to 9 hours earlier in the United States than it is in France.



CELL PHONE & TABLETS:

A note on cell phones and tablets: VIE encourages you to verify with your cell phone provider which services are available to you while traveling in France. **However, please keep in mind that using a cell phone or tablet can significantly detract from your immersion into French culture**, particularly during the LA VIE EN FAMILLE Family Stay.

French host families look forward to interacting and engaging with their American student, and excessive cell phone use can become an unwelcome distraction.

When using their cell phones or tablets, students **must remain mindful and respectful** of the tour guide, host family, teachers, and fellow travelers. Additionally, students should be aware of any potential international and/or roaming charges for calls, texts, emails, or web access. Please note that **VIE** is not responsible for lost or stolen items, nor for any additional charges incurred due to international calls, data usage, or roaming.

You are about to experience a culture very different from your own. In order to get the most from this experience, please keep the following in mind during your time in France:

FRENCH CULTURE

1. Don't jump to conclusions about things that you don't understand. Think about possible explanations and try to **keep an open mind**.

Some of the most important traits in adapting to a new culture are:

- A good sense of humor
- Patience
- Curiosity
- Open-mindedness
- Empathy
- Self-confidence
- Independence

2. Because many **stereotypes** exist on both sides, you may find that you are asked a lot of questions about the American way of life. Try not to get angry or defensive even if a question initially seems rude. Remember that the people you will meet have a perspective different from your own and are genuinely curious about your country.

3. **Remember that what is acceptable in America is not necessarily acceptable in France.** An open, friendly manner - a smile, a greeting, or giving out an address - could be misinterpreted as a sign of encouragement and lead to unwelcome attention. You should never give the name or address of your hotel to strangers or go anywhere with someone you don't know. Often, observing and imitating the reserved manner in which young French people conduct themselves, particularly on the streets of Paris, can be helpful.

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Here are some of the major areas where you may notice cultural differences between France and the U.S. Thinking about these issues before you arrive in France will prepare you for much of what you will encounter. We have also offered a few suggestions for navigating your way through any potential difficulties that may arise:

DRESS – What is considered normal to wear in America may be seen as too casual or risqué in France. For example, Americans often feel comfortable wearing shorts and t-shirts while the French tend to dress up more, even for regular daily activities.

- Take pride in your appearance and avoid looking sloppy at all times. Remember that you are a representative of your school and your country.

GREETINGS – While handshaking is common in France, kissing on the cheeks "*la bise*" is a greeting exchanged between close friends and family. According to their custom, the French may greet each other with two, three, or even four kisses on alternating cheeks.

- While it might feel awkward at first, greet others as they greet you. The more you observe how people greet each other in different situations, the more comfortable you will feel.

FORMALITY – As you know from learning the "*tu*" and "*vous*" forms, social behaviors in France are more formal than in the U.S.

- The "*tu*" form is used only between people who know one another well or between young people who are less formal in their speech and attitudes.

- Use the more formal “vous” form with people until they tell you that you may use the “tu” form. When speaking to adults, address them as “monsieur” or “madame”. Remember to always use “s’il vous plait” and “merci”.

PRIVACY – French people are generally quiet in public places and respect the privacy of others. It is not considered an insult if you wish to be by yourself.

- In public, keep noise to a minimum. Do not speak loudly or draw attention to yourselves as foreigners. **Remember that you want to avoid the “ugly American” stereotype of a loud, obnoxious tourist.**

PERSONAL SPACE – You will certainly notice right away that many things in France are smaller: cars, streets, shops, houses, hotels, and so on. The French are accustomed to living with much less “elbow room” than Americans.

