



The Northeast of France



Bonjour, my name is Nicolas! Follow me on a tour of northeastern France.



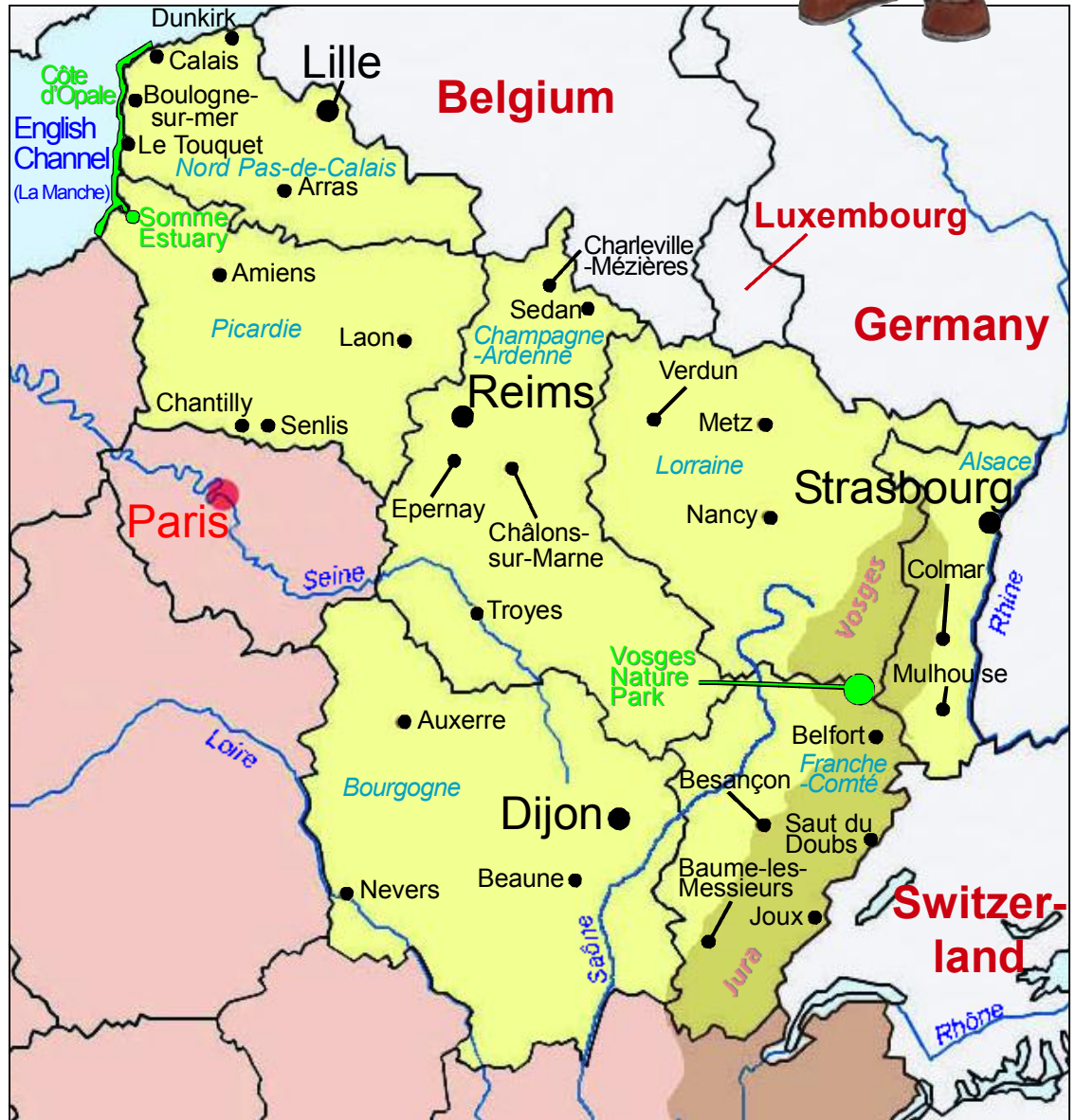
WITH ABOUT 350,000 square miles, France is the largest country in Western Europe, and roughly the size of Texas. In 2003, its population reached 62 million, of which about 12 million live in or around the capital, Paris.

France also includes several overseas territories: Guadeloupe and Martinique in the Caribbean; French Guiana just north of Brazil; Reunion Island in the Indian Ocean; French Polynesia, New Caledonia, and Wallis and Futuna in the Pacific Ocean; and the Antarctic territories.

