



**SAMPLE**

# HOLIDAYS & CELEBRATIONS

IN

**FRANCE**

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## Holidays & Celebrations in **FRANCE**

Thank you for downloading a sample of my new digital book which is an invitation to discover and learn about the holidays and celebrations in France.

In France, we know how to celebrate life on many occasions! Whether you are visiting Paris or the French Province, these times of celebrations will bring an 'exotic taste' to your stay.

Did you know that the French annual calendar is punctuated with eleven bank holidays? As well as several religious, civil and commemorative celebrations?

I hope this book will give you some insights into what to expect on your next travel to France. Or you can learn more about the customs of France from the comfort of your armchair!

Enjoy discovering the holidays and celebrations in France!



**Pierre**



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# THE CELEBRATIONS

*Les célébrations*



# CANDLEMAS

## La chandeleur

Once the cheerful Christmas and New Year's celebrations have gone, the long months of January and February are not a season one particularly anticipates in Europe (except for shopaholics drawn to the massive sales!). Therefore, since ancient times, French (and European) traditions have marked the beginning of February with light-hearted celebrations, accompanied by delicious treats. Candlemas (la Chandeleur) is one of them.

### **Traditions and origins of Candlemas**

In France, the month of February starts with the celebration of Candlemas which occurs on the 2nd, which is 40 days after Christmas.



This religious celebration recalls the Presentation of Jesus to the Temple, a decisive event that happened during the early years of Jesus and is described in the Bible (Gospel of Luke chapter 2 verses 22-40).

The origins of the Chandeleur date back to a pagan feast.

According to local customs, candles had to be lit at midnight as a symbol of purification. Chandeleur comes from the latin "candelarum" as does the English word 'candle'.

The Church adapted the tradition into the blessing of the candles, which were to repel Evil...

Thus reminding all that Christ is the light of the world. Christians would then come back to their homes with the blessed candles in order to protect them.

It was also at that time of the year that the winter seed-time started.

The surplus flour was then used without too much risk of shortage and crêpes were made as a symbol of prosperity for the coming year.

# Candlemas

## Crêpes Day



### **Candlemas today: Crêpes Day**

Today Chandeleur is above all known as Crêpes Day. Generations have kept alive a collection of traditions and customs around the making of crêpes.

For instance, crêpes must be eaten only after eight in the evening. If the cook can flip a crêpe while holding a gold coin in the other hand, his household will enjoy prosperity throughout the coming year.

Another custom suggests keeping the first cooked crêpe in a wardrobe in order to assure the abundance of the coming harvests.

The word "crêpe" derives from the Latin *crispa*, meaning curled. Its simple preparation makes it a favourite dish for Candlemas and/or Mardi-Gras.

## Crêpe Suzette and crêperies

Crêpes are made by pouring a thin liquid batter onto a hot frying flat pan, previously greased with butter or oil. The batter is spread evenly over the cooking surface of the pan by tilting the pan.

Another standard French and Belgian crêpe is the crêpe Suzette, a crêpe with lightly grated orange peel and liqueur (usually Grand Marnier) which is subsequently lit upon presentation.

In France, crêpes are usually bought in a crêperie, which may be sold as a takeaway in a stall on the street or in public gardens, or a proper restaurant.











# VALENTINE'S DAY

## La Saint-Valentin

On the 14th of February, Valentine's Day is a celebration of love for couples from many countries around the World. While many couples celebrate Valentine's Day every year, its origins remain unknown to most.

Whether true or not, many tales have told the origins of Valentine's Day for years. Here is the one that sounds the most likely.

### **Who are you, St. Valentine?**

The story began during the third century when the Roman Empire had been at war for years. The Empire's power was declining, particularly its army.

More and more young men were deserting. At the very least, young men were not as likely as previously to sign up for the military.

According to Emperor Claude II, potential soldiers were more interested in women and having families than in fighting for the Empire... To solve the problem, "Cruel Claude" decided purely to forbid weddings throughout the Empire.

However, a priest called **Valentine** decided to defy the law. In secret, he continued to perform weddings. Valentine even encouraged young lovers to meet him to be blessed with the marriage Sacrament. But Claude II eventually heard about these activities... and immediately decided to put Valentine in jail.

There, the priest befriended the blind daughter of his prison guard.

Valentine was eventually sentenced to death. According to the legend, right before his execution on the 14th of February 270 AD, he gave sight back to the blind girl. He also gave her a heart-shaped letter, which he signed: "From your Valentine".

When the Roman Empire collapsed at the end of the 5th century, Valentine was declared a Saint by Pope Gelasius I for his sacrifice in defence of love.



French pâtisserie for Valentine's Day



## **A sweethearts' celebration**

It was not until the Middle Ages that Valentine's Day became a day to celebrate love. It was a political decision by the Church, which wanted to respond to the pagan celebration of Lupercalia, which had been emerging over the years in Christian Europe.

