



The Southeast of France



Bonjour, my name is Manon! Follow me on a tour of southeastern 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.





A History Fashioned by the Mediterranean



THE SOUTHEAST borders Italy, Switzerland and the Mediterranean sea, placing it at the crossroads of various cultures and civilizations. Indeed, several civilizations invaded the region during its long and tumultuous history, and each left behind a rich historical heritage that can still be seen today.

The Roman influence is particularly hard to miss. Indeed, Julius Caesar himself named the southern part of the region "Provincia," and the name stuck, becoming today's Provence.

Remains of their ancient constructions can be found throughout the area. **The Pont du Gard**, 158 feet high and 900 feet long, still stands tall, as a testimony to the Romans' engineering skills.



A glimpse of the exterior of the Gallo-Roman Arena found in Arles

Lyon is home to Roman amphitheaters, **Arles** has a Roman arena and theater, and Roman baths can be visited in

Nice. **Aix-les-Bains**, next to the Lac du Bourget, has thermal baths that the Romans used over 2,000 years ago.

The Greeks, who came before the Romans, also left their mark on the region. They were the ones who brought grapevines to Roussillon, which has now become a major wine-producing area. **Marseilles**, whose port was Europe's gateway for most of the trade carried out with the Middle East and North Africa, was invaded by the Greeks in the 7th century BC. It is now France's largest port and second largest city, and continues to have close links with the Middle East and North Africa.



The Notre-Dame-de-la Garde, seen from the old port in Marseilles.

The Middle Ages played an important role in shaping the region. Pope Clement V moved the papal court to **Avignon** in 1309, where it remained until 1376 before moving back to Rome. Famous Avignon sites from that period in time include the Palais des Papes and the Rue des Teinturiers, as well as nearby Gordes, a village perched in the mountains with a 16th-century castle, and Tournon-sur-Rhône (which boasts its own medieval castle).

The **Côte d'Azur**, the coastline of southern France, was primarily shaped by more recent historical events.

Saint-Tropez, located at the tip of a peninsula, first attracted artists and, in the 1950s, young Parisians as well. The film "And God Created Woman," starring Brigitte Bardot, helped establish St-Tropez's image as a young, playful place. Today, tourists continue to flock to the coastal city to enjoy its lovely beaches and to relax in its classy cafes while admiring the luxurious boats in its harbor.



A village perched high in the mountainous landscape of Corsica

CORSICA THE BEAUTIFUL

Corsican rebels had been fighting for independence for 15 years when the Genoese sold the island to France in 1768. The year after, Napoleon Bonaparte, future Emperor of France, was born in Ajaccio. Between the 11th and 13th centuries, Corsica was a colony of the republic of Pisa, and Roman architecture can still be seen there today.

Cannes was born when a British Lord built a villa there in 1834. Other foreigners did the same and thereby transformed the fishing port into a top Mediterranean resort with sandy beaches. The fort on nearby Ile Sainte-Marguerite is where the notorious Man in the Iron Mask was imprisoned in the 17th century.

The **Cap d'Antibes**, a rocky peninsula, also known simply as "the Cap," attracted F. Scott Fitzgerald and rich Americans in the 1920s. Today, the city hosts a world renowned jazz festival and a number of sumptuous villas.

MONACO: A SOVEREIGN STATE ON A ROCK

For the past seven centuries, the Grimaldi family has ruled **Monaco**, a sovereign state smaller than New York's Central Park and located along France's Mediterranean coast. At the end of the 13th century, Charles Grimaldi took possession of the Monaco Rock and established the House of Monaco. Prince Rainier III, the current ruler, gave the Monegasque people a new constitution in 1962 and brought his country into the United Nations in 1993.



The city of Monaco was built on a rock.



Mild Winters and Mistral Winds: a Varied Geography

THE EXTREMELY varied landscapes of southeastern France account for the area's wide range of climates. Most of the region has a Mediterranean climate, especially Provence and the Côte d'Azur which enjoy warm winters and hot, dry summers. However, due to higher elevations, the French Alps have a much colder climate in which snow is common during the winter. Some ski resorts in the Southern Alps are only an hour's drive from the sea.

