



Bon Appétit !

**Eating and Drinking Your Way
Across France**

K. B. Oliver

You're going to France!

There's so much to see (and taste) in this varied and wonderful country. To visit France is to *taste* it, through mouth-watering meals, wines, liqueurs, desserts, cheeses. French *gastronomie* is an art form, cherished and protected, elevated as part of French identity. Each area of France has its very own specialties you will want to taste.



Foods are tied into the climate and the terrain, both of which are included in the elusive word that has no English equivalent...terroir. Many traditional meals in France, such as *tarte aux pommes* or *coq au vin*, have hundreds of versions all over the country, as families have prepared them for generations and passed recipes down.

Think of French cuisine as using butter in the north and oil in the south. The south uses mostly olive oil, though in the southwest, walnut oil is favored. Terrain and climate shape everything edible, influenced by the types of animals that graze, the winds that blow, the nearness of the oceans, and the temperature of the sun.



Coq au Vin

Many people associate French cuisine with heavy creams and sauces, but since the 1930s French cuisine has undergone a healthy revolution, and the result

photo: Taste.com

is as yummy as ever.

This culinary overview will inform your taste journey across France with a brief summary of each of eight regions: Normandy, Brittany, Alsace, East and Southeast, Provence, the Southwest (including Bordeaux), the Loire Valley, and Ile de France, which encompasses Paris and its nearby cities. You'll see what *foods and drinks* the region is known for and the names of some typical recipes. A few sample recipes are even included at the end of the booklet, allowing you to enjoy a taste of France at home.

Take this guide with you as you travel, so you'll know what regional specialties you should not miss!

Bon Voyage et Bon Appétit!



Some Culinary Regions of France

Normandy

In the north of France you find Normandy, facing the English Channel. You won't be surprised that seafood is an important feature of Normandy cuisine.

Green pastures cover this primarily agricultural region. Normandy produces 60% of the flax and over 50% of the dairy products for all of France. That is why Normandy dishes make us think of butter and cream.

Normandy is also apple country, with 800 different varieties cultivated. Many recipes are prepared with apples, with apple liqueurs, or apple brandy, called *Calvados*.

Seafood. Normandy seafood includes sole, shellfish, turbot, and herring. In the old days, herring was considered a poor man's dish, although it saved Europe from famine on several occasions. Eel is also popular, as is channel fish and mussels (served with French fries!)

Meats. Many cows graze in the fields of Normandy and supply much of the beef for the country. Tripe is also popular, as is pâté de canard (duck liver pâté) and andouille (a type of sausage.)

Cheese. The best-known cheeses in Normandy are Camembert, Pont l'Évêque, and Livarot, Neufchâtel, Mariolles, Boursin, and Mimolette, resembling cheddar, though the taste is very different.

Breads and desserts. Normandy is the birthplace of brioche. One distinctive brioche is called coukebootram, made with raisins. Many cookies and cakes contain a lot of butter, and of course there are many desserts with apples, including apple tarte (tarte aux pommes.)

Beverages. Normandy is not known for wine production. However, many beverages are made from apples. The most famous of these is Calvados, a strong apple brandy. Pommeau is a spirit made with fermented apples mixed with Calvados, and cidre is a type of apple cider with a low alcohol content. Cidre is the traditional drink served with crêpes. A digestive called genièvre is a rare type of gin made from juniper berries and in only 3 distilleries in the north of France. Lastly, coffee is often served with local chicory.

Some classic meals in Normandy

Tripe à la Mode de Caen is tripe braised in cider and Calvados.

Roast pork is often cooked with apples.

Sole Meunière, flour-dredged fish sautéed in butter.

Agneau de Pré-salé: literally, pre-salted lamb. These lambs graze in fields often covered by seawater, so their meat is already slightly salty.

Les sablés (butter cookies), Baked Apples, Crème Brulée, and Mousse au Chocolat. Many Normandy desserts contain a lot of butter and cream. Though the flavors are simple, the dessert can be very rich.

Alsace~Lorraine

A swath of land on the border of Germany changed ownership between France and Germany in the 19th century, once after the Franco-Prussian War and once during WWII.

