

Slices of life in France

Fitting into the sophistication of Parisian city life, living it up in the south coast resort of Cannes or soaking up the medieval charm of Rouen; these are just some of the experiences awaiting language students in France. AMY BAKER reports.

As one of the most popular tourist destinations in the world, France offers a wide range of French language schools well placed to entice students keen to discover the charms of the country and learn the French language first-hand. But, given the country's many and varied qualities, the most difficult decision for students bound for France is where exactly to study. Options range from beach-side schools to city-based institutions, and schools are dotted throughout the length and breadth of the country.

In Sancerre, the Coeur de France Ecole de Langues offers no surprises about its location – as its name suggests, it is situated right in the heart of the country. Here, there are more than 300 small, family-owned wineries making it an ideal place for students with an interest in France's wine-making traditions, while Sancerre itself represents, "French country life at its finest, with outdoor

markets, charming village cafés and relaxed friendly people", says Gerard Chartrand at the school.

Further north from Sancerre, Rouen in the northern Normandy region is more famous for its food than its wine, says Eleri Maitland from the language school, French in Normandy. "Our region is famous for its fine regional cuisine plus cheeses, calvados [apple brandy] and

cider," she relates, "so we try to organise at least two excursions per month that take in producers of local and traditional foods."

Maitland explains that students at the school also enjoy bread or croissant-making activities, "which, although not strictly Norman, are obviously very typical French items".



Rouen is a magnificent medieval city close to Paris and also just 65 minutes from the famous landing beaches of World War II and the D-Day museums. Students have many interesting places to visit just a short journey away from the city, while Rouen itself has a renowned art museum, a museum dedicated to the life of Joan of Arc, and is

a living testament to the architecture of the medieval period in history.

A more modern side of France is found at the opposite end of the country, in Cannes. This palm tree-bedecked Mediterranean resort town is famous internationally for the Cannes Film Festival, when the international movie industry descends on the town for a week. Laurent Riéra of Institut Français Riéra points out that Cannes also boasts a popular music recording studio and first-division football teams, Nice and Monaco, which are based nearby.



Moulin Rouge, Paris

One of the oldest cabaret venues in France, the Moulin Rouge is responsible for popularising the French Cancan dance and is situated in the red light district of Pigalle on Boulevard de Clichy

The south coast resort of Nice (main picture)

As well as experiencing local football matches or the Grand Prix in Monaco, Riéra points out that students can enjoy many outdoor sports in and around the Côte d'Azur. "From late November to early April, within one hour's drive of Cannes and its winter sunshine, students can be skiing or snowboarding," he says. "In summer, these same areas offer some of the most spectacular rambling or mountain walking in France." Being beside the sea, Cannes also has numerous opportunities for students to take part in water sports, including sailing, windsurfing and diving.

Along the western edge of France is the Atlantic coast, with its less-developed seaside towns and stretches of beaches with good surfing waves – making it popular with adventurous water-sports enthusiasts. Visitors to the region also enjoy visiting the Dune de Pyla, the largest sand dune in Europe, while Bordeaux, France's third largest city,



Dune de Pyla
The highest sand dune in Europe is situated near Bordeaux and is 117 metres high and 2.7 kilometres long. The spectacular views from the top take in pine forests on one side and the ocean on the other

Agent viewpoint

"Since our country is next to France it is much easier for our clients to travel to France than other destinations (such as Switzerland, Belgium, etc.). Loches is a good destination as it is a very nice town with friendly people and at the same time easy to reach and not far from Paris. Also the area around Loches is nice and interesting and our clients can visit many touristic and historical places. We usually recommend Loches, Paris, Tours, Nice and Bordeaux. Tours is a nice town and very well linked; Nice is good for those who wish to enjoy the beach, especially in the summer. We recommend the schools that we work

with in these places because we have always got a highly positive report from our clients."

Elisa Rozadilla, Step Travel, Spain



"France is the best place to learn French, isn't it? A great thing about less famous destinations [in the country] is that providers really try to do their best to amuse the students. Activity leaders in Loches are great! One of the most popular excursions is a full day excursion to Paris, which covers an Eiffel Tower [climb], a visit to the Louvre, a walk and picnic lunch by Notre Dame, a

is a popular base for students to explore the area. The city is famous worldwide for its wine industry and has recently been updating its transport system, making it easier for students to get around.

