

Famous France

Language schools in France are keen to introduce students to France's famous traditions of food and wine appreciation, as AMY BAKER finds out.

From the northern charm of the countryside and villages in Brittany and Normandy to the elegant and relaxed seaside resorts in the south, France offers all the ingredients needed for a memorable language travel experience. Beautiful countryside, historical and cultural points of interest, and language schools that are keen to help students become acquainted with the France's history and lifestyle.

"All our courses offer an immersion into the French way of life," says Catherine Antoine at Fondvielle Language School (FLS) in St Verand, near Lyon. "While staying with us, students share meals with the French tutors and taste the local specialties, and wine!" Many French language schools not only organise trips to see the surrounding countryside and areas of interest, but are keen to ensure that students appreciate one of France's greatest treasures: its culinary tradition.

"[Our school] is based in the south of the Beaujo-

lais region so we often take students [to] visit a local vineyard," says Antoine.

Nearby, in Roanne, Ecole des Trois Ponts offers a residential course in the French language or cooking, in an 18th-century chateau. The school is situated in "a gastronomic and wine-producing area", explains Margaret O'Loan. "The Roanne area has lots of lovely medieval villages nearby," she says. "It's cradled between the Burgundy, Beaujolais and Auvergne areas."

O'Loan adds that the highlight of a student's stay at the school is the relaxed, convivial atmosphere at the dinner table, where students speak French and eat together. In their free time, they also enjoy horse riding, bike rides along the canal and playing tennis.

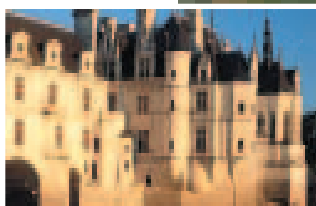
This area of France is off the beaten track for many tourists, so there are many opportunities for students to use their French language skills. "The southern part of Beaujolais is called the Golden Stone

area and is still very preserved from mass tourism," confirms Antoine.

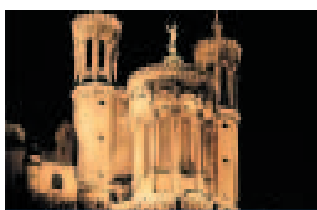
In Saint-Etienne, which is a medium-sized central city, the Centre International de Langues et Civilisation (Cilec) at Université Jean Monnet also offers students the chance to learn French in an area where there are "not so many non-French speaking foreigners", says Harry Crawford, Director of Cilec. "For an industrial city, Saint-Etienne has a very active cultural life," he adds, "with the second-largest modern art museum in France, theatre, opera and numerous amateur dramatics societies and choirs."

Saint-Etienne also boasts very beautiful countryside nearby and, by using the *train à grand vitesse* (TGV), students can reach the Alps and the Mediterranean, says Crawford. "They have the [opportunity] to go skiing in winter and sailing in the summer."

For those students who prefer to be located slightly nearer the coast, Montpellier in southern France is a popular destination. Because of the university, it is a lively city with a busy social calendar, while it is also known for its historic old centre and state-



Chateau de Chenonceaux
This famous chateau in the Loire Valley spans the River Cher by six arches and has a number of stunning gardens, designed by Catherine de Medici and Diane de Poitiers in the 16th century



Basilique de Notre Dame de Fourvière, Lyon
Completed in 1896, the basilica on Fourvière Hill was built by money collected from local Catholics. The nearby terrace provides an impressive panoramic view of Lyon

Agent viewpoint



"There are not so many [students] sent from our agency, although interest in French language programmes is growing in St Petersburg nowadays.

For adults, the most popular destination is Paris, learning in the capital city. There is a wide variety of schools compared with other regions in France. The Cote d'Azur is also very popular. For [juniors], residential accommodation is preferred. The most popular schools are in Normandy, while

students are [also] sent to the Vichy area and the south of France of course. Older teenagers prefer either Paris or the seaside in Nice or Antibes. Our students [say] the French are communicative, cheerful and easy to get on with, if you speak French, not English."

Victoria Orlova, Tour Prestige, Russia

"The preferred cities are generally located in the south of France, like Nice, Montpellier and Aix-en-



Provence. Nice, because of the proximity to the beach [and] in Montpellier, the beaches are just six km away. Aix-en-Provence represents the charm and flair of Provence. The students really appreciate the way of life in France, especially our German clients."

Cathy Hagendorf, Dialog, Germany

"In their spare time, [our clients] like to go skiing in the French Alps, to go to the beach on the south



of-the-art city tram. “We have many students interested in knowing more about France and the French way of life [so] we organise many activities together with courses,” says Anaïs Baurens at ABM in the city. Throughout their stay, tailor-made activities are organised for ABM students, such as horse riding in the Camargue and treasure hunts in the city centre.

Day-to-day activities that students enjoy, according to Baurens, include going to the beach and walking in Montpellier’s historic city centre. The city’s origins date back to the late 10th century, and since then it has been under the rule of various kings and witnessed a power struggle between Protestants and Catholics. The ancient citadel was built in 1622 to guarantee loyalty to the crown, after King Louis XIII oversaw a siege of the rebellious Protestant city.

Another area that bears testament to France’s regal history is the Loire Valley, where many impressive chateaux are peppered throughout the region. Philippe Minereau, Director of Elit Groupe St Denis in Loches, says students are taken



coast and visit famous places around Paris. Normally, they really like the culture and the people, but they prefer the people from the south of France and the smaller cities. French people usually welcome students from South America. Students normally go to learn a third language, and also, [further] studies in France are not expensive.”
Alexandra Galindo, Global Connection, Colombia

The gardens of the Luxembourg Palace in Paris are adorned with statues of French queens

to visit many chateaux and these visits are explained in depth in their morning lessons at the school. “Foreign students [discover] our local history during classes,” he explains.

Aix-en-Provence is another old French city with splendid architecture. The city was founded in 123 BC by the Romans and was the

capital of

the Provence region in the 15th century, which meant the wealthy merchants and local dignitaries helped earn the city its reputation as the “Florence of Provence”.

Aix, as it is known to locals, and the outlying region is said to have been an inspiration for

many French writers and painters including Cézanne, who has a tour in his honour in the city.

Astrid Giorgetta, at IS Aix-en-Provence, asserts that students who choose to study here have the opportunity of learning in the best possible conditions, “in a school with a friendly atmosphere, in a sunny and warm region where students can easily



meet talkative French people”. Activities organised for students include an international championship of *pétanque* (regional variation of boules) and cooking lessons and dinner with a cordon bleu hostess. While France’s capital, Paris, is not best known as a friendly city, with a reputation for its ice-cool fashionable city residents, there are good

learning opportunities for foreign students in the vicinity, asserts David Boydell at Les Cèdres school. “Our school is situated in a pleasant suburb of Paris, so students benefit from both a small town intimacy and the benefit of Paris just 25 minutes away by train,” he says. “Since we are a Christian school, many [students] appreciate the voluntary spiritual activities [we organise] and our links with several local churches.”

Paris itself has no end of sights for students to visit, while many enjoy visiting the city’s cafés, restaurants, bars and shops. There are also many festivals during the year, such as the festival of St Denis in June and the Festival of Autumn, which incorporates theatre, ballet, film, music and opera, in the latter part of the year. □



Saint Tropez
 Located on the Côte d’Azur on the Mediterranean coast, Saint Tropez is famous for the celebrity visitors it attracts. Rows of small cafés overlook the harbour where expensive yachts are plentiful