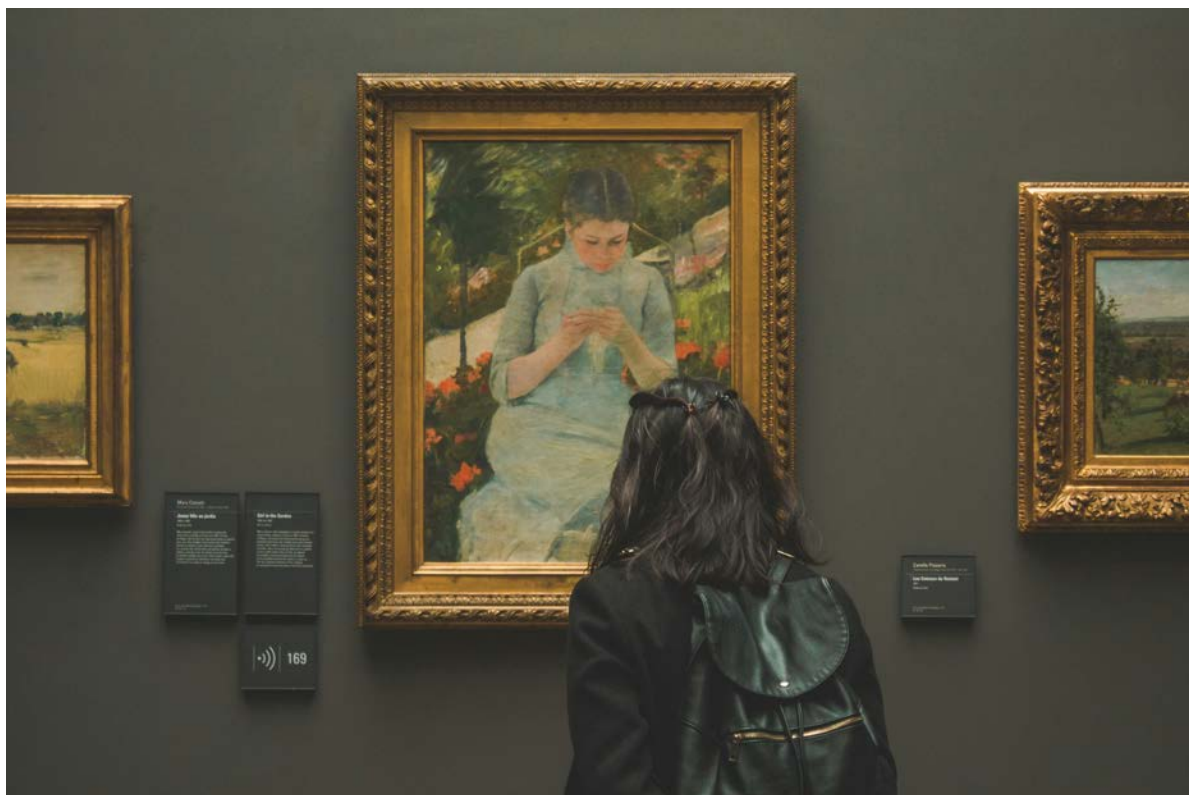
- Do not be surprised at crowded *métro* stations or small living quarters. Focus on the charming aspect of the smaller scale and notice how “Americanizing” trends are leading to bigger shopping centers and cars throughout France.

STANDARDS OF CLEANLINESS – Many Europeans think it is unclean to have a toilet and a shower in the same room, hence the separate “WC” for the toilet. On the other hand, the French in general do not necessarily shower every day like many Americans do.

- Instead of laughing at certain attitudes towards cleanliness and hygiene, think about why cultures adopt different habits. Be sensitive and respectful toward your host family.

FLEXIBILITY – Throughout your tour in France, you will travel as part of a group. It is important for you to realize that you will need to be flexible. There will be times that you will have to compromise. Learning to handle the small and unexpected inconveniences that arise is an important part of travel.

RESPONSIBILITY – Be a courteous and responsible member of the group. Use respectful language around others. Make sure that you are on time so that the group can function smoothly.