## **The ancient celebration of Fertility Day**

Honouring ancient Roman deities:

- ✱ Luperculus (God of herds and shepherds)
  - ✱ and Juno (Goddess of marriage),
- "Fertility Day" was celebrated every year from the 13th of February to the 15th of February.



This former Greek and Roman celebration became fashionable again after the collapse of the Roman Empire.

People organised rituals to celebrate love and to bless future parents.

The most unusual was Luperci's race, where half-naked young men ran after young ladies holding pieces of pork skin. The goal was to (gently!) hit the young ladies to have peaceful and happy pregnancies.



## **Valentine's Day becomes a Christian tradition**

The Church was fearful of losing its power in Europe, and Lupercalia was not the only pagan celebration to come back into fashion after the collapse of the Roman Empire. The Pope decided to turn Lupercalia into a Christian celebration. It would take place on the 14th of February and would be called Valentine's Day to honour the priest who sacrificed his life to bless young couples.

Valentine's Day in France: just a commercial celebration?

1,500 years later, Valentine's Day is a trendy celebration in many countries, especially France. On that day, "lovebirds" swapped presents to show their mutual love.

According to a recent poll, 71% of French people celebrate Valentine's Day. They spend about fifty euros each on presents such as flowers, jewellery or a romantic dinner.

Storekeepers and big businesses knew there was business to make out of it. "Surfing on love's wave", they adorn their shop fronts with hearts, roses and Cupid's angels, just a few days before the 14th of February. Hence taking advantage of the opportunity to lure people who don't know what to buy for their lover!

Valentine's Day has become an occasion for retailers to make the most of an old tradition. However, let's not accuse our favourite florists and jewellers! After all, they also allow many couples to celebrate such an important day for them!





Pont Alexandre III, Paris

# THE SEASONS OF THE YEAR

*Les saisons de l'année*



# THE FOUR SEASONS OF THE YEAR

## Les quatre saisons de l'année

France is situated in the Northern Hemisphere. As its fellow European neighbouring nations, it goes through a cycle of four distinctive seasons:

- ✱ Spring - *le printemps*
- ✱ Summer - *l'été*
- ✱ Autumn - *l'automne*
- ✱ Winter - *l'hiver*

These seasons have shaped most of the holidays and celebrations in France.





# WINTER IN FRANCE

## L'hiver en France

Winter in France is often considered the least popular season for tourism in the country. This is the coldest season of the year when the weather, gloomy and rough, forces the vegetation into a well-earned pause. Trees are leafless, their trunks of a darkish-grey colour, and depending on the sky, snow and ice cover entire regions, disrupting human activity. Once the cheerful Christmas and New Year's celebrations have gone, the long months of January and February are not a season one particularly anticipates in Europe. However, there are many light-hearted celebrations and events happening to cheer everyone up.

### **Winter in France: the calendar**

Officially the season of Winter starts on the 21st December and ends on the 20th March the following year.

Winter officially starts on 21 December in Europe, the date of the Winter solstice and ends on 20 March the following year.

For meteorologists and many French people, Winter runs from approximately 1 December to the beginning of March. Although most of December officially belongs to Autumn, the last month of the year is often thought to be part of Winter because cold and snow occur throughout the country.

With the start of Winter comes the festive season of Christmas and New Year, commonly referred to in French as "les fêtes de fin d'années".



## Winter Calendar:

- ✿ Four Sundays before Christmas - Advent (l'Avent)
- ✿ 21 December - beginning of Winter
- ✿ 25 December - Christmas (Noël)
- ✿ 1 January - New Year's Day
- ✿ 6 January - Epiphany (l'Épiphanie)
- ✿ January-beginning of February - Les Soldes d'Hiver. The big retail sales in January and February.
- ✿ 2 February - Candlemas (la Chandeleur)
- ✿ 14 February - Valentine's Day (la Saint-Valentin)
- ✿ February or March - Shrove Tuesday and the Carnivals (Mardi-Gras et les carnivals)
- ✿ 21 March - the start of Spring

## **Winter: a bit of (art) history**

According to art historian Erwin Panofsky (1892-1968), the first wintry scene ever depicted in the history of painting dates from the 1410s.



It is part of the most famous French Gothic manuscript illumination Les Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry. The collection is possibly the best surviving example of its kind. The book is on display at the Musée Condé, Chantilly.

Other early winter-landscapes date from 1565. Dutch artist Pieter Bruegel painted The Hunters in the Snow. On a calm, cold and overcast day, three hunters and their dogs are returning from an expedition with a poor catch, a single fox dangling from a spear. The painting is displayed at the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Austria.

Between the 16th and 18th centuries, Europe underwent a Little Ice Age. Many factors could explain this climate change: volcanic ash blocking solar radiation, cyclical lows in solar radiation, changes in the ocean circulation, variations in Earth's orbit and axial tilt...