Here you'll see half-timbered houses, blond-haired residents with names like Nussbaumer, and a memorable banquet of special meals and beverages unlike elsewhere in France.

Though some cultural features will remind you of Germany, this is not German cuisine or culture, make no mistake! Any Alsatian will hasten to correct you if you think otherwise. The cuisine and culture of Alsace is entirely its own.

Many classic meals in Alsace will include pork, sauerkraut, and meat. Here are some meals that are well-known in Alsace.

Baeckeoffe is a casserole dish that includes 3 meats (mutton, beef, and pork), as well as potatoes. It is marinated overnight and seasons with leeks, garlic, and parsley.

Choucroute garni is a classic Alsatian dish containing sauerkraut, potatoes, and sausage. Some recipes include apples. The dish is marinated in Alsatian white wine.

Tarte Flambée is also known in Alsatian as Flammekueche. You can think of it as an Alsatian pizza, but it's more of a delicious flatbread that covers your entire placemat! You

won't find tomatoes in this pizza, just cheese, onions, and bacon. There are several variants as well.

One universally-known specialty is *Quiche Lorraine*, with bacon bits, eggs, and cream. Alsace also has its very own local foie gras.

Desserts. You'll also encounter an appealing array, such as the pretzel or bretzel, as it is called, sold on street corners in Strasbourg or Colmar or in brezelleries. These can be salty, savory, or sweet. For dessert, try kugelhopf, a type of fruit-filled brioche.

Cheese. The best-known cheese in Alsace is Munster, which comes from the town by the same name. This strong-tasting soft cheese pairs well with Alsatian Riesling wine.

Beverages. For starters, beer-lovers will enjoy local beer. And there is also plenty to taste for the wine enthusiast. White wines are well-known in Alsace, though Alsatian wines are often undervalued in other countries. They are an undiscovered treasure, in many ways, and the lower price reflects this. Riesling is the most famous type, along with Pinot Gris, Muscat, and Gewürztraminer.

In Alsace you can take wine tours on the Route des vins (Wine Route), visiting lovely villages like Eguisheim, Ribeauvillé, and Kayersberg along the way.

East and Southeast

This section covers two areas with very different cuisines, but you'll find both in the eastern half of the country. First is the Bourgogne, or **Burgundy** region, snuggled between Paris and Alsace, and with its own wine and food heritage, as well as wine tasting itineraries to discover.

Red wines from the Burgundy region are known all over the world. In this area, not only are there acres of vineyards and many types of wine here, but much of the food is cooked with wine.

A highly-prized beef cow, the Charolais, is raised here, though the meat is available all over the country. You can recognize them in pastures, because they're all white.

The city of Dijon is located in Burgundy. You might be thinking of mustard. This area produces most of France's mustard, a frequently-used condiment in France. At times you'll detect mustard flavors in local recipes. There are more types of mustard than you probably knew!

Many varieties of mushrooms are cultivated here, including truffles. Black currants (called cassis) grow in the area as well, and are used to make sauces and sorbets, as well as a liqueur (crème de cassis) that is added to white wine for the ever-popular *kir*, a refreshing apéritif, or before-dinner drink.

Cheese. The best-known cheeses are Chaource, Epoisses and Abbaye de la Pierre-qui-Vire. A little further east in the

Franche-Comte, you'll find the sweet and firm Comté and Morbier cheeses.

Regional dishes include *coq au vin* (chicken with wine), *boeuf bourguignon* (beef burgundy), and *escargot à la Bourgogne* (snails with wine.)

Speaking of burgundy wine... a dry red wine comes to mind. Red wines here are made from Pinot noir grapes while whites are made from the Chardonnay grape, or perhaps the Aligoté. Beaujolais is made from the Gamay grape. Burgundy wine labels emphasize the area where they come from rather than the reputation of the vineyard that produces it, which occurs more often in other regions.

Chablis and Beaujolais are produced in the burgundy region, but aren't considered as burgundy wines. They have their own identities on the wine market.

From here we go southeast, closer to the **Alps**, with its mountain influence. Ski resorts such as Val d'Isère, Courcheval, and Tignes draw winter sports enthusiasts, as does the town of Chamonix in the shadow of France's tallest mountain, Le Mont Blanc.