YOUR TOUR OF FRANCE

BUS TRAVEL

Most of your travel in France will be by motor coach. Some of the bus rides will be long, but this will allow you to visit different areas of the country. Keep the bus clean and be polite to the bus driver.

Take advantage of planned restroom stops. Facilities in Europe are not always as easily or frequently accessible as in the U.S. You will need to be prepared to use toilets in the morning and evening at the hotel and locate facilities during the day as it is convenient.

The use of any headphones in the bus is prohibited while the guide is speaking. Not only is it impolite not to listen while someone is speaking, but you will also miss out on important cultural information.



Before getting off the bus, check all around your seat to be sure you have all your belongings. The bus driver cannot be responsible for lost or stolen goods and VIE's insurance policy does not cover theft of unattended items.

HOTELS

Your accommodations will be in comfortable tourist class hotels. Hotel rooms in France are generally small and usually have a private bath. You will share a room with other students from your travel group (not necessarily just from your school). Your guide and teachers will be in charge of the room assignments.

Do not take your room key with you when you leave the hotel; always leave it at the front desk. When you return to the hotel, ask for your room key by number, e.g., *Deux cent vingt-six (226), s'il vous plaît, Monsieur.*

If you make phone calls from your hotel room, you will need to pay for them before you check out. Some hotels may charge a connection fee also even if you are using a phone card. Ask at the front desk before you use the phone.

Respect the other guests in your hotel by being quiet. Don't run, shout or disturb others. Do not stand in the halls talking or congregate in large groups in one room.

Drinking alcohol in hotel rooms is strictly forbidden.

Hotel furnishings are not souvenir items and taking them from the hotel is stealing and **will not be tolerated.**

To prevent loss of your belongings, keep your important possessions in a **closed and locked** suitcase. **Never leave money, or your passport in your hotel room.** Keep these with you at all times, preferably in your passport pouch.

No one is to leave the hotel alone. You must be in a group of 3 or more. If your teacher provides a check-out sheet, fill out the required information completely. Be mindful of your group's curfew and bed check times. Be sure you know the next day's planned activities, breakfast times and bus departures times.

SHOPPING

Shopping in France is a great way to learn about French culture and to find some souvenirs from your trip. Speak in French when you shop, even if the shopkeeper knows English. It is customary to greet the shopkeeper as you enter and leave a store. (*Bonjour, Madame/Monsieur. Au revoir, Madame/Monsieur.*)

Shopping time will be limited while you are on tour, so try to learn about regional specialties before you visit. If you see something unique (and affordable), buy it on the spot! You may not be able to find it in another area.

You may have more time for shopping when you are with your French family. Go with them when they run errands, including grocery shopping. You will often find interesting items in grocery stores to bring home as gifts or souvenirs. If you have your heart set on buying something, ask your French family where a good place would be to buy it. They will often be able to help you get a good deal.

Make sure you know what the rate of exchange is before you decide to buy! Taxes are always included in prices in France.

U.S. citizens are allowed up to \$800 worth of duty-free purchases. Purchases over that amount are subject to U.S. government tax.

You cannot bring back liquor and wine, most meats, fresh fruits, vegetables, or plants due to agricultural restrictions.

For more details, visit: cbp.gov.

SHOPPING VOCABULARY

La taille	<i>clothing size</i>
La pointure	<i>shoe size</i>
Faire des courses/	<i>to go shopping for specific purchases (such as groceries)</i>
Faire les magasins	<i>to shop without specific purchases in mind</i>
Aller au marché	<i>to go to the outdoor market</i>
Faire du lèche-vitrines	<i>to go window shopping</i>
Solde/en solde	<i>on sale</i>
Quel est le prix de...?	<i>How much does ... cost?</i>
Combien coûte...?	<i>How much does ... cost?</i>
Essayer	<i>to try on</i>



USING THE PARIS METRO

The **Paris Metro** is **fast, efficient, and easy to navigate**. With 16 lines covering the city, it is one of the best ways to get around. Each line is identified by its **number and the name of its terminal stations**. To find your direction, simply follow the name of the **last stop** on your line.