An exception to the warm Mediterranean climate is the **Mistral** wind. The Mistral is a strong and sometimes violent wind that results from the differences in atmospheric pressure between northern and southern France. It has a major influence on the region's climate and is quite beneficial to grape-growing.

THE CAMARGUE



Pink Flamingoes aimlessly wander along the Rhone delta in Camargue

The **Camargue** (346,00 acres) is composed of marshland. It is home to a rich selection of wildlife, including pink flamingoes, bulls and wild horses. The gardians, or French cowboys, ride the wild horses of this fertile land.

From the rivers to the lakes to the Mediterranean sea, many bodies of water can be found in southeastern France, including the Ardèche (the fastest-flowing French river), the Rhône and Saône rivers, and the Bourget and Léman lakes. The **Saône** separates Beaujolais to the west and Bresse to the east. The **Rhône** has its source in the Alps and feeds **Lac Léman** (known as Lake Geneva in Switzerland) before finding its way to the Mediterranean. In Arles, the Rhône divides into two, its arms encircling the Camargue delta.



Dormant volcanoes in Auvergne

France's various terrains can all be found in the Southeast, from mountains to rolling hills to flat plateaus. The huge central plateau of ancient granite and crystalline rock that makes up the **Massif Central** embraces the departments of Auvergne, Limousin, Aveyron, and Lozère. The Massif Central covers one-fifth of France and is over 250 million years old. It is home to several extinct volcanoes, including Mont Domes, Mont Dore, and Mont du Cantal.

To the east, stretching south from Lake Léman almost to the Mediterranean are the **French Alps**, where the highest point in Europe can be found (Mont Blanc, at 15,765 feet). This area is also home to Europe's highest town, **Briançon**, which surveys the heavens from 4,330 feet high. Another famous mountain in the region of Provence is **Mont Ventoux**, or the "windy mountain."



The vibrant lavender fields of Provence

The region boasts two renowned national parks, **Vercors** (known for its wilderness, mountain caves and deep, narrow gorges) and the Luberon (whose Montagne du **Luberon** is home to more than 1,000 plant species). Beautiful fields of lavender animate the landscape with splashes of color.

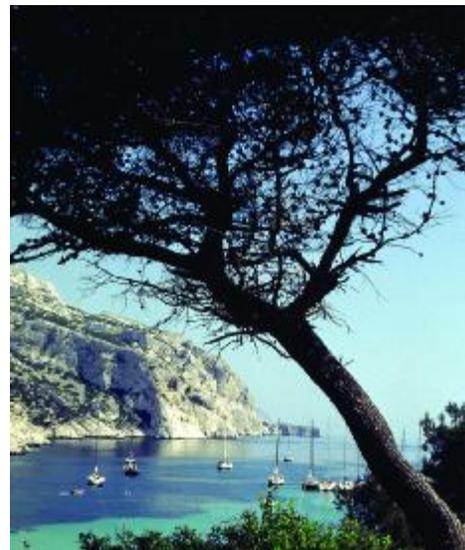
Among the natural treasures of the region is the Vallon Pont d'Arc, the starting point for exploring the **Gorges de l'Ardèche**, either by boat or via a scenic route overlooking the canyon.

Another famous gorge is the **Gorges du Verdon**, one of the most famous sites in Europe. The dark green Verdon River flows through the valley, forming a stunning gorge that can reach depths of up to 2,297 feet.



The breathtaking Gorges du Verdon

The **Gorges du Tarn**, through which the Tarn river has carved its way through the limestone plateaus of Cevennes for millions of years (thereby creating an overwhelming canyon), are just as spectacular.



A rocky inlet between Marseilles and Cassis

Finally, there are the **Calanques de Cassis**, a unique coastline between Marseilles and Cassis, with jagged white cliffs as high as 1,312 feet overlooking the mesmerizing, translucent and turquoise waters of the Mediterranean. No wonder it has become such a hit with tourists from all across the world, seeking the sun, the sea, and secluded little coves!



