

I'm not a robot



68.8K Learning some French will help you further insight into the French culture, mentality and way of life. The ability to speak even un peu français (a little bit of French) and avoid making these French faux pas will enhance your travel experience and open the doors to unique connections with the locals. France is the world's top tourist destination, attracting more than 79.5 million visitors a year! That's why French is the next language in my travel phrase guide series. Not only that, but speaking French also comes in handy when travelling to Africa, Switzerland, Canada, Monaco, French Polynesia, the Seychelles amongst other places. Why else should you learn French? Well, it makes learning other languages, especially Romance languages like Spanish, Italian, Portuguese and Romanian much easier. Travelling to France? Don't be treated like a tourist! Live your best travel experiences and learn France for less than the cost of eating at a tourist trap restaurant or a taxi driver who has "taken you for a ride". In addition to my free French travel phrase guide, I've made it even easier for you to master the French language so you can create lifelong memories as you mingle with locals, get local tips, avoid tourist traps, and make new friends. Join my popular French course here. Let's take a quick look at the French language so you're a bit more clued up on its origin, use, and vocabulary. I hope you enjoy this post as much as I enjoyed bringing it together. If you have any requests for other languages, let me know in the comments section! Where is French spoken? Did you know that more than 34 million people speak French on five continents? That's a lot of Bonjour! French is the third most spoken language in Europe, after German and English, and has official language status in 29 countries, including: Belgium, Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Canada, Chad, the Ivory Coast, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, France, Haiti, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Mali, Monaco, Niger, Rwanda, Senegal, Seychelles, Switzerland, Togo and Vanuatu. French is even one of six official languages of the United Nations. It seems like nearly everyone wants to learn French, it's the only language, alongside English, that is taught in every country in the world! And the best way to learn it? Well, France operates the biggest international network of cultural institutes, which run French-language courses close to a million learners. My two favourite ways to learn French is by attending language classes – so I'm not only held accountable but also for the social aspect – and going on language holiday too! 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Now for the tricky stuff! The French alphabet looks very similar to the English alphabet, but there are a few key differences. There is a total of 26 letters in the French alphabet. Standard French contains 13 oral vowels and up to 4 nasal vowels, but there are 5 additional accented letters that can be applied to change the sound of a letter. Here are some helpful pronunciation tips: Using Liaisons One of the fundamental rules of pronouncing French (and many other Latin-based languages) is that everything has to flow. That's one of the reasons why French sounds so beautiful. If you're speaking French correctly, everything should sound like a continuous melody. That's where liaisons come in. Liaisons are a phonetic link between two words that may sound awkward if left unconnected. Let's take a look at some examples where they are used when speaking: After pronouns e.g. vous avez sounds like vooz-ah-vey not voo ah-vey Numbers and nouns e.g. deux amis sounds like derz-ah-mee not der ah-mee One syllable prepositions e.g. chez eux sounds like shez-ur not sheh ur And liaisons that are forbidden when speaking: When using full names e.g. After (and) Liaisons may seem complicated at first, but they will become easier the more you listen to spoken French. After a while, you'll automatically be able to notice where a liaison is needed (and where it isn't) and how to make it sound natural when speaking. What Not to Pronounce in French Much like English, the French language isn't written phonetically. The same sound can be represented by several different combinations of letters, and there are many cases of the silent "e" and the silent "h". The French "e" is often silent in French, especially at the end of a word. Here are some examples: Rue (road/street) is pronounced roo not roo-ee and unacceptable (unacceptable) is pronounced an-shap-tah-bil not an-shap-tah-ble Of course, there are exceptions when it comes to masculine and feminine adjectives and nouns. In the case of feminine adjectives and nouns, this typically means that the final consonant of the masculine form will now be pronounced. So, the masculine ouvert, meaning open in the masculine form and pronounced oo-ver, will become ouverte in the feminine form and pronounced oo-vert. The "e" makes the final letter sounded. The Final Consonant As you've probably already noticed, there are a tonne of French letters that simply aren't pronounced at the end of words. Don't worry, you'll get used to it! In