METRO VOCABULARY

Excusez-moi, je descends ici.

Excuse me, I get off here.

Laissez passer, s'il vous plaît.

Let me by please.

Remember to watch out for pickpockets in the metro stations – always hang on to your bags and purses!

Planning your journey

The RATP website (www.ratp.fr) and the RATP app provide real-time routes, maps, and ticket options. Check these resources before you travel!

Large maps of the Metro system are available inside stations and often outside entrances.

Tickets & Navigo Easy Card

As of January 2, 2025, Île-de-France has introduced a simplified fare structure, and paper tickets are being phased out. We recommend purchasing a **Navigo Easy card (€2)**, which can be loaded with:

- **Ticket Métro-Train-RER (€2.50):** Allows unlimited transfers within 90 minutes on the Metro, RER, and train networks (excluding airports).
- **Ticket Bus-Tram (€2.00):** Permits unlimited transfers within 90 minutes on buses and trams (€2.50 if purchased onboard).
- **Navigo Day Ticket:** €12 for unlimited travel throughout the day.
- **Paris Visite Ticket:** €29.90 per day for unlimited travel within Paris zones.

You can buy and recharge your Navigo Easy card at ticket machines, station counters, or via smartphone.

Using the Métro

- Check your route using the RATP app or station maps.
- Validate your ticket by tapping your Navigo Easy card at the turnstile.
- Follow the signs for your train's direction (marked by the last station on the line).
- Watch for your stop—station names are displayed and announced.
- If you need assistance, station employees are available to help.

Safety Tips

- Always keep an eye on your belongings, especially in crowded stations.
- Hold your bag securely to avoid pickpockets.
- Stay behind the safety line while waiting for the train.

For more details, visit www.iledefrance-mobilites.fr. Enjoy exploring Paris like a local!

MEALS

Mealtime in France is a wonderful opportunity to experience French cuisine, which is famous throughout the world. You are sure to discover some favorites, so be open to new foods.

Please be willing to at least try everything you are served at your French family's home and in restaurants.

The French go to great lengths to offer you their specialties and will feel offended if you don't even taste what you are served.

If you have special medical dietary restrictions, please let your teacher and guide know. They will do their best to accommodate you; however, it will limit the variety of meal options.

It is important to note that the French take great pride in their cuisine and regional specialties and enjoy sharing them with visitors. Meals often include bread, meat, and, more than likely, cheese. While restaurants and host families will do their best to accommodate dietary preferences such as vegetarianism and veganism, these choices remain relatively uncommon in France and may not always be fully understood. Currently, around **3% of**

French citizens identify as vegetarian and another 3% as vegan, making these dietary choices still relatively rare. However, the trend toward flexitarians (reducing meat consumption without eliminating it entirely) is growing. **We encourage you to communicate your dietary needs clearly and to be patient and understanding when dining out or staying with your host family.**

PETIT-DÉJEUNER: Breakfast usually consists of coffee, tea or hot chocolate served with bread or croissants, butter and jam. Don't skip breakfast. It may be late in the day before you have a chance to stop for lunch, and it's not fun to sightsee on an empty stomach.