Tourism and Technology: a Prosperous Economy



THE SOUTHEAST (23.5 percent of France) is rich in resources and its economy is highly diversified.

The strategic location of **Rhône-Alpes**, coupled with a good quality of life, attracts many economic activities. Efficient public transportation (including trams and the TGV) and one of France's largest airports, Lyon-St Exupéry, offer easy access to the region. Lyon, Rhône-Alpes's major city, is the third largest city of France.

Rhône-Alpes's industries are varied and include chemicals (Rhodia), mechanical engineering, electronics (SEB), pharmaceuticals (Aventis Pasteur), textiles (ribbons and braids), food and beverages (Entremont, Evian, Candia), biotechnology and energy. Research is also an important activity in a region that produces numerous patents.



A production line for Evian mineral water.

Indeed, the inhabitants of the region are tech-savvy, and the area offers excellent professional training with its great universities (such as the University of Grenoble), and 35 prestigious schools, where many French engineers are trained.

Tourism, which brought in 10 billion euros in 2002 alone, is a source of wealth for the region. The French Alps feature ski resorts such as Avoriaz, Chamonix and the city of Albertville (which hosted the 1992 Winter Olympics). The Ardèche offers wild scenery with beautiful gorges where people can practice canoeing, whitewater rafting and climbing.



The Avoriaz ski resort in the Rhône Alpes.

The region's agricultural sector is also very important. As mentioned previously, the Saone river separates the region into two areas: Beaujolais, the wine country, to the west, and Bresse, the rural area (with its country-style furniture and specialties such as the famous Bresse chicken), to the east. But the Southeast's most devoted agricultural region is elsewhere, in the **Auvergne**.

Almost 13 percent of Auvergne's inhabitants work in agriculture, double the French average of 6 percent. In addition, 60 percent of the land in Auvergne is devoted to agriculture. The inhabitants of Auvergne specialize in livestock breeding but also produce grain on vast, fertile plains.

Industry is also a major component of Auvergne's economy. The food and beverage industries, as well as the production of tires, are particularly important sectors. The Michelin brothers discovered how to use rubber to make tires here at the end of the 19th century. Today, Michelin is the world's second-largest tire maker and Auvergne is the international capital of rubber.



The Michelin Man

Languedoc-Roussillon's economy relies heavily on tourism, which brought in 4.9 billion euros for the region in 2000. The number-one destination for campers in France, Languedoc-Roussillon has four UNESCO World Heritage sites—France's portion of the Santiago de Compostela pilgrimage route, the historic fortified city of Carcassonne, the Canal du Midi, and the Pont du Gard (a Roman aqueduct)—not to mention 127 nature reserves. Languedoc-Roussillon also produces wine and other agricultural products, such as fruits and vegetables.



The fortified city of Carcassonne

Together, **Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur** and **Corsica** form the third-largest economic region of France. This area's economy flourishes thanks to the service sector and tourism. The region has two of the largest French airports: Nice-Côte d'Azur and Marseilles-Provence. The Côte d'Azur attracts people who like sunny, crowded sandy beaches, while Cannes and St-Tropez also offer the opportunity to practice star-spotting all year long.

With nine major ports, the region is an important commercial and naval center. Marseilles is the leading commercial port in France and is famous for its fish markets.



A woman sells fish in the old port of Marseilles



Seafood, Wine and Truffles

Who could ask for anything more!



THE RENOWNED culinary specialties and natural delicacies of southeastern France account for some of the world's most delicious treats.

Over 2,500 years ago, ancient Greek settlers first planted olive trees on Provence's hillsides. Since then, olive oil has become a staple in the southeastern diet, and olive groves are found throughout the region.