Since the European Union's inception, some 50 years ago, France has been at the forefront of the construction of a strong and integrated Europe. The European Union remains one of France's top foreign policy priorities. As one of the five permanent members of the United Nations' Security Council, and the fourth highest contributor to the U.N. budget, France is deeply involved in all significant international affairs.

But France is also a country where people are strongly attached to their regional roots. This brochure will help you understand the deep ties the French continue to have with their native regions.

This brochure belongs to a series of six: the Northeast, the Northwest, the Southeast, the Southwest, Ile-de-France, and the overseas territories. Brochures are available on request, by writing to info@ambafrance-us.org.





Reaching Prosperity After a Turbulent History

THE HISTORY of northeastern France, at the crossroads of several major cultures, is both fascinating and rather turbulent. Most of the area was long inhabited by tribes of both French and German origin. Nord-Pas-de-Calais used to be populated by the Celts, Alsace-Lorraine by the Allamani, and Burgundy by the Burgundii, to name just a few examples. In the early part of the first century, northeastern France fell under Roman occupation, like most of Europe at the time. The area along the Rhine and Rhone rivers, now the geographical border between France, Germany and Switzerland, became a major center of commerce, with the two rivers serving as highways for trade and transportation. Strasbourg, now the de facto capital of Alsace-Lorraine, was one of the northeastern most outposts of the Roman Empire, and a major trading city between the Romans and Germanic tribes.



"The Baptism of Clovis" by François Louis Dejuinne (1839). Clovis became the first Gallic ruler to convert to Christianity in 498.

One of the most important moments of French history took place in the Northeast after the fall of the Roman Empire. In 499 AD, France's first king and the founder of the Merovingian dynasty, Clovis, was crowned in **Rheims**. Leader of the Franks, his dynasty ruled over much of what has become present-day France (indeed, the word "France" is derived from "Franks"). The area then became part of the Holy Roman Empire under the rule of Emperor Charlemagne, or Charles the Great (768-814). During his reign, a centralized administration was created, and the arts experienced a renaissance.

After Charlemagne's death, the Empire was ruled by Louis the Pious, who eventually divided it between his three sons. The Northeast was reunited with the rest of France under the reign of Philip the Bold in the latter half of the fourteenth century. Under his rule, the region of **Burgundy** experienced a golden age, with the house of Burgundy owning lands that encompassed almost the entire northeastern region.

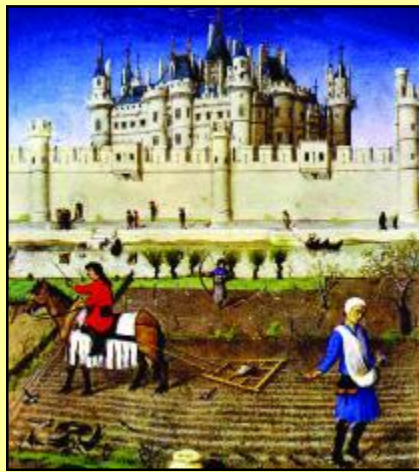
ALSACE'S TUMULTUOUS HISTORY



The chateau of Haut-Koenigsbourg near Sélestat, Alsace. Strongholds such as this one can be found throughout Alsace, and they attest to the region's tumultuous history.

The lands of **Alsace** have long been a source of contention between Germany and France. Originally a Germanic territory, Alsace became French after the Thirty Years War (1618-1648). Following France's defeat at the hands of Prussia in 1871, Alsace was relinquished to the Prussians, who enacted strict anti-French policies, including the ban of spoken and written French. After being defeated during World War I, Germany ceded Alsace back to France under the Treaty of Versailles. The region remained under French rule until Germany occupied France during World War II. Finally, at the conclusion of the war in 1945, Alsace was once again returned to France. After such a tumultuous history, it is no surprise that present-day Alsatians speak a Germanic dialect, Alsatian, as well as French!

ECONOMIC PROSPERITY IN THE MIDDLE AGES



The northeastern region of France experienced great economic prosperity during the Middle Ages, especially in the regions of **Nord-Pas-de-Calais** and Champagne-Ardenne. The vibrant Flemish textile industry, located in Nord-Pas-de-Calais and Belgium, brought prosperity to large parts of the Northeast. As for Champagne-Ardenne, it served as an important economic location during

the Middle Ages by hosting major trade fairs. Indeed, because of its location near several major European trade routes, **Champagne-Ardenne** proved to be one of the best locations for merchants from all over Europe to meet.