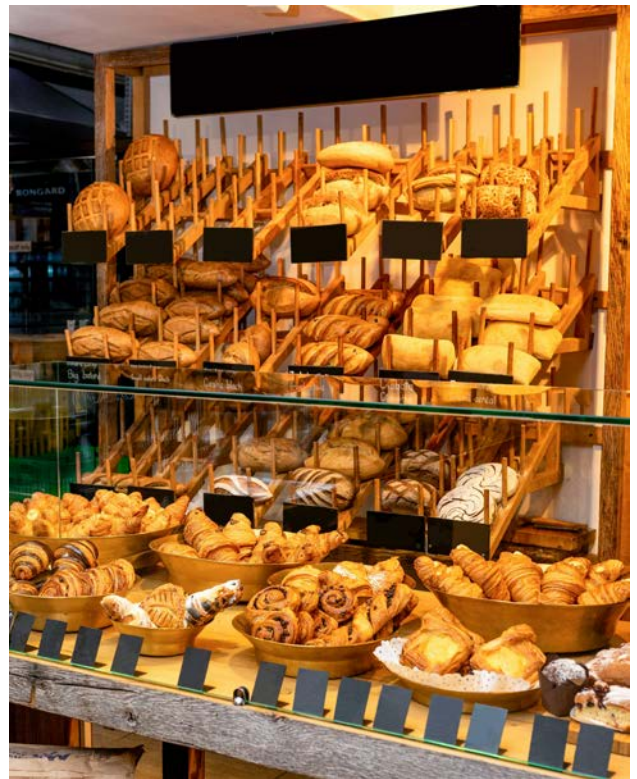
DÉJEUNER: While you are with your group in France, you will be responsible for buying your own lunch. Your group may decide to picnic or choose to eat in restaurants.

DÎNER: Throughout the touring portion of your program, dinner will usually be served between 7:00 and 8:00 p.m. and will last a couple of hours. You will eat in typical French restaurants or in the dining room of your hotel. We make every effort to vary the dinner menus and to feature regional specialties, but **because the dinners must be planned in advance for groups, you will not be able to choose your own dinners.**

Beverages at dinners are **NOT included**. Water is not served unless you ask for it. Keep in mind, you will have to pay for **bottled** water. If you just want tap water, ask for *une carafe d'eau*, which is generally free. You will pay your server directly for any other beverages you order.

In Paris, you will usually be free to choose where you will eat dinner. Fast food restaurants are becoming very popular in France, but they are generally more expensive than their American counterparts. Choosing traditional French cafés and restaurants will enable you to experience more of the fine food France has to offer.

Menus are posted outside cafés and restaurants so that you can see the offerings and prices before you enter. You may order from *un menu à prix fixe*, which usually consists of choices of an appetizer, a main course and a dessert for a set



price. Or you may order from *un menu à la carte*, which is generally more expensive.

Service is usually included in your restaurant bill (*l'addition*) under *Service Compris*. If it isn't included, 15% is the usual amount. During the tour, your guide will pay the tips for your breakfasts and dinners.

TABLE MANNERS

The French generally spend more time at the table for meals than most Americans do. Meals are considered a social event to be enjoyed as they provide an occasion for good conversation as well as fine food.

A typical French dinner consists of several courses served one after another, rather than being served all at the same time. You may find that your French family serves an *entrée* to start the meal, then serves the main course followed by salad or cheese and finally a dessert!

Some of the differences in table manners that you will see are:



- Bread is served with every meal in France, but butter is not usually served. In homes, bread may be torn rather than cut. Bread is always placed on the table, not on the plate.
- In the European style of eating, the fork is held with the left hand with the tines facing down and the knife is held with the right hand. When the French have finished eating, they lay their knife and fork with the tines down across the middle of the plate. This signifies that they have finished with that particular course of the meal.
- Almost everything is eaten with silverware during a French meal. It is very rare to eat anything with your hands. Even fruit is peeled and eaten with a knife and fork.
- The French rest their forearms on the edge of the table when they are taking a pause from eating. It is not polite, however, to put elbows on the table.

A NOTE ABOUT ALCOHOL:

This program is considered an extension of your school. As such, the same rules that apply to other school functions will still apply to you. **Restrictions or guidelines set by your teacher apply above and beyond any rules set by VIE.**

In Europe, it is customary for adults and occasionally their children to drink wine with meals. This drinking is not done in excess but is considered a beverage to accompany the meal. Your host family may offer to serve you wine during a meal at their home. **The issue of how you respond must be settled with your parents and your school before you leave for France.** It is important that your parents understand the French custom of drinking wine with meals and discuss their preference with you. If your teacher grants the option, you must have the Alcoholic Beverage Permission form signed by your parents in order to drink wine when served at meals. You are responsible for your behavior at all times, including the Family Stay.