Beaujolais Nouveau wine

Wines have been produced in the Southeast for over 2,000 years. In fact, the Rhône Valley proudly harbors the oldest vineyards in all of France. Provence is also one of the main wine-producing regions of France, with many famous vineyards (including Châteauneuf-du-Pape). Another famous wine produced in the area is the delicious Beaujolais Nouveau, which is unveiled annually on the third Thursday of November.

And alongside the Rhône Valley vineyards are the luxuriant Cavaillon melon fields.

Unique blends of culinary herbs and spices are trademarks of the Southeast's flavorful cuisine. Mediterranean cooking harmoniously combines fresh vegetables, spices and herbs to create a savory mix. Ingredients such as mint, basil, fennel, garlic, rosemary, savory, sage, marjoram, coriander, and parsley can all be found in one single dish!



Celebrated Cavaillon melons



The treasured truffles of Provence.

The delectable truffle, also known as the "black diamond," is an extraordinary mushroom found mainly in Provence, in the oak plantations near the Verdon river. The truffle harvest represents a 100-year-old tradition, in which pigs and dogs are used to sniff out these buried treasures. Truffles are typically sold at village markets, and on account of their rarity they can cost up to 300 euros per pound!

A wide array of fish can be found throughout the region. Rivers, streams and lakes alike contribute a variety of freshwater fish to local menus, from the wild salmon found in the Allier River to oysters from Bouzigues and mussels from Sète.

Bouillabaisse soup, perhaps the world's most famous fish stew, is composed of seafood (usually shrimp, scallops, or mussels) and combined with garlic, parsley, spices, and olive oil.



An artisan carefully handles maturing Beaufort

The cheese of the Southeast ranks among France's best. Auvergne alone produces five famous cheeses: Salers, Cantal, Bleu d'Auvergne, Fourme d'Ambert and Saint-Nectaire. In the Rhône-Alpes, one finds the Tomme de Savoie (a mild, semi-soft cheese), Beaufort (Savoie's gruyère)

and Reblochon (an unpasteurized cheese). And let's not forget the famous blue-veined cheese, Roquefort.

Several other notable specialties can be found in the Southeast. Bresse, for example, is famous for France's finest fowl—chickens that are poached and stuffed with truffles.

From Aix-en-Provence come calissons, a traditional southeastern sweet made from almonds, candied fruit, and a thin wafer.

Montélimar, the famous nougat, is a sweet white delicacy made from sugar, honey, vanilla, almonds, pistachios, and lavender.



Provence's tasty calissons and nougat.

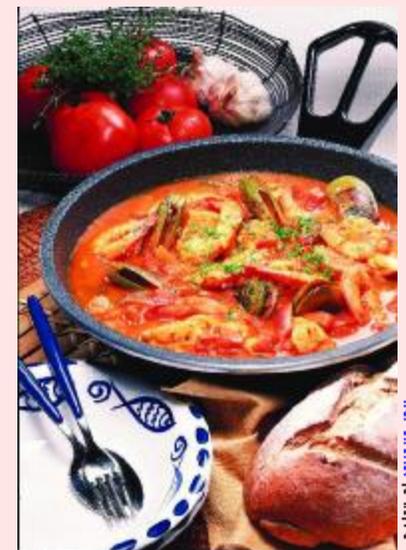
Bouillabaisse Recipe (4 servings)

Ingredients: 6 potatoes, 1 leek or onion, 1 can of tomato purée, garlic, saffron, salt, pepper, olive oil, a bottle of white wine, 4 fillets of hog-fish, 1 pound of mussels and a few large shrimp.

Pour the olive oil in a stew pan and put the slices of potatoes on top. Create a layer with the sliced leek and another layer with the tomato purée. Repeat until all the vegetables are used. Fill 2/3 of the pan with white wine, and add the spices. Place the fish fillets on top, as well as the washed mussels, shrimp and salt and pepper.

Close the lid. When it whistles, reduce heat and leave on low heat for 10 to 15 minutes.

Bon Appétit!