The House of Burgundy aligned with the English during the Hundred Years War (1337-1453), creating a deep rift between the Northeast and the rest of France. The region was also ravaged by the Thirty Years War (1618-1648), during which two major battles took place in the Northeast. At one point, Burgundy and Franche-Comté were part of the Hapsburg Empire, then the Spanish Empire, only to finally return to France in 1678.

The Northeast's history unfortunately continued to be plagued by conflict and war well into the modern era. Its strategic location at the heart of Europe made it a recurrent battleground, during the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-1871, World War I (1914-1918) and World War II (1939-1945). Regions such as Picardie, Nord-Pas-de-Calais and Champagne-Ardenne were particularly hard hit by the first World War, with its deadly and prolonged trench warfare. The Battles of the Marne (1914 and 1918), the Battle of the Ardennes (1914), the Battle of the Bulge (1944-45)... all these epic clashes took place in northeastern France. Since World War II, however, the region has reaped the rewards of peace and prosperity, and one of its main cities, **Strasbourg**, is now home to the Council of Europe, the European Court of Human Rights, and the European Union's Parliament—all symbols of Europe's newfound unity and peace.

Lovely Coastlines and Dense Forests



STRETCHING FROM the English Channel to the German border, the Northeast is one of the most varied regions in France. Here visitors can find everything from beaches and rolling farmland to forests and snowy mountains. Like the landscape, the climate varies dramatically, with mild maritime conditions along the coast and colder winters and hotter summers in the more continental interior.



Le Touquet, "the pearl" in the Cote d'Opale

that reflects off its contours. The pebble and sand beaches are popular among many vacationers.

The fertile plains of the Northeast have long been centers of agriculture, with wine-making especially widespread. **Burgundy** is perhaps the area best known for its wine, which is produced throughout the region, but particularly on the vine-covered hills of the Côte d'Or department. Bordered by the Rhine river, **Alsace** is a fertile watershed between the Vosges mountains and Germany's Black Forest. It too

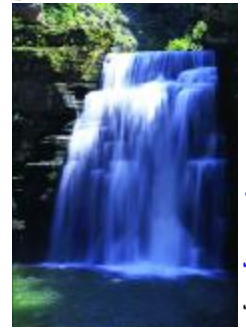
The northernmost region—**Nord Pas-de-Calais**—is defined by its coastline that stretches from the Somme estuary to the Belgian border, including the busy commercial ports of **Calais**, **Dunkirk** and **Boulogne**. Visitors are treated to dramatic scenery along the **Côte d'Opale** (Opal Coast), named by the impressionists for the iridescent light

boasts well-known wines. Finally, the unique climate and landscape of Champagne make the area ideal for the production of its eponymous drink.

Throughout the Northeast, dense forests are havens for nature-lovers. While much of the **Picardie** region has been developed, vast forests such as Senlis and Chantilly, which were once the hunting grounds of France's royalty, have been preserved. Today anyone can enjoy this green belt just north of Paris. A little more toward the east, one finds the department of **Ardennes**, nearly a third of which is wooded (indeed, the department takes its name from the Celtic word for "deep forest"). This land bordering Belgium features hills and deep valleys along the meandering Meuse river. **The Vosges** range in Lorraine boasts magnificent spruce

forests that are part of a remarkable environment including thermal springs, waterfalls, mountain lakes and rivers.

As the meeting point for three river systems, Burgundy is rightly named a watershed. The Yonne river runs north through it to join the Seine on its route to the English Channel whereas the **Saône River** flows south to the Rhône, and eventually to the Mediterranean. Finally, the **Loire**, France's last undeveloped river, flows west across the region to the Atlantic Ocean.



Le Saut de Doubs in Franche-Comté

Over 1,200 kilometers of manmade canals connect the region's cities to these rivers. A boat may be the best way to visit this region! This abundance of water has left its mark on the landscape and environment, which features a profusion of waterfowl.



View of the port of Saint-Florentin on a Burgundy canal

The **Jura mountains** provide what is perhaps the most dramatic landscape in the northeastern region. This range in the southern portion of Franche-Comté boasts an unspoiled countryside that is accessible to all. Blanketed with alpine forest, the Jura range is a haven for outdoor sports-lovers seeking an alternative to the Alps. The famous "Grand Traversée du Jura" in the Haut-Jura Regional Nature Park is a 200-mile trail ideal for hiking, mountain biking or skiing.