Some classic meals in the Alps are *fondue*, after a long day on the ski slopes. Several varieties are unique to the alpine region, such as Reblochon, Tomme de Savoie, Emmental, and Beaufort. A well-known potato side dish, *Gratin Dauphinois*, made with cream and garlic, and sometimes cheese. Other meals featuring cheese are *tartiflette* and

Raclette, both involving cheese and potatoes. Goat cheese is widespread as well. You can hear the bells of goats as they graze on the local hillsides.

Fresh-water fish (trout, perche and omble-chevalier) and game, as well as locally-grown fruit are frequent ingredients on the mountain menu.

West of this mountain region we encounter **Lyon**, a city rather than a region, but it has its own stellar reputation for gastronomy, known the world over for about the last 80 years. Lyon has one of the highest concentrations of restaurants per capita than anywhere else in France, as well as many top chefs. Cuisine here is like rich yet elegant comfort food, full of meat, pork, sausage, potatoes, sausage with pistachios, or quenelles made of fish. When a meal is made à la lyonnaise, it means it is made with onions, vinegar, and chopped parsley.

Lyon is home to the “bouchon”, which normally means plug or cork, but in this context is a sort of local bistro/diner that only exists in Lyon. There is a special menu here, simple décor, usually family-run. A cultural and culinary experience rolled into one.

Provence

Keep heading southeast and eventually you'll arrive in a sunny slice of France, Provence. Provence is more than just the area we call the Riviera. The region of Provence actually

covers 6 French departments (like counties). Much of this area is agricultural, and the food reflects the crops and animals that graze there. Olives reign supreme, and the olives themselves or their oil are found in many local dishes.

Herbs that flourish under the Provence sun have a strong presence as well: Thyme, lavender, rosemary, tarragon, mint, chervil, savory, and chives. Another plant, garlic, is a signature flavor as well.

Provence cuisine is characterized by simplicity and local flavors, with a decidedly Mediterranean flair. In areas near the coast, fish is a theme, and many restaurants base their menus on the catch of the day. You can find ravioli stuffed with sardines, or *soupe de poisson*, supplied by the local catch.

A Provençal specialty is *Pissaladière*. That name might lead you to think it's some kind of salad, but it's actually pizza dough covered with anchovies, olives, herbs, and lots of caramelized onions. Even some types of bread (*fougasse*) may be accented with garlic and olives.

Corn-fed lambs roam high in the mountains, and their meat is a delicacy. They are well-known for having superb flavor, especially those from the pastures near Sisteron.



Photo : Marmiton

Tomates à la Provençale

Some other typical flavors are spreadable... *tapenade*, made of olives, *aioli*, a mayonnaise made of garlic, or *l'anchoïade*, a blend of anchovies, olive oil, and capers. And you'll even have a chance to taste truffles that flavor certain meals.

La ratatouille is a dish made of eggplant, zucchini, peppers, tomatoes, and onions, along with herbes de Provence. *La bouillabaisse* is a famous fish stew you must try if you are near the coast. There is a specific procedure to eating it, starting with a hearty red broth. You mix in a sauce, croutons, and fresh fish from a platter.

La boeuf en daube is a meal made of chunks of beef slow-cooked with onions and olive oil. And don't forget les grenouilles (frogs) or les lapins (rabbits) à la Provençale !

Cheese. A famous Provence cheese is a goat cheese called Banon, a small, pungent disc wrapped in chestnut leaves. The dry, rocky terrain of the south of France is suitable for raising goats, so many goat cheeses are the result. You'll find goat cheese in many recipes, including salads and pizzas. Roquefort is a specialty of the region, and comes from a town by the same name to the west of Avignon.

Beverages. Rosé accounts for half of all the wine produced in Provence, which is the largest region in the world for dry rosé. Provence supplies about 80% of the table wine for all of France. The best-known Provence wine comes from the small seaside town of Bandol. Most wines in Provence are named for the area where they're produced. Les Côtes de Provence is the largest category of Provence wines.

Pastis is an anise-flavored liqueur you can dilute as much as you like (since it's quite strong!) It is a traditional apéritif in the South of France.

