

Traditional French Food
Regional Recipes From France

Geography

France is the second-largest country in Europe (after Russia). Much of the country is surrounded by mountains. The highest mountain, Mount Blanc, is near France's border with Italy. The climate and soil of France create good conditions for farming. Although only four percent of the French people earn their living from farming, the country is self-sufficient when it comes to growing its own food

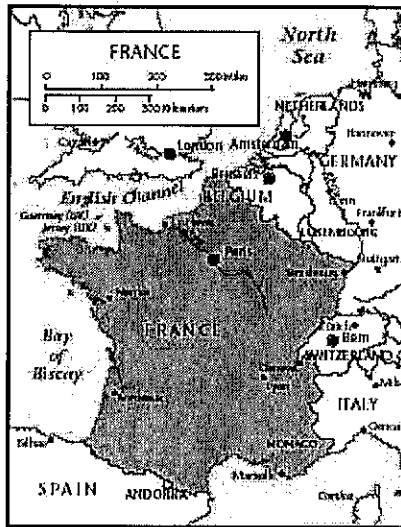
HISTORY AND FOOD

The French have always been proud of their sophisticated way of cooking. Fertile soil provides fresh fruits, vegetables, herbs, grains, and meat, nearly year-round. The soil is also suitable for growing grapes, which are used for making some of the finest wines in the world. Food and alcohol play important roles in French society—the way a person eats often reflects their French heritage, region of birth, social status, and health.

During the reign of Louis XIV (1661–1715), the nobility (upper class citizens) would hold twelve-hour feasts with over ten different dishes served. The presentation of the food was just as important as the taste and quality of the ingredients. Such elaborate feasts were too expensive and required too much time for the common people to prepare for themselves, but others were also able to enjoy exotic foods and spices, such as the kumquat fruit and yellow saffron, brought back from Africa and Asia by explorers. These foods were quickly incorporated into the French diet.

FOODS OF THE FRENCH

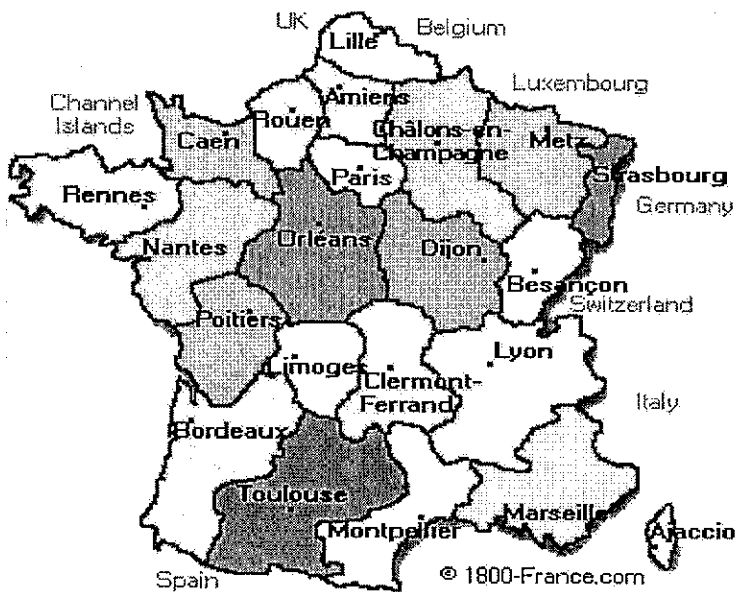
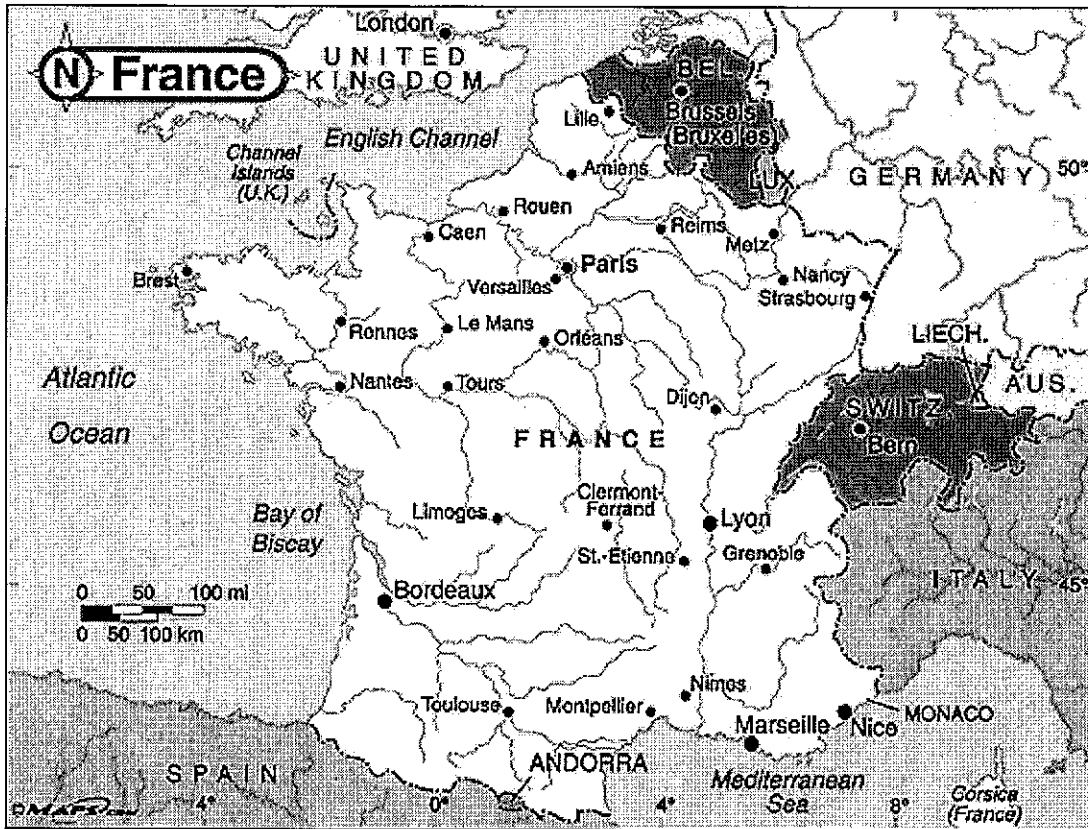
The baguette, a long, thin loaf of crusty bread, is the most important part of any French meal. Everyone at the table is expected to eat a piece. It is eaten in a variety of ways, including being used to make