French, silent letters, or lettres muettes, have rules and exceptions just like many other linguistic concepts. In general, the final consonants of a word are usually silent in French except in some cases of the letters c, f, l, or r. Just remember this simple rule, the consonants in the word "careful" are always pronounced. For example, Avec (with) is pronounced ah-vek Cinq (five) is pronounced sank Five (winter) is pronounced ee-ver The general rule regarding French word endings is that when in doubt, you probably don't pronounce it. But, French is full of exceptions! The Infamous "r" For many English speakers, the French "r" can be a source of frustration. To pronounce it, you'll need to use your throat and imagine you're trying to gargle. The French "r" is pronounced in the same place as the English "k", but with your throat closed. The Silent "h" As you've probably noticed from every French speaker's failed attempt to say the word "hamburger" in English, the "h" in French is a silent letter no matter where it's located in a word. The only exception to this is when the preceding letter is "c", in which case the "ch" combination makes a "sh" sound or "k" sound. Here are a few examples of the silent "h": Le haricot vert (French bean) is pronounced leh-ah-ree-oh ver Huit (eight) is pronounced weet Hiver (winter) is pronounced ee-ver Vocabulary We anglophones don't have the greatest reputation for speaking foreign languages, but French is the one language in which many of us can at least utter a few words. Admittedly there are a few finicky grammar rules to learn, but generally speaking, English grammar corresponds relatively closely to French grammar. Consider words in English that end with -ible and -able, these are the same in French, only the pronunciation changes. So, the French word "possible" sounds like poss-ee-bleh and "comfortable" becomes kom-for-tah-bleh. Then we have English words ending in -ent and -ant which also come from French and have the same spelling and the same meaning. So, the word, different sounds like differ-ohnt and important sounds like ahm-poor-tahn. The "t" at the end is just slightly sounded. Had enough? Ok, one more! Numbers in English ending in -ary like contrary become -aire in French. So, "contrary" becomes contraire and sounds like kon-trair. There are so many rules like this, so you can see just how easy learning French can be. Here are top 10 French phrases for travellers Want the infographic to take with you? Scroll to the bottom of the page. Greetings Essentials Questions Eating Out Getting Around Numbers Days Emergencies English French Pronunciation Hello Salut sah-loo Good morning Bonjour bon-jur Good evening Bonsoir bonn-swah Good night Bonne nuit bonn nwee Goodbye Au revoir oh rev-oh How are you? Comment allez-vous? kohm-ah-lee-vooz I'm well, and you? Ça va bien, et vous? sa va byen, eh voo Good, thanks Ça va bien, merci sa va byen, mer-see Please S'il vous plaît sil voo pleh Thank you Merci mer-see You're welcome De rien deh rien-ee Oui yes Oui well No non Excuse me Pardonnez-moi par-don-eh-mwah I'm sorry Je suis désolé/je suis désolée-oh I don't understand Je ne comprends pas jehn kom-pron pah Do you speak English? Parlez-vous anglais? par-leh-vooz ohn-gleh How much is...? Combien coûte? kohm-byen koo Where is...? Où est-ce? oh seht? When? Quand? kohn May I please have...? Est-ce que je pourrais avoir...? es-kerh je pour-ay av-oir Beer Bière biyer Wine Vin vahn Water Eau oh I don't eat... Je ne mange pas de... jehn monj pah I'm a vegetarian Je suis végétarien (masc.) / végétarienne (fem.) Je s'wee ve-jeh-tair-ree-an / ve-jeh-tair-ree-en the bill, please L'addition, s'il vous plaît lah-dee-zon, sil voo pleh Left Cauche gawsh Right Droite draht Straight ahead Tout droit roe dwat Turn left Tournez à gauche tour-ney ah gawsh Turn right Tournez à droite tour-ney ah drwat Bus bus ah-reet deh boos Train station Gare gaar Airport Aéroport ah-eh-ro-port Entrance Entrée ohn-treh Exit Sortie sor-ti 1 un 2 deux 3 trois 4 quatre 5 cinq 6 six 7 sept 8 huit 9 neuf 10 dix 20 vingt 30 trente 40 quarante 50 cinquante 60 soixante 70 soixante-dix 80 quatre-vingt 90 quatre-vingt-dix 100 cent 1000 cent Monday lundi Tuesday mardi Wednesday mercredi Thursday jeudi Friday vendredi Saturday samedi Sunday dimanche De-mahsh Help! À l'aide! ah I need a doctor J'ai besoin d'un médecin jay be-zohn dohn meh-deh-shahn I don't feel well Je ne me sens pas bien jehn meh sahnh pah bien Call the police! Appelez la police! ap-leh lah po-les Fière! Au Feu! au feu **There are a few places that use unique words for the numbers 70 (septante) and 90 (nonante), such as Belgium and Switzerland. With the numbers 80 to 89, combine the number 4, the number 20, and the ones. For example, in French 80 is four 20s, 81 is four 20s plus 1, and so forth. (Unlike most French-speaking countries, Switzerland actually has a word for the number 80. It's huitante.) Want more? Learn French with me, with Intrepid French! Travelling to France? Don't be treated like a tourist! Live your best travel experiences and learn France for less than the cost of eating at a tourist trap restaurant or a taxi driver who has "taken you for a ride". In addition to my free French travel