"Bordeaux is changing, with the construction of the tram," recounts Cécile Delaunay of Alliance Française Bordeaux Aquitaine. "The first line opened in December [2003] and some places have become pedestrian areas. Bordeaux is also developing cycling tracks."

Bordeaux is also a student-centred city with a lively social scene. "There are a lot of people studying here, with four universities, a school of architecture, a faculty of oenology [study of wine], etc.," says Delaunay. "Nightclubs are open all night!"

If it is nightlife and a myriad of socialising opportunities that students are looking for, then Paris cannot be missed. As Yvonne Le Gillou of IFG Langues in the city says, "Paris is the most visited city in the world. There is so much to do here, both day and night." World-famous tourist attractions such as the Eiffel Tower and Montmartre are equalled in terms of interest by the day-to-day charms of the city. Maud Bertrand of

bateaumouche ride and a panoramic sightseeing coach ride. My favourite destination in France for students over the age of 18 is Montpellier. The beauty of the city, its sophistication, the leisurely pace with over 25 per cent of the population being students, the climate, the surrounding attractions, the quality of life – all this contributes to its appeal.”

Irina Kubik, Kub Travel Enterprises, Yugoslavia

“For 40 years, Bordeaux has been a sister city of Munich. Every year we send a delegation of 25 students to Bordeaux. The Aquitaine region

is known for its beauty and it offers plenty of possibilities for free time. We visit the Atlantic Ocean at Lacanau for swimming and a surf class and the amazing Dune de Pyla [sand dune].



There are also plenty of villages, such as St. Emillion, and chateaux in the region.

Bordeaux itself is not too large, so that as leaders we can let students move freely around in their spare time. The students like to walk around in the city, hang out in cafés and have the feeling of living a French life – at least for two weeks.”

Xenia Kernycky, Department of Education - City of Munich, Germany



“Lots of Japanese people like Paris, but there are lots of people in Paris and it is very expensive. Normandy is a good location, because it takes about one hour between Rouen and Paris by train. Students can visit Paris easily at a weekend, which is why Normandy is a popular area. I think it is good to study French in a small town. If there is not so much sightseeing to do, the only thing for the students is studying French! I also recommend Vichy, Annecy, Chambéry, Montpellier and Aix-en-Provence.”

Masahiro Shinkawa, Nexsis, Japan

Ecole des Roches points out, “Students like to visit not only touristic and cultural places but all sorts of places where Parisians meet as well – restaurants, bars, cafés, parks, etc.”

IFG Langues is located in the centre of the city, near to the Eiffel Tower and many other famous landmarks. “The area is very secure and peaceful and there is a very nice social life with many bars, restaurants, fitness clubs and cinemas [in the area],” relates Le Guillou. Bertrand is also keen to point out that their students, studying in the



Chateau Chenonceaux, Loire
Built in 1520, the grand Chateau Chenonceaux was originally the home of a succession of wives and mistresses of French kings. France's first ever firework display also occurred here in 1560

heart of the city, quickly feel at home and become “true Parisians”. She adds, “Our school offers excursions to museums, monuments, cul-

tural events in the different

Parisian neighbourhoods and different ways to see the city: by boat on the Seine or by balloon from the sky!”

Another region of France that is popular with tourists is the Loire Valley, renowned for being the

“One of our Gourmet-French students came to the final evening meal exquisitely turned out in a gorgeous kimono and all the trimmings including wooden shoes. This caused quite a stir as the meeting point for the evening activity was in the city's main square.”

Eleri Maitland, French in Normandy, Rouen

“playground of princes” in times past. Reminders of this heritage can be found in the many beautiful chateaux that are dotted around the region, many complete with impressive gardens. However, according to Philippe Minereau

of Elit Groupe St Denis in Loches, language students are often motivated not by the local sightseeing opportunities but by the fact that the French spoken there is the purest in the country. And, he confirms, many summer students return year after year because they enjoy the activities and the school set-up, and they even help out with presentations to other foreign students. □