

# Contents

## Introduction p1



### 1. Identity: the foundations of French culture p3

- 1.1. **Geography** p5
  - 1.1.1. **Natural borders:** the Hexagon takes shape p6
  - 1.1.2. **Local colour:** the regions of France p8
- 1.2. **History** p23
  - 1.2.1. **An emergent state:** from cavemen to Emperors p24
  - 1.2.2. **Heroes and villains:** how Jeanne, Louis and Napoleon shaped France p27
  - 1.2.3. **Beauty and the beast:** modern France emerges from the *belle époque* and war p33
- 1.3. **Language and belonging** p39
  - 1.3.1. **Tongue twisting:** how language evolved in France p40
  - 1.3.2. **Language barriers:** protecting the mother tongue p42
  - 1.3.3. **Being French:** the national psyche p44



### 2. Literature and philosophy p49

- 2.1. **Literature and poetry** p51
  - 2.1.1. **Reading habits and the lionised author** p52
  - 2.1.2. **A taste for the epic:** early French literature p53
  - 2.1.3. **Taking the initiative:** French Renaissance writing p55
  - 2.1.4. **Height of good taste:** writing in the age of Classicism p58
  - 2.1.5. **A revolution of words:** from Romanticism to Modernism p60
  - 2.1.6. **The modern way:** 20th century and contemporary writers p68
  - 2.1.7. **The outsiders:** foreign authors inspired by France p74
- 2.2. **Philosophy** p77
  - 2.2.1. **Thinking man's game:** the French and their intellectuals p78
  - 2.2.2. **Founding father:** Descartes and the age of reason p79
  - 2.2.3. **Thought processes:** philosophy in the Enlightenment p81
  - 2.2.4. **Sartre to Derrida:** philosophy in modern France p83



### 3. Art, architecture and design p87

- 3.1. **Art** p89
  - 3.1.1. **Master strokes:** the tradition of French art p90
  - 3.1.2. **The first French masters** p91
  - 3.1.3. **Light fantastic:** the Impressionists p94
  - 3.1.4. **Maintaining the momentum:** post-Impressionism p98
  - 3.1.5. **Seeing the world afresh:** from prophets and wild beasts to Cubists p101
  - 3.1.6. **Identity crisis:** post-war and contemporary art p105
  - 3.1.7. **Form and function:** French design p108
- 3.2. **Architecture** p111
  - 3.2.1. **Classical remains:** Gallo-Roman architecture p112
  - 3.2.2. **Heaven sent:** French medieval architecture p113
  - 3.2.3. **Grand designs:** the unstoppable rise of the chateaux p115
  - 3.2.4. **Capital ideas:** the streets and buildings of Paris p117
  - 3.2.5. **Making concrete plans:** modern architecture p120
  - 3.2.6. **Closer to home:** domestic architecture p122



### 4. Performing arts p125

- 4.1. **Music** p127
  - 4.1.1. **France on song:** the *chanson* p128
  - 4.1.2. **French classical music** p130
  - 4.1.3. **France adopts jazz** p136
  - 4.1.4. **Modern music:** the growth of home-grown talent p138
- 4.2. **Theatre** p145
  - 4.2.1. **Setting the scene:** from miracles to Molière p146
  - 4.2.2. **Theatre for the masses:** Romanticism to Realism p150
  - 4.2.3. **State of play:** modern French theatre p155
  - 4.2.4. **Lingua Franca:** French opera p160
  - 4.2.5. **Keeping in step:** French dance p165
  - 4.2.6. **Bonne humeur:** modern French comedy p169



### 5. Arbiters of style: cinema, photography and fashion p175

- 5.1. **Cinema** p177
  - 5.1.1. **The seventh art:** the importance of French cinema p178
  - 5.1.2. **Birth of film:** the Lumière brothers get things moving p179
  - 5.1.3. **Golden age:** the historical epics p180
  - 5.1.4. **Capturing the mood:** New Wave p182
  - 5.1.5. **Mixing it up:** French film in the late 20th century p184
  - 5.1.6. **Individual flourishes:** contemporary French cinema p186
  - 5.1.7. **Outside looking in:** global interest in French film and France as a location p188
  - 5.1.8. **Celebrating the movie:** French film festivals p190
- 5.2. **Photography** p193
  - 5.2.1. **Image conscious:** the dawn of photography p194
  - 5.2.2. **On a roll:** modern and contemporary photography p195
- 5.3. **Fashion** p199
  - 5.3.1. **La mode Française:** a history of looking good p200
  - 5.3.2. **Haute times:** a century of French style p202



### 6. Media and communications p207

- 6.1. **Media** p209
  - 6.1.1. **Pressing matters:** national and regional newspapers p210
  - 6.1.2. **Magazine rack:** from *Paris Match* to *Marie Claire* p212
  - 6.1.3. **Viewing habits:** French television p214
  - 6.1.4. **Home advantage:** French radio p216
  - 6.1.5. **Overexposure:** the cult of celebrity p218
  - 6.1.6. **New media:** emailing and the Internet p219
- 6.2. **Communications** p223
  - 6.2.1. **Staying in touch:** posting a letter and making a call p224
  - 6.2.2. **Transport links:** how the French get around p226



### 7. Consuming culture: food and drink p229

- 7.1. **Food** p231
  - 7.1.1. **A national obsession:** the French love of food p232
  - 7.1.2. **Regional specialities:** truly local tastes p234
  - 7.1.3. **Staple diet:** bread, *charcuterie* and cheese p239
  - 7.1.4. **Eating habits:** in the home and going out p243
  - 7.1.5. **Buying food:** markets, shops and supermarkets p245
- 7.2. **Drink** p247
  - 7.2.1. **More than just a drink:** the culture of French wine p248
  - 7.2.2. **Viti-culture:** the French wine regions p251
  - 7.2.3. **Drinking culture:** beyond wine p260
  - 7.2.4. **Drinking habits:** when and where to indulge p267



### 8. Living culture: the state of the nation p271

- 8.1. **Reading between the layers:** class, family, sex and race p272
- 8.2. **Belief systems:** religion and values p275
- 8.3. **Politics, the French state and green issues** p277
- 8.4. **Money matters:** the economy, employment and social security p280
- 8.5. **Law of the land:** rules and regulations p283
- 8.6. **French lessons:** education p286
- 8.7. **Time out:** festivals, free time and holidays p289
- 8.8. **Sporting heroes:** *les bleus*, *le tour* and *les armchair fans* p292