Other than drinking wine at supervised meals, **no drinking during the trip is permitted by VIE.** Any violations of this rule may result in your being sent home at your parents' expense.

STANDARDS OF CONDUCT

VIE expects students to conduct themselves properly and to show respect for others throughout the entire program. Failure to abide by these rules may lead to sending the student home before the completion of the trip at his or her parents' expense.

1. I will behave responsibly during the entire travel program and remember that I am representing not only my school but also my family, my community, and my country.
2. I will show respect for local culture, language, and customs that are different than my own. This includes acting and dressing appropriately, being open and enthusiastic to new activities, and communicating to the best of my ability in French with my Host Family and other French people with whom I interact.
3. I will not go out alone. While on tour, I will always be with at least two other participants and will let my teacher/chaperone know where I am going, with whom, and when I will return. While in my Family Stay, I will be always with a family member or family friend. Without exception I will carry the name, address, and phone number of my hotel or French Host Family with me.
4. I will refrain from smoking, drinking, and using drugs, and I will not accept or transport any of these items during the program.

*EXCEPTION: Consumption of wine served at meals with my Host Family or during meals supervised by teachers is allowed **ONLY IF** the VIE Alcohol Beverage Permission form has been signed by my parents **AND** if my teacher/chaperone grants this option.*

5. I will respect my group leaders, other school leaders, the guide, and the bus driver. I will honor all rules set by them for the group including, but not limited to, hotel curfews, bus behavior guidelines, rules during all visits, and rules set at the hotel. I will also show respect for and be courteous to all participants of the travel program, those from my school and those from other schools with whom I travel.
6. I will refrain from inappropriate personal conduct – in both language and behavior. I will not engage in romantic or sexual involvement of any kind either with a program participant or any individual I meet on French soil.
7. I will not operate any type of motorized vehicle, even if I have an American driver's license. I understand that I would not be covered in case of an accident while operating a motor vehicle of any kind.
8. I understand that there may be cultural or linguistic challenges and misunderstandings when trying to communicate across cultures. I will be courteous and respectful in the face of potential frustrations, which I understand can take place on with all parties. I understand that most misunderstandings are easily and quickly cleared up, and I understand that VIE staff and my teacher/chaperone are available to help in these circumstances.
9. I will contact my teacher or the VIE Paris representative immediately if I am uncomfortable with my Host Family placement or if there is any kind of emergency during my Family Stay or the travel program.
10. I understand that should there be participant misbehavior, all efforts will be made to resolve the conflict prior to sending a student home.

However, I understand that a student whose attitude or behavior works against the purpose of the program, is detrimental to the smooth function of the group, or who consistently acts in defiance of teacher direction may be sent back home before the end of the program at their family's expense.

MA FAMILLE FRANÇAISE

DEAR STUDENT,

Your French family is eagerly awaiting your arrival. They know a little about you from the letter and Family Stay Application that you submitted, but they and their friends can't wait to meet you! You are no doubt equally excited about departing for France and meeting your family. So we wish you "*bon voyage*" and "*bienvenue en France*"!

Sincerely,



10 STEPS TO A SUCCESSFUL FAMILY STAY

VIE considers the VIE EN FAMILLE experience to be an essential part of our programs. By living as a family member in a French home, you will learn much about everyday French customs and habits. You will put your language study to practical use as you participate in your French family's everyday life and make new friends with your host brother or sister. We're confident that this will be an experience you will never forget!

As you prepare for your trip to France, we're sure that you have many questions about the family stay. Past travelers consistently tell us that while they were often anxious about the family stay, it ended up being one of their favorite parts of their trip to France. Even though, it would be impossible to prepare you for everything that you will experience during your time with your host family, we offer some cultural information to help you to prepare for the family stay. Please be patient when waiting to find out whom your host family will be. This is typically sent to your teacher 2 weeks prior to your departure.