Le Chateaux Joux in Franche-Comté

CAVES OF FRANCHE COMTÉ



The entrance of a Baume-les-Messieurs cave from the collection of J.C. Frachon

While Franche-Comté is celebrated for its mountains and vast woodlands, some of its most unique geographic features are hidden from sight. Throughout the region, over 9,000 underground passages and caves have been discovered, several of which are open to the public for tours. These include the 15-chamber Osselle Cave, which was discovered in the 13th century, the Poudrey cave, which is the largest in France, and the caves at Baume-les-Messieurs whose entrance is hidden beneath a waterfall.

THE BALLONS DES VOSGES NATURE PARK



A snow covered "ballon"

Covering three regions (Franche-Comté, Lorraine and Alsace) the Regional Nature Reserve of the **Vosges Ballons** was created in the 1960s to preserve the stunningly beautiful landscapes of the region. At 3,000 square kilometers, it is an incredibly diverse area with many sites

to see. The park is named for the unique rounded mountains, or "ballons" (balloons), located throughout the area. The highest ballons offer views reaching all the way to the Alps in clear weather. The park also features high pastures, dense forests and wetlands.



A Bustling Economy at the Crossroads of Europe

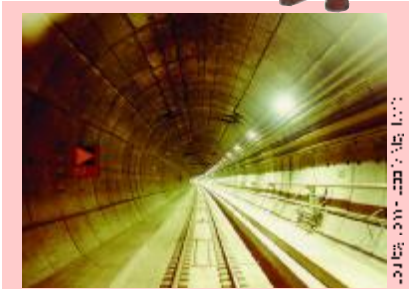
NORTHEASTERN FRANCE has always been a productive agricultural region, and farming remains a non negligible part of its economy. Its major agricultural outputs are wheat, grains, hops, sugar beets and livestock. The Northeast also breeds cattle and produces renowned dairy products, particularly cheese. However, the agricultural backbone of the area rests firmly in its vineyards. Indeed, northeastern France is best known for its world revered Alsatian wines and, of course, for its Champagne.

Farming has gradually become more and more mechanized and now less than 10 percent of the region's workforce works in the agricultural sector. The latter half of the 20th century witnessed the rapid emergence of industries such as power generation, car manufacturing, chemicals and metallurgy, which provided jobs to millions of former farmers. More recently, the traditional coal, steel and textile industries—once the lifeblood of the Northeast—have declined in importance. Coal mining once dominated the **Nord-Pas-de-Calais**

region, for instance, but the area now mainly relies on imported natural gas for its energy needs. Nevertheless, a highly automated textile industry centered around the town of Lille still thrives.

As a gateway to Britain, Belgium and Germany, the northeast region of France is now splattered with Euro-oriented businesses and advanced technology industries. **Strasbourg**, at the heart of one of the wealthiest European regions, is often deemed as "the crossroads of Europe." The city plays a prominent role as a center for manufacturing and engineering, as well as for road, rail and river communications. It is the seat of the Council of Europe and the European Court of Human Rights and it is one of the seats of the European Parliament.

Last but not least, the northeast coastline, stretching from the Somme estuary to the Belgian frontier, hosts breathtaking cliffs and sandy beaches making it an extremely frequented location for tourists. The world famous resort at **le Touquet** attracts affluent visitors from around the globe. The region's maritime flair is also embodied by successful fishing ports and a cross-channel terminus. Indeed, both trade and tourism have flourished with the arrival of the Chunnel, the tunnel that links France to Britain and makes the two countries just a short train hop away from each other.



Inside the Chunnel

CHUNNEL

Crossing the Channel has always prompted innovative solutions. In 1785, Frenchman Jean Pierre Blanchard accomplished the feat in a balloon, and in 1909, his countryman Louis Blériot was the first to fly over it by airplane. However, it was not until 1994 that man could cross the English Channel by train. The train ride provides a link between **Fréthun/Calais**, France and Folkestone, England. The 21 billion-dollar project makes continental Europe a mere 20-minute train ride from Great Britain and it provides northeast France with a steady influx of British tourism and business.



