



Published November  
2003

## COUNTRIES IN BRIEF ... On assignment in FRANCE

By Anne Dean, Editorial Director

Sending an assignee abroad? Then, this IGM country profile should be of interest to you. This month we highlight **FRANCE**

"How can you be expected to govern a country that has 246 kinds of cheese?"  
Charles de Gaulle (1890-1970), President of France, *Newsweek*, 1 October 1962.

More than 3,000 foreign industrial companies, many of them British and North American, currently take advantage of France's location and established trade relations with neighboring markets. Consequently, a network of relocation agencies, expatriate clubs and English-language societies has emerged throughout France to enable foreign transferees to integrate into the community with minimal difficulty.

As well as being at the forefront of business and industry in Europe, France is renowned for its cultural and historical heritage. The country is filled with over 30,000 Chateaux and monuments that retrace over 2,000 years of history.

France is one of 11 countries in the European Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) to adopt the euro (EUR) as its new official currency. Francs can be exchanged for euros at the Central Bank until 17 February 2012, but they can no longer be used as legal tender.

Northern France typically enjoys a temperate climate, with warm summers and cool winters which may bring some snowfall. The highest regions of the Alps and Pyrenees are covered with snow all year, and the Mediterranean Coast is usually home to hot, dry summers and relatively mild winters. In Paris, the weather is usually pleasant after May, with spring bringing a considerable amount of rain. During the summer months, light or medium-weight clothing should be most comfortable. The winter months can get quite cold, so heavier clothing is necessary.

The winter months in Paris can be bitter, but the coldest month is February with average temperatures ranging between one and seven degrees Celsius (34 to 45 degrees Fahrenheit). In general, temperatures in the months of December and January also hover anywhere between one and ten degrees Celsius (34 to 50 degrees Fahrenheit). Temperatures in March and April rise slightly and there is more rain. The average temperature in March and April is typically about 12 degrees Celsius (54 degrees Fahrenheit).

In general, one can expect temperatures in July and August to be between 15 and 28 degrees Celsius (60 to 82 degrees Fahrenheit). The average temperature in October is about 17 degrees Celsius (63 degrees Fahrenheit), while the average temperature in September is about 21 degrees Celsius (70 degrees Fahrenheit).

France and the French are world renowned for their nationalism. As a result, foreigners visiting or living in the country often view the French in a stereotypical manner. However, French culture is one of rich heritage and tradition.

The French may appear indifferent to strangers. Instead, they tend to reserve their warmth and hospitality for friends and family. Foreigners will find that the French enjoy life's simple pleasures like reading in a cafe or eating a two hour lunch on Sunday with their family.

France is divided into 21 administrative and cultural regions, not including Corsica and the nation's overseas territories.

Each region of France is physically and culturally diverse. Each province has its own distinct style which can be seen in the people themselves, as well as in the architecture and cuisine. The sheer diversity found throughout the country is no more apparent than in the "City of Lights". Paris is one of the most high-tech cities in all of Europe, and yet traditional villages and old-fashioned buildings are found amongst monumental structures like the Louvre. Like all of France, Paris offers a wide variety of experiences, opportunities and sights for all.

Paris is world famous for its rich cuisine, fine wines and stunning architecture. In addition, it is served by one of the most efficient and pleasant public transport systems in Europe. The city is compact, consisting of twenty areas, referred to as *arrondissements*. Although Paris has some dangerous sections, the crime rate is relatively low compared to other major urban centres throughout the world.

The French also enjoy being different. French culture can be separated from the cultures of other countries and French people even enjoy being different from one another. French individuals are passionate about conversation, cuisine, fashion, language and sexuality. In general, the French try to avoid boredom and, as a result, certain elements in their life, such as fashion trends, may pass by quickly. Though surrounded by a long history of tradition, the French continue to look into the future and embrace new ideas.

Although dialects vary from region to region, French is the official spoken and written language of France. Most nationals are familiar with at least one other European language, but visitors will find that proficiency in French is very useful.

Although a large majority of French nationals are Catholic, a much smaller number actually practices the religion. There are minorities of Protestants and Muslims in Paris and other major cities.

More and more expatriates are joining the local English-speaking churches and synagogues for social as well as spiritual reasons. In addition to prayer groups and bible study, many of these institutions offer community service activities, Christmas bazaars and even 'pizza night' parties. Your assignees may find that members come from all different ethnic backgrounds and even different religions. If they are looking for new social opportunities, don't overlook the idea!