phrase guide, I've made it even easier for you to master the French language so you can create lifelong memories as you mingle with locals, get local tips, avoid tourist traps, and make new friends. Join my popular French course here. Here's what my students are saying: Loved it, loved it, loved it. I've been trying to learn languages using various language learning apps for years now and although I know random words I feel no more confident in actually speaking the language than I was when I started... - Basil Pereira Click here more details and get instant access! Have a laugh with these funny French expressions like it? Pin or download this French travel phrase guide like it? Pin it for later! Learning French? Check out these French language guides Want to know more about learning languages? Start here! Don't miss my France Travel Guides Over to you! Which of these French phrases are the most useful? What other languages would you like a travel phrase guide for? Have you been to a French-speaking country? Let me know using the comments section below or join me on social media to start a conversation. Thanks for reading and I hope you enjoyed this post. Like what you see? Subscribe using the form below to have all of my posts delivered directly to your email. 76.8K Learning some French will help you further insight into the French culture, mentality, and way of life. The ability to speak even un peu français (a little bit of French) and avoid making these French faux pas will enhance your travel experience and open the doors to unique connections with the locals. France is the world's top tourist destination, attracting more than 79.5 million visitors a year! That's why French is the next language in my travel phrase guide series. Not only that, but speaking French also comes in handy when travelling to Africa, Switzerland, Canada, Monaco, French Polynesia, the Seychelles amongst other places. Why else should you learn French? Well, it makes learning other languages, especially Romance languages like Spanish, Italian, Portuguese and Romanian much easier. Travelling to France? Don't be treated like a tourist! 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French word using the phrase above, you might want to write it down before you forget it. Unfortunately, French spelling isn't the easiest. Generally, it's easier to figure out a word's pronunciation from its spelling than it is to know its spelling from its pronunciation. I wrote a guide to help you with French pronunciation here. So if you're not sure, ask someone "comment ça s'écrit?" - "How do you spell that?" Literally, "How does that write itself?" Or if you don't trust your own transcription abilities, try asking them to write it for you: say "Est-ce que vous pouvez l'écrire?" - "Can you write it (down)?" Other Helpful Phrases for Maintaining a French Conversation: Can you speak more slowly please? - Pouvez-vous parler plus lentement s'il vous plaît? Can you say it one more time? - Pouvez-vous le dire une fois de plus? Do you speak French? - Parlez-vous français? Do you understand? - Comprenez-vous? What do you do for a living? - Qu'est-ce que tu fais dans la vie? How old are you? - Quel âge as-tu? I'm years old - J'ai ans Where are you from? - D'où êtes-vous? I'm from... - Je viens... Are you married? - Es-tu marié? Are you single? - Es-tu célibataire? When can we meet? - Quand pouvons-nous nous rencontrer? What's your phone number? - Quel est ton numéro de téléphone? Struggling to find your way around? Not to worry. Just get a stranger's attention (remember what phrase would you use to do this?) and ask "où est X" - "Where is X?" "X" could be many things: la Tour Eiffel, le Louvre, Notre Dame... or perhaps something less exotic, like le metro or un restaurant. Another way of saying "where is it?" is où se trouve, literally "where is (it) found". Here's an example of où se trouve combined with another handy phrase to know: la station de métro la plus proche means "the closest metro station". One more piece of useful vocabulary: once you're in the metro station, you might want to ask someone "où est le guichet?" - "Where is the ticket window?" Now that you've found the guichet, you probably want to buy a billet - a ticket. But what type of ticket do you want? un billet aller simple - a one-way ticket un billet aller retour - a round-trip ticket Make your decision, and tell the assistant "Je voudrais un billet aller simple/retour pour X" - "I would like to buy a one-way/round-trip ticket to X", where X is your destination. France isn't the cheapest of countries - so whether you're at the guichet or elsewhere, it doesn't hurt to be price-conscious. To ask how much something costs, say "c'est combien?" - "how much is it?" You can also say "Combien ça coûte?" - literally, "how much does it cost?" It's worth learning this phrase, because you might need it in a hurry! Où sont les toilettes means "where are the toilets?" Although if you want to use a public toilet, you could be searching for a long time. They aren't very common in France - and if you do find one, you'll probably have to pay to use it. You're probably better off buying something in a café and using their toilets instead. (Why