STEP #1 – START OFF ON THE RIGHT FOOT

You will receive the telephone number, email address and mailing address of your French family before you leave for France. Although you will have submitted your letter and American Student Application to VIE several months before your departure, a great deal of work and many administrative steps both in the U.S. and in France precede the delivery of your letter to the family.

When you receive the information about your host family, you will also know the age of your French host sister or brother, the ages of other children in the family, and the professions of the parents. ***As soon as you know who your host family is, write a short letter or email*** thanking them for inviting you into their home. Your family will be eager to hear from you to know that you have accepted their offer of hospitality. It's very important also that the American parents have contact with the French parents before departure. It's a great idea to send them a card thanking them in advance for their hospitality.

STEP #2 - PREPARE AHEAD OF TIME

Have some ideas of things that you would like to do and see during your stay with your family. While the family members will have their normal weekly routine and are not required to act as your tour guide, they can help you do as much as possible during your stay if you let them know what interests you.

Read the newspaper so you can discuss world events and do research online to learn about current issues in France. Generally, politics is a common topic for conversation among the French. Have some opinions that you can explain in simple terms.

Remember that you may be one of the few Americans that your family will ever really know. They will judge other Americans and our country by the way that they get to know you, **Be a good ambassador.**

STEP #3 – BRING THE NECESSARY “TOOLS”

In France, it is polite to **bring a gift** when you are invited to someone’s home. We suggest that you take a small gift to your French family in appreciation for their hospitality. It’s nice to bring something that the whole family can enjoy, such as a book about the region where you live.

Here are some other suggestions for gifts:

- A map of your state, Postcards from your state or a calendar with scenes of America
- Sweatshirts,
- T-shirts, baseball caps, stadium blankets, other items with American locations or expressions
- Favorite foods: peanut butter, popcorn, brownie mix, chocolate chips (If you like to cook, bring some recipes and measuring cups!)
- Regional specialties: wild rice, maple syrup, candy, jam

STEP #4 – REMEMBER WHAT THE FAMILY STAY IS ALL ABOUT

Your French family has welcomed you into their home because they are interested in you and your culture. They do not receive money for hosting you. Their home is not a hotel. Be open and caring with your family and show your appreciation for their efforts to make you feel at home. We’re sure you’ll receive much in return.

The family stay is intended to give you an idea of what family life is like in France and to offer you the chance to adapt to it. As France is a diverse country, your host family’s ethnic background and/or way of life may be very different from your own. Remember that the success of your Family Stay depends as much on you as on the French family. Be available by leaving your cell phone in your suitcase or turned off. **Keep an open mind** as you follow your host family’s daily routine and adapt to their rhythm of life. You will notice many interesting cultural differences. Let go of your American lifestyle and live as the French do.

STEP #5 – PARLEZ FRANÇAIS!

Talk with your family! This is your chance to use the French you know. If you have limited language abilities, don’t feel shy. Just try! You don’t have to speak perfect French. Your family is happy to have you in their home and will appreciate your efforts to be a part of conversation.

Don’t just answer *oui* and *non* to their questions. Ask your family members questions and show interest in learning more about them.

If you can’t think of how to say something in French, ask your host family to help you. Smile and say lots of “*merci*”. If you don’t make an effort to communicate, your family might think that you are not feeling well or that you are unhappy

staying with them.

Suggested conversation starters – always handy around the dinner table! You might want to make a list of questions before you meet your family.

- Avez-vous de la famille dans la région ? (des grands-parents, tantes, oncles, cousins/cousines, etc.)
- Où aimez-vous passer vos vacances ?
- Est-ce que vous êtes déjà allés aux Etats-Unis ? Dans d'autres pays ?