The Southwest

Not surprisingly, the southwest of France has a unique slant on its cuisine, influenced by the Pyrénées mountains to the south and a very long, straight coastline, along with green pastures for grazing.

Most traditional meals in this area are heavily meat-based, involving mutton, beef, lamb, pork, and duck. Along the coast, you'll find plenty of mussels, oysters, and lobster, some of which are cooked in wine. The lamprey, an eel, is also very

popular, cooked in red wine “en matelote”. The nearby area called the Perigord is known for foie gras, the world-famous duck or goose liver paté, and for black truffles, which cost several hundred dollars per kilo to buy! (You can probably afford a truffle omelette, though!)

The city of Bordeaux and all of its surrounding wine-producing towns are part of the southwest, where many meals are made with wine, parsley, shallots, and garlic (à la bordelaise.)

To the south near Spain, is the Basque country. Food can be spicier here, with the addition of Espelette peppers. Bayonne ham is a local specialty of the Basque country. It is salt-cured, has a nice, strong flavor, and is a trademark of certain recipes. Throughout the region more dishes are prepared with walnut oil than olive oil.

A signature dish of this corner of France is *cassoulet*, a hearty stew of beans, pork, sausage, and duck. Again, many versions of this exist, including some lower-fat versions. *Duck confit* (confit de canard) is duck slow-cooked and preserved in its own fat. You can try rabbit and prune stew, made from local Agen prunes, or *Piperade Basque*, an omelette filled with tomatoes, peppers, onions, and garlic.



Photo: Epicurious

Cassoulet

Desserts and cheese. Try *Touron*, a Basque specialty, which is a colorful marzipan roll cut into cookie-like pieces and containing nuts or candied fruit. A favored cheese in the region is a firm but crumbly goat cheese called cabécou.

Beverages. The Bordeaux region is the largest wine-producing area in France, and possibly the world. Bordeaux wines are made up of a blend of grapes from the region, including Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Malbec, and Cabernet Franc, among others. The region is mostly known for red wines, including Médoc, Pomerol, Graves, and Saint Emilion, though white Sauterne wines are also produced here. The best way to discover many Bordeaux wines as well as the surrounding region is to take a wine tour, where you can visit several vineyards, taste many varietals, and learn about the local culture at the same time.

Cognac is a well-known brandy made from white wine in the city of Cognac. Cognac is currently so widely produced that some brands are quite affordable.

Armagnac comes from the Gascony region and is the oldest brandy distilled in France. Though both are brandies, they are made by different methods. Some say Armagnac has a more complex flavor, due to longer distillation. It also has a lower alcohol content than Cognac.

The Loire Valley

The Loire River is the longest river in France, beginning below center and snaking upward before it veers to the west and continues on to the Atlantic Ocean, cutting France more-or-less in half. Over 600 miles of a rich, fertile river valley has given this area the nickname “the garden of France.”

This region is one of France’s largest agricultural areas, and *the* largest for organic produce. Here you’ll find acres of cheerful sunflowers, providing cooking oil for daily use, along with wheat, barley, and corn, and many other fruits and vegetables, like pears, cherries, lettuce, asparagus, and beets. Mushrooms are cultivated in limestone caves and provide a large percentage of the French supply.

The Loire Valley was significant in French history. The many castles of various sizes, ages, and levels of splendor provide often breath-taking signs of the glorious past. For this reason, it is a popular area with tourists, though there is much more to do here than castle-hop. A gentle landscape provides many opportunities to walk, bike, camp, and enjoy the outdoors, as well as visit local vineyards.

Meals here reflect the bounty of the rich land and rolling hills. If you want to see a list of regional cheeses followed by wines, the list is very long! Some suggested cheeses you won't want to miss include the most popular, goat cheeses. Some of the best-known are Pouligny-St-Pierre, Crottin de Chavignol, Sainte Maure, and Selle-sur-Cher. Each has a distinct flavor.

A variety of meats, including game, are found in Loire Valley recipes. Duck, pheasant, pigeon, boar, and rabbit recipes provide a change of pace. Fish is also available to enjoy, whitebait, eels in wine, or zander in butter sauce.