We know for instance that encroaching glaciers caused the destruction of farms and villages in the valley of Chamonix during the mid-17th century.

Rivers and lakes in France were frequently frozen deeply enough to support ice skating and winter festivals.

In 1693-1694, famines in France claimed roughly 10 per cent of the country's population.

## **The first snowmen**

The earliest documentation on medieval snowmen (1380) is on display in the Koninklijke Bibliotheek in The Hague.

As for the earliest known photograph of a snowman, it dates back to 1853. Taken by Welsh photographer Mary Dillwyn, the original is kept at the National Library of Wales.

Great Italian artist Michelangelo also worked on a snowman (bonhomme de neige in French) in Florence in 1494.

## **The weather in Winter**

The average temperatures are often just below zero and can go up to a maximum of ten degrees in the afternoon.

Winter can be tough in some mountainous parts of France. In the Jura Mountains, a record of  $-41^{\circ}\text{C}$  was recorded in 1985 in the little town of Mouthe.

On the opposite, the coastal towns of Corsica can enjoy average temperatures of 9°C during the season of Winter.

In Provence, the mistral is a strong, cold and dry wind originating from the Alps that blows in Winter for periods of only a few days up to a couple of weeks.

In Paris, sunshine is rare but the closeness of the sea means that temperatures are generally above freezing (around 7°C). For a few nights, temperatures can go down to - 5°C.

Often Winter is associated with snow but it appears more rarely on the plains in the South of the Loire and in Paris. However, snowfalls abundantly in the mountain areas particularly in the Alps and the Pyrenees. The first snow of winter can cause massive transport disruption in a region.

The Winter solstice occurs on the first day of the season (21 December). It is the day of the year that has the fewest hours of daylight. The solstice is closely associated with Christmas with the meaning of rebirth with the hope of the coming of the better days of spring.





Alsace in Winter



## Visiting France in Winter

Visiting sites and monuments in France is ideal in Winter as it is a low touristic season.

During Winter in France, people on vacation will choose between cool winter sports in the mountains and mild Mediterranean destinations.

During your exploration, you may be surprised by the beauty and harshness of Winter in France!

Winter in the mountains

The country's mountains are the best places to be to unfold the wonders of winter in France! There, you can walk through snow, marvelling at the unique design of each snowflake.

The Winter sports season takes place in January and February in the Alps and the Pyrenees. Millions of people come to France in Winter as the country has some of the world's top resorts. A wide range of activities are possible: downhill skiing, cross-country skiing, snowboarding, snowshoeing, dog sledging, ice climbing and ice rappelling.

France contains more than 400 ski resorts which are found across the six main mountain ranges: the Alps, Corsica, the Jura, the Massif Central, the Pyrenees and the Vosges.

Some of the largest connected ski areas in the world are found in the French Alps:


- ✱ Les Trois Vallées (Courchevel, Méribel, Les Menuires, and Val Thorens): 338 slopes, 600 km.
- ✱ Portes du Soleil (Avalaz, Châtel, Morzine, and Abondance): 288 slopes, 650 km.
- ✱ Paradiski (La Plagne, Peisey-Vallandry, Les Arcs): 239 slopes, 420 km.
- ✱ Évasion Mont-Blanc (Megève, Saint-Gervais, Les Contamines Monjoie): 183 slopes, 420 km.
- ✱ Espace Killy (Tignes, Val-d'Isère): 137 slopes, 300 km.
- ✱ Les Grandes Rousses (L'Alpe d'Huez): 117 slopes, 236 km.
- ✱ Les Deux Alpes and La Grave: 69 slopes, 220 km.

Ski resorts in the Alps are extremely busy during the February school holidays and accommodation can be very expensive and should be planned well in advance.

## **Winter by the sea**

Since the 19th century, the sea-resorts have attracted millions of visitors, some of the illustrious Queen Victoria, Robert Louis Stevenson... Places like Biarritz in the Basque Country and Menton in



A large, ornate float covered in lemons and oranges is the central focus of the image. The float is shaped like a large, multi-tiered structure, possibly a house or a monument, and is densely packed with bright yellow lemons and orange lemons. In the foreground, two young women are standing, dressed in traditional costumes. They wear white blouses with ruffled collars, dark aprons with floral embroidery, and blue and white striped skirts. They are holding round, woven hats with blue star-shaped decorations. The background shows a clear blue sky, palm trees, and a building with a balcony. A semi-transparent text box is overlaid on the right side of the image.

the French Riviera enjoy an exceptionally mild climate. Already in the 19th century, even before the region of Nice belonged to France, British tourists flocked to Nice and Menton to benefit from the mild climate during the winter season. In February and March, Menton hosts the popular Lemon Festival.





Tarentaise, French Alps of Savoie



Conciergerie, Paris







Forest in the Vosges mountains





Castle of Menthon-Saint-Bernard, French Alps of Haute-Savoie





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