The belfry of Lille's Chamber of Commerce

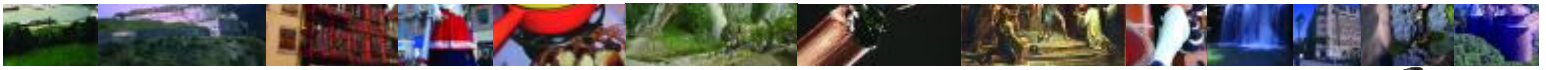
LILLE: A MAJOR HUB

The year 2004 saw **Lille** become the European Union's Cultural Capital, adding to its historical status as the capital of the Nord region. The city has erected a new "hi-tech" business district and serves as a major TGV hub for France and much of northern Europe. With more than a million inhabitants, Lille is the fourth largest city in France.



BUBBLE ECONOMY

The bubbly white wine that epicures worldwide avidly quaff can only be made in northeastern France. Indeed, the Reims and Epernay areas have a monopoly on the drink that is named after their region. **Champagne's** eponymous bubbles result from a double fermentation process that arises from the region's cold climate and short growing season. The grapes are picked late (to give them time to reach maturity), so there is not enough time remaining for the yeast to convert the sugar into alcohol before winter temperatures put a temporary stop to the fermentation process. With the arrival of spring's warmer temperatures, the fermentation begins again, but this time in the bottle. The re-fermentation creates carbon dioxide, which becomes trapped in the bottle, thereby creating the sparkle.



A Culture of Gentle Giants and Christmas Markets



THE CULTURAL HERITAGE of northeastern France is quite unique, due to the region's proximity to Belgium and Germany. Influences from these neighboring Germanic cultures are visible across the Northeast, starting with the half-timbered homes in Strasbourg. The region's historical role as a meeting place between cultures has given its rich and varied heritage a flavor that is distinct from the rest of France.



A typical Alsatian house.

Throughout northeastern France, traditions are an integral part of the region's current cultural landscape. In **Alsace-Lorraine**, where Germanic influences are still part of everyday life, medieval castles and houses covered in geraniums dot the countryside, and the people take pride in their strong identity by keeping traditional dialects and clothing alive. Alsace-Lorraine is also known for its festivals, such as the annual town celebration, or *messti*, as well as for its religious diversity (over one-fifth of its inhabitants are Protestants, and Strasbourg is home to an important Jewish community).



A village in Alsace

STRASBOURG: THE CHRISTMAS CAPITAL



For centuries, Alsace has been known for its enthusiastic celebration of Christmas, a tradition that started with an annual fair during the Middle Ages. This fair, called the "Klausenmärik" or "St. Nicholas's Market," was held to give gifts to children in celebration of St. Nicholas. During the Reformation in the 16th century, the local courts decided to change the focus of the fair to the "Christkindel," or Christ child, who reigns over all Christians. With this decision, the "Christkindelmärik" was born. This event is still held today and has survived Alsace's turbulent history. In addition to the Christmas market itself, activities such as concerts, exhibitions, and story-telling help **Strasbourg** earn its reputation as the "Christmas Capital."

THE GIANTS OF THE NORTH

In the **Nord-Pas-de-Calais** region, no festival is complete without the town's giant, or *reuze* in Flemish. These giants, made from lightweight wicker and up to 30-feet tall, first appeared in the 16th century during religious processions. Giants, who are carried and made to dance by one to six people, first represented biblical characters or stories. Now, giants can represent anything imaginable, from kings and laborers to mythical creatures, such as the Unicorn (La Licorne) of Gommegnies. No matter what they represent, giants are an important part of the identity and heritage of almost every northern town, whether large or small. With over 300 of them "alive" today, these traditional party-starters are unique to the culture of northern France.



Reuze Papa, associated with the town Dunkerque



Gargantua, associated with the town Bailleul

In nearby **Champagne-Ardennes** and **Burgundy**, world-renowned wines are produced according to centuries-old tradition. On the Route des Grands Crus in Burgundy, or in the "sacred triangle" of Champagne between Reims, Epernay and Châlons-sur-Marne, vineyards stretch as far as the eye can see.



Boulogne-Sur-Mer, on the Opal Coast, is a lovely place to visit in the summer.

In **Nord-Pas-de-Calais**, it is undeniable that Flemish culture still holds sway. The region's red brick houses, windmills and abbeys have more in common with France's northern neighbors than with other French regions. The local taste for beer and hearty food echoes this influence, while the majestic cliffs and lively beach towns of the Opal Coast draw visitors from all over France and Europe. The regional capital, Lille, boasts a diverse architectural and cultural heritage, having been successively under the control of Flemish, Spanish and French rulers.



