

French
moments

DISCOVER FRANCE DIFFERENTLY

A FREE GUIDE TO THE HIDDEN SOUL OF **FRANCE**



Discover **France** differently

There are many ways to discover France.

You can hurry through it — ticking off monuments, chasing itineraries, and collecting photos like trophies.

Or you can slow down, let the map fold itself away, and allow France to appear the way she prefers to be seen — quietly, unpredictably, and on her own terms.

That's what this little guide is about.

Not the *famous France* of postcards and bucket lists, but the one that breathes between the lines. The France of morning bells and market chatter, of crooked shutters and empty cafés, of bread still warm from the oven and air perfumed by lavender, rain, or wood smoke depending on the day.

For years, I've travelled across the country I call home — from Alsace to Provence, from Lorraine to the Alps — and every region has whispered a different secret.

Some places have made me laugh, others have taught me patience, and all of them have reminded me that France is less a destination than a conversation.

Now that I live across the Channel in England, I find myself listening for those whispers more than ever — in memory, in photos, in stories.

This isn't a checklist, or a guide to "must-sees."

It's an invitation to notice — to pay attention to the small things that make France herself. Ten simple ways to look again, listen better, and travel slower.



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1. FOLLOW THE SOUND OF BELLS



Sarlat-la-Canéda, Dordogne



exploring small villages through their church towers

If France had a heartbeat, it would sound like church bells.

They don't rush; they remind. They echo through valleys, across tiled roofs, and between limestone walls that have heard centuries of the same rhythm.

When we lived in a little Alpine village, our days were marked by those familiar chimes.

Every hour, half-hour, even quarter-hour — until midnight, when mercy (and the mayor's noise regulation) gave us a reprieve until six in the morning.

At first, it felt excessive.

Then, strangely comforting.

The bells were like neighbours you never saw but always knew were there.

They rang for weddings, for Mass, for funerals — but mostly, they rang because that's what bells do.

They told the time, yes, but also the mood of the day.

On foggy mornings, their sound felt thick and muffled, as if it were wrapped in a wool blanket.

In summer, it shimmered through the heat, reaching up to the peaks.

Wherever you go in France, listen for them. Follow the sound and you'll find the village heart — usually a stone square, a fountain, a few elderly men discussing the weather, and a boulangerie nearby.

You'll see that time still matters here, but not in the way we think of it.

The bells don't count the minutes; they remind you that life — like sound — expands beautifully