is it "où sont", when previously we used "où est"? Easy: sont means "are" while est means "is". Since toilettes is plural, you must use sont, not est - "where are the toilets?", rather than "where is the toilets", which wouldn't make sense.) If you're checking into a hotel in a French-speaking country, one useful thing to know the checkout time. One way to find this out is to ask "à quelle heure est-ce qu'il faut régler la note?" - "What time must we check out?" Another similar expression is: "quelle est l'heure limite d'occupation?" (Lit: "What is the occupancy cut-off time?" France is famous for its food, so while you're there, you'll probably want to dine in a restaurant or two! When dining out in any language, there are usually a few subtleties around how to order. Here I'll explain one of the more important things to know in French: the words for "menu". I say "words" because there are two main ways to say "menu" in French. The general word is carte, which you may recognise from the expression à la carte. A carte is what you typically think of when you hear the word "menu". It's a list of individually-priced options; you pick and choose what you want, then add up the prices to get your total bill. But you can also ask for a menu, which is usually called a "fixed-price menu" in English. When ordering from a menu, you pick an option for each course (starter, main course, etc.) and pay the same, fixed price no matter what you selected. Whichever option you choose, inform the serveur/serveuse ("waiter/waitress") by saying "la carte/le menu, s'il vous plaît" - "the menu/fixed-price menu, please." This doesn't apply to everybody, but for those to whom it does apply, it's very important: informing the waiter about your dietary restrictions. The simplest way to do this is to say "Je ne peux pas manger de X" - "I can't eat X". Here are some of the more common ways to fill in the blank: cacahuètes - peanuts noix - nuts gluten - gluten fruits de mer - shell fish œufs - eggs poisson - fish produits laitiers - dairy products soja - soy viande - meat If you're vegetarian, say so with "je suis végétarien" (for men) or "végétarienne" (for women.) A vegan is a "végétalien(ne)", although végétan/végane is sometimes used too. You could also explain "je ne consomme pas de produits animaux." - "I don't consume animal products" Nous voudrions commander maintenant. - "We would like to place an order now." To "order" in French is commander, when you're talking about ordering something in a restaurant. Don't confuse this with ordonner, which is used in the sense of "to order a person to do something", such as in the military. After receiving the carte or the menu, and perhaps informing the waiter of your dietary restrictions, you may be given some time to make a decision. When you're ready, say "nous voudrions commander maintenant" - "we'd like to order now." It's also acceptable in nearly any restaurant to use on instead of nous for we, as I mentioned earlier: On voudrait commander maintenant. Or if you're by yourself, say je voudrais (I'd like) instead of nous voudrions (we'd like). Bon appétit! One final bit of restaurant-related vocabulary - the bill (or "check" if you're American) is l'addition. So when you're ready to leave, say l'addition, s'il vous plaît - "the bill, please". You'll often hear la facture used in Quebec instead of l'addition - however both are perfectly understandable to waitstaff. Can you help me please? - Pouvez-vous m'aider s'il vous plaît? I would like... - Je voudrais... I'd like one of those please - J'en voudrais un s'il vous plaît One: Un Two: Deux Three: Trois Four: Quatre Five: *Cinq Learn more: French Numbers: Counting in French from 1 - 100+ Finally, let's talk about love. They say that French is a romantic language, so maybe in your travels you'll find love on the road? Or maybe after you get home, you'll want to use your newfound French skills to woo that special someone. So how do you say "I love you" in French? The French word for "to love" is adorer - but you generally only use this word when talking about things rather than people, for example to say that you love a place, book, or song. When talking to a person, say je t'aime. Aimer usually means "like", but in this context it means "love" in the most romantic of senses. Use it wisely! Here are some other romantic French phrases: My heart - Mon cœur My love - Mon amour You're beautiful - Tu es belle (to a woman); Tu es beau (to a man) You're too cute - Tu es trop mignon I like you (Lit: "You please me") - Tu me plais Wondering what a famous French saying is that you could use in everyday life? Or how do you say "cool" in French slang? Here are some bonus French sayings and slang to level up your French: Cool - Cool (yes, really! Just say it with a French accent ☺) Awesome - Génial That sucks - C'est nul That's great - C'est top Don't worry - L'inquiète Losing my mind - Perdre la tête Can you think of any other useful French phrases for tourists? What are the most important words and phrases for beginners to know? Let us know in the comments. And if you're ready to learn more French, check out the 111 core French words that are commonly used. Or learn some more fun French slang!