Champagne and Quiche Lorraine



NORTHEASTERN FRANCE, where visitors can find "traditional" French cuisine as well as dishes with distinct German influences, produces some of France's most famous specialties.

The **Burgundy** region is famous for its wines. Here, the soil and temperature are perfect for cultivating Pinot Noir, Gamay and Chardonnay grapes, which are used to produce world-renowned wines such as Meursault, Nuits-St. Georges and Chablis. In addition to drinking their wine, Burgundians use it in many of their regional specialties. These include coq-au-vin and beef bourguignon as well as the notorious "escargot" (snail) dishes. **Dijon**, Burgundy's biggest city, is particularly well known for its wines, mustards and pears.

While Dijon may be known for its pears, **Amiens**, a city located in the Picardy region, is renowned for its pear tarts and duck pâté. Lamb meat is another popular delicacy from the **Picardy** region, which is located along the coast just south of the English Channel. Lambs graze on salty marches there, and by consuming salty grasses, their meat becomes pre-salted! Other gastronomic inventions from this region include macaroons, the Picardy-style pancake, and the *gateau battu*, a delicious brioche-cake sometimes made with a touch of cognac or kirsch.

The region to the north of Picardy, **Pas-de-Calais**, is directly south of England and offers a variety of delectable seafood dishes. Nearby **Champagne-Ardenne**, as its name indicates, is the region where the bubbly wine used for celebrations and other festive events is produced. It is located directly west of Picardy and North of Burgundy. As the story goes, Champagne was created completely by accident by a monk named Dom Perignon in the early 18th century. Today, it can be found in many different forms and is derived from various grapes.



A Cheese Fondue

France, various blue cheeses and comté. Because this region produces so much delicious cheese, many of its well-known dishes use it in their recipes. Comté is used for fondues, for example, and raclettes are made with a smooth and creamy cheese of the same name that is melted in thin slices, placed on top of boiled potatoes and served with thinly sliced meat. Besides cheese, this region is also famous for its morels (delicate and flavorful mushrooms) and its smoked and cured meats, which are often combined with various cheeses to produce the region's signature dishes.



Pinot Noir Grapes

Alsace's gastronomy is heavily influenced by Germany, which it borders. Foie gras and sauerkraut are the two main specialties of this region. This area is also well known for its delicatessen meats such as aniseed-flavored sausage and smoked ham. Also frequently found on an Alsatian menu are baeckeoffe (a marinated meat dish), tarte flambée and spaetzle (a variety of noodles.) Muenster cheese, an orange-rinded cheese with a creamy interior, serves as a delightful transition between the entrée and dessert. For dessert, one has the choice of kougelloff, a towering cake made with raisins and almonds, or numerous fruit tarts.

Located to the east of Alsace is the **Lorraine** region. The world renowned Quiche Lorraine was created here. Below is the recipe for this sumptuous dish. Bon Appétit!

La Quiche Lorraine

Recipe Courtesy of Chef William Rolle, Rolle French Gourmet Foods © 2004 Gannett Co., Inc.

INGREDIENTS

Short Crust Pastry

- 1 cup plain flour
- 1/2 cup butter (unsalted)
- 2-3 ounces water
- 1 egg
- Dash of salt

Filling

- 7 ounces diced ham
- 3 eggs
- 2 cups half and half cream
- 2 ounces Swiss cheese
- Salt, pepper, grated nutmeg



DIRECTIONS

For the pastry, combine the flour and the salt on your working table. Add the butter (cut into small cubes) until the consistency is coarse. Stir and work in the egg and the water until the dough becomes a ball. Leave the paste for at least 30 minutes (with a bit of flour on bottom).

To prepare the quiche, preheat the oven to 400 degrees. Butter the pie dishes. Spread the pastry in the pie dishes with your fingers (using flour to help, push the dough from the middle to the sides of dishes). Let the pastry stand a bit higher than the dish edge. Bake the pastry for five to ten minutes; get it out before it shrinks (adjust sides if needed). Place the ham and cheese in the pan. In the meantime, beat the eggs and cream with a fork in a bowl and add the seasoning. Pour the mix in the pan. Bake for 15 to 20 minutes, until the center is firm. Serve warm with a salad. Serves four to six people.