One local (from the city of Tours) specialty is *Rillettes de porc*, or pork paté, perfect on a slice of baguette or country bread for a picnic. It's also made with salmon and duck, though pork is traditional. *Géline de Touraine* is a small hen cooked in the traditional way.

For dessert you can't miss *Tarte Tatin*, invented in this area by the Tatin sisters, but beloved all over the country. There is also Anger plum pie with local Greengage plums.

Beverages, what a lengthy topic! First we have cherry liqueur from Angers, and Cointreau, the famous orange-flavored liqueur also made in the Angers area. You can take a tour of the Cointreau distillery in Angers. Many types of beer are brewed here as well.

Wine has been produced in the Loire Valley since the first century. It is still a premium winemaking region, once more important than Bordeaux. The soil in the river valley is rich

with nutrients and limestone (the latter which you'll also find in mushroom caves, cliff-homes, and castles.)

The best way to sample a variety of specialties from the Loire Valley is to take a wine tour. Reds include Gamay from Anjou, Bourgueil, Chinon (from the city of Chinon), Saumur Rouge (from Saumur), Touraine and Coteaux du Loir, among many others.

Among rosés, you'll find Rosé d'Anjou, Cabernet d'Anjou, Rosé de Loire and Touraine d'Amboise. Sparkling wines include the famous Vouvray, Crémant de Loire (second only to Champagne in French sparkling wines), and Saumur Brut.

White wines have found their place as well, including the well-known Pouilly-Fumé and Sancerre (which also makes reds and rosés), Saumur Blanc, and Savennière, and of course, Muscadet, which is produced in higher volume than any other wine in the region.

Brittany

We continue our culinary tour northward, to the wild lands of Brittany. It may be tempting to think the culture of Brittany similar to that of Normandy, but their roots are very different. Normandy was influenced by the Anglo-Saxons and Vikings, while Brittany roots are Celtic. The Breton language still exists in Brittany, a vestige of its Celtic past. Brittany only became a part of France in the 16th century.

The inland climate is harsher than in Normandy as well, with the highest rainfall in France. The department the furthest west, Finistère, is called “the end of the earth” in the Breton language. The land is rich and fertile, though, and produces artichokes, potatoes, strawberries, and cauliflower.

At the coast, marshes and the sea influence menus, where you’ll find oysters, shrimp, mussels, lobsters, and scallops. A seafood specialty you should not miss is *La Lotte à l’Américaine*. La Lotte is monkfish. *La Cotriade* is a rich stew of local fish (no shellfish) and potatoes. Very popular in this region are *moules marinières*, mussels, cooked in white wine, parsley, and shallots.

Dairy products are used a lot, as in Normandy, only here in Brittany, butter is salted. Many of the desserts are full of butter, such as the mouth-watering *Kouign-Amann*, which consists of bread dough layered with butter, sugar, then repeated several times. (It’s amazing, though hard to pronounce!) Try queen-yah-man. Also try *Palets Bretons*, butter cookies.

True crêpes originated in this region, and the savory ones (called *galettes*) are made with buckwheat, also called black wheat (blé noir.) Of course, this is served with cidre, and Brittany apples are the same varieties as those in Normandy. Also in the desert category, Brittany dessert specialties include *Clafoutis*, or flan with dark cherries, and *Far Breton*, a dense, custardy pie with prunes or raisins.

As for beverages, Brittany is not a wine-producing region, but they do provide their fair share of cidre, as in Normandy,

made from local apples. No particular cheeses emerge from the region, though their butter is well-known.

A highly-prized sea salt is harvested in Brittany, in the town of Guérande, the Sel de Guérande. It is used as a finishing touch on a cooked meal. Some other countries, including Spain and Canada, also produce fleur de sel, as it is called, though that from Brittany is known all over the world.

Ile de France

The Ile de France is a picturesque phrase, meaning “island of France”. It *is* a kind of island, since Paris sits in its center and influences all of the suburbs surrounding it.

Ile de France has its own food contributions to the tapestry of French cuisine. Food developments over the centuries have been strongly influenced by Paris, where many of the best-known chefs have trained and gained their reputations. Many meals associated with Paris, however, have a humbler appeal, such as the Croque-Monsieur and Soupe à l’Oignon, and are as suited to a bistro as they are a French family lunch table.