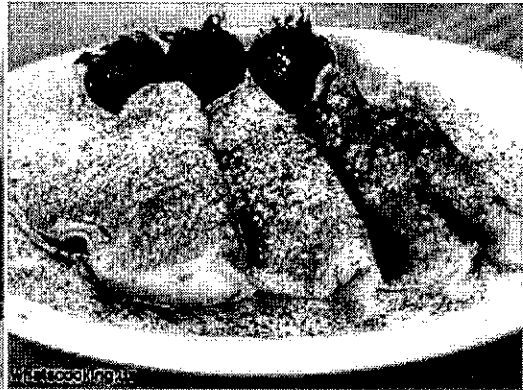
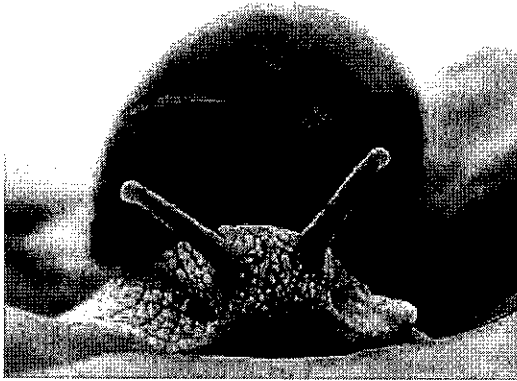
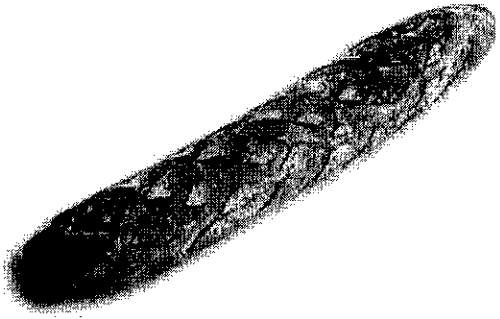


sandwiches. Melted cheese spread on a baguette is often presented as part of a meal. A meal of grilled food (called *la raclette*) is sometimes served. Using an open grill, diners melt their own cheese with ham or beef slices, or fry their own egg. The grilled food is accompanied by potatoes. Sometimes diners spear pieces of bread on long-handled forks, and dip the bread into a pot full of melted cheese called *la fondue*.

The regions of France have varying cuisine: in Brittany (northwestern France), the main dish is *crêpes* (thin pancakes) with cider; and in the Alsace region (eastern France near Germany), a popular dish is cabbage with pieces of sausage, called *la choucroute*. The French from the Loire River Valley eat a special dish made of the Lotte fish that can only be found in the Loire River. On the coasts of France seafood is plentiful, including mussels, clams, oysters, shrimp, and squid. The French enjoy *escargots* (snails) cooked with garlic and butter, roast duck, and rabbit.

Maps of France





Baguette (French Bread)

Ingredients

- 1 package dry yeast
- 1 Tablespoon salt
- 2 Tablespoons sugar
- 2½ cups warm water
- 7 cups flour
- Egg white, lightly beaten

Procedure

1. Grease two cookie sheets.
2. Dissolve the yeast, salt, and sugar in water in a large mixing bowl.
3. Stir in the flour until a stiff dough forms. Turn the dough onto a floured surface (countertop or cutting board) and knead for 10 minutes.
4. Clean out the mixing bowl, lightly oil it, and return the dough to the bowl.
5. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap. Let the dough rise until doubled in size, ½ hour or so.
6. Dip your fist in flour and push your fist into the center of the dough to "punch" it down. Remove from the bowl, and knead 3 or 4 more times.
7. Separate the dough into 4 equal pieces. Form each piece into a long loaf. Place 2 on each of the greased cookie sheets.
8. Carefully slash the top diagonally every few inches with a knife.
9. Brush the loaves with the egg white. Cover lightly with plastic wrap and let the loaves rise again for about 30 minutes.
10. Preheat oven to 400°F. Bake loaves for 10 minutes.
11. Lower heat to 350°F and bake 20 more minutes.