STEP #6 - BE POLITE

When you meet your French family, don't be surprised if they give you a kiss on both cheeks or shake your hand. **Always greet your family** in the morning and evening. Watch how the family members greet each other and how they greet you, then try to imitate them.

Remember what you have learned in French class: use the **"tu"** form towards your host brother or sister, their friends, and any younger siblings in the family. Use the **"vous"** form towards your host parents and address them as **"Madame/Monsieur"** unless they tell you otherwise Remember that **"merci"** and **"s'il vous plait"** are magic words – use them often!

If your family suggests an activity to you, say **"J'aimerais bien!"** (I'd love to!). **Show your appreciation** whenever possible for meals, special outings that your family plans with you, or anything else that they do for you. A smile is multilingual!

STEP #7 – BE A GOOD HOUSEGUEST

Always **be considerate** of your family and of their hospitality. You are expected to behave in their home as one of the family.

- Keep your bed made and your room clean.
- Be on time for meals.
- Spend a minimum amount of time in the bathroom.
- Turn off lights when you leave a room.
- If a door is closed, knock before entering. You will find that the French generally close doors (like the bathroom door) when they leave a room rather than leaving them open as Americans tend to do. Privacy is greatly respected in France.

At mealtime, **taste everything!** French cuisine is renowned throughout the world. Your French family will likely go to great lengths to cook authentic meals for you; please keep this in mind and be appreciative. If you are served something that you don't like, don't say **"Je n'aime pas..."**. You might instead say, **"Merci, mais je n'ai pas très faim"** (Thank you, but I'm not very hungry). Offer to help with household chores: help set the table, clear the dishes, offer to go buy bread for breakfast or dinner. In short, **contribute!**

STEP #8 – MAKE THE MOST OF THIS OPPORTUNITY

LA VIE EN FAMILLE provides you with the unique experience of complete immersion into the French way of life.

- **Do not contact your American friends during the Family Stay.** If you should meet your American friends out somewhere, be sure to introduce and include your French host/hostess in your conversation.

Remember that **it is normal to feel nervous** at the beginning of your Family Stay. After all, this is a brand-new experience—speaking in French full-time, exploring a different culture, making new friends. Give yourself time to adjust and leave your cell phone off as much as possible. You will be surprised how much you learn by the end of your stay!

If there is a serious problem during your Family Stay, it is your responsibility to let someone in France know that things are not going well. You will be given all the necessary contact information for your teacher as well as for the Family Stay Organizer in your area and the VIE office in Paris, known as APEC. Our Paris office is ready to help you, and there are backup families available in case a change needs to be made. However, we cannot help you if we don't know you are having a problem in your host family situation.

STEP #9 – KEEP A JOURNAL

You will want to remember this experience long after you return home. Use the pages provided here to write your impressions each day. You can journal any way you like, though we do recommend that you write in French to realize how much you're learning each day!

Here are some helpful hints for keeping a journal:

- Use full names when you are writing about someone or something. You will be experiencing so many new things that you may forget names of people or places.
- Record your opinions, feelings and impressions, as well as details of daily events and happenings.
- Write down jokes or funny stories that you hear.
- If you enjoy sketching, include illustrations in your journal.
- Note new vocabulary that you learn each day and the context in which you learned it (where you were, what was happening, what you saw or heard).
- Record any cultural differences; that is, observe things that are done differently in France from what you normally do at home.

STEP #10 – STAY IN TOUCH

It is extremely important that you **write a thank you letter** to your French family after your stay. After your host family has shared their home and life with you, they will be very disappointed if you don't keep in touch with them.

About two or three weeks after your return, write again. Sending a greeting card over the holidays is also a nice gesture. In any case, be sure to **write to your family at least twice** to show your appreciation for all that they have done for you!

Nous espérons que cette expérience restera gravée dans votre mémoire et que les liens tissés avec votre famille d'accueil feront d'eux des amis pour la vie.

Bon voyage et profitez pleinement de cette immersion unique !

The VIE Team