Other regional classics include frogs’ legs (parboiled, breaded, then fried), soufflés, either sweet or savory, tête de veau (veal) vinaigrette, pot-au-feu, Boeuf (Beef) Mironton, and Blanquette de Veau (a veal stew.)



Blanquette de Veau

Cheese. The best-known cheeses of the Ile de France region are all types of brie. These include Brie de Meaux (once called the king of cheeses), Brie de Coulommiers, Brie de Melun, and Brie de Montereau.

Pastries have been refined to an art form, exemplified by signature sweets such as Paris-Brest (a cream-filled pastry in the shape of a bicycle wheel, in honor of the Paris to Brest bicycle race), the millefeuille (translated, seemingly a thousand sheets of pastry, sometimes called a Napoleon in English), l'Opéra (decadent almond and chocolate cake soaked in coffee), puits d'amour (puff pastry stuffed with jam or cream.) As delicious as they are beautiful.

Conclusion

Hopefully this short guide will lead your palate and end up delighting your taste buds as you eat and drink your way across France. By knowing some of the regional specialties and products of each area you visit, you'll expand your enjoyment of the food itself, as well as appreciate the history and creation of these meals.

For a more food-oriented trip, consider wine tours, where you can visit vineyards of a particular region, or gastronomy tours, where specific restaurants are chosen (by a local expert or by you!) Doing some research in advance can be part of the fun, or you can simply book a tour that provides the experience *and* the education at the same time.

Many regions of France offer cooking classes in the context of a tour or as an individual class, if you'd like a more hands-on experience. These classes give you the full experience, going to the local marché to choose fresh produce, preparing the meal under expert guidance, and then eating it! Many or most classes are available in English.

In various parts of the country you can find festivals surrounding particular kinds of food or wines, or food/wine shows in Paris, Lyon, and other large cities.

There are many ways to deepen your knowledge and experience of French foods, and this will deepen your enjoyment of this magical country!

Recipes on the next pages...

Loire Valley: Tarte Tatin

Pastry

4 oz soft butter
1/3 cup sugar
2 Cups all purpose flour

1 egg
2 pinches salt

Filling

3 oz. soft butter
3 lbs Golden Delicious apples

1/3 cup sugar

1. Cream butter and sugar until pale. Add egg and mix together. Add the flour and salt. Mix until smooth dough forms.
2. Place the pastry on a floured surface and knead for about 5 minutes. Wrap it in plastic and refrigerate for at least 2 hours. Remove from refrigerator 1 hour before using.
3. Preheat oven to 425°. Grease a 9-inch cake pan with 2/3 of the butter, then sprinkle on 2/3 of the sugar.
4. Cut apples in half, peel and core them, then set them upright in the pan, packing them tightly. Sprinkle the remaining butter and sugar on top.
5. Place the pan over medium heat and cook until a light caramel forms on the pan, about 20 minutes.
6. Transfer to the oven and bake for 5-8 minutes, then remove from the oven.
7. Roll out the dough to a 10-inch circle and place over the pan, sealing the edges.
8. Return the pan to the oven and bake for another 20 minutes, or until the pastry is browned.
9. Turn the pan over onto a plate. Serve with ice cream or crème fraîche.

Serves 6.

Normandy: Veal Filets in Calvados Sauce

| | |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|
| 6 4- ounce pieces of veal filet | 4 ounces butter |
| 8 ounces mushrooms | 2 T. vegetable oil |
| 4 ounces Calvados | ½ cup crème fraîche |
| salt, pepper | or sour cream |
| Sprig of parsley | |

1. Clean, wash, and dry the mushrooms and slice them.
2. Heat 2 ounces of butter with the oil in a frying pan. Brown the veal on both sides until golden brown. Pour in the Calvados and light it. After it burns down, salt and pepper the meat. Add a small amount of hot water to the meat and cook on low for 10 minutes.
3. In another pan, melt the remaining butter and cook the mushrooms for 5-8 minutes. Salt and pepper them. Wash and chop the parsley.
4. When the veal is cooked, add mushrooms and the crème fraîche and heat through. Pour into a serving dish and sprinkle the parsley on top.

Serves 6

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