Fish stew at its finest, the Bouillabaisse

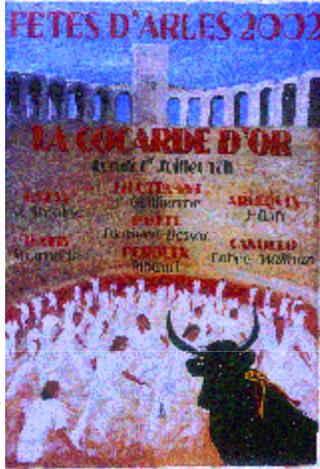


Multicultural events



- January**
Monte Carlo Rally
(usually mid-January)
- February**
Lemon festival in Menton
(mid February - March).
Nice Carnival, Battle of Flowers
(late February - early March).
Jazz festival in Cannes
(mid to end of February).
- March**
Grenoble Jazz Festival
(March 18-27)
- May**
Grand Prix of Monaco
(Ascension week-end)
Cannes Film Festival
(second and third week)
Nîmes Feria (bullfights)
(end of May)
- July**
Marseilles Festival
(performing arts)
Cavaillon Melon Festival
Avignon Theater Festival
(all month long)
International Jazz Festival
Antibes and Juan-les-Pins.
(mid to end of July)
- August**
Fête de la Véraison
Châteauneuf du Pape
Fruit harvest festival
(first or second weekend)
Parade of Lavender Floats
Digne
(first or second weekend)
- September**
Musicades (classical music)
Lyon
(first and second week)
Grape harvest in wine regions.
- October**
Pottery makers festival in Lyon
(first weekend)
- November**
Truffle season in Provence
(until March)
- December**
Men's International skiing
competition in Val d'Isère
The year's most important
skiing competition!
(mid-December).

THE SOUTHEAST'S culture has been heavily influenced by its neighboring countries—Spain, Italy, and the nations of North Africa—and by Marseilles's many commercial ties with the Middle East and Africa. Indeed, the port of **Marseilles** has long been known as Europe's gateway to the Orient and Africa. The Southeast has thereby become a melting pot of cultures, creating an eclectic mix of local crafts and traditions.



A poster announcing the Concarde d'Or bullfight in Arles.

It could be said that **Arles** encompasses all of Provence's charms and illustrates many of its traditions. Every year, Arles organizes festivals and bullfights very similar to those that take place across the border, in Spain. In April, French cowboys from Camargue, the Gardians, come to show off their skills in the Arles Arena.

Food is celebrated throughout the Southeast. **Menton** holds a Lemon Festival in February and **Cavaillon**, not be outdone, has a Melon Festival in July. The Rhône-Alpes region holds wine tastings in the Beaujolais area and celebrates the new Beaujolais Nouveau vintage every third Thursday of November.

The Southeast also celebrates music, movies and the performing arts. From mid-July to mid-August, **Avignon** hosts one of France's largest festivals in its historic Palais des Papes, featuring not only ballet, theater and classical concerts, but also street performances and jazz.

Over a million spectators gather every February for the amazing **Nice** Carnival, when music, parades, and dancing last for two straight weeks in a lively atmosphere of merry-making.

For year-long entertainment, tourists flock to the the Côte d'Azur and **Monaco**, which are full of expensive hotels and boats, showing off the luxury and wealth the region is famous for.



Cannes hosts its famous International Film Festival in May. This festival started in 1939, after a group of critics and filmmakers, including Louis Lumière (he and his brother Auguste invented the film camera), petitioned the French government to sponsor a festival where international movies could be shown without bias or political repression.



The colorful and animated Lemon Festival of Menton



The ever so eccentric and vibrant Nice Festival



Palm trees and luxurious hotels and casinos line the Promenade des Anglais in Nice.

FORMULA 1 IN MONACO



Monaco's Grand Casino is world-renowned and so are its two auto races: the Formula 1 Grand Prix of Monaco (pictured), which is held in May, and the Monte Carlo Rally, held in January. The city's narrow, twisted roads make for spectacular races!



Santons, ornamental Christmas figurines, are typical of Provence.



For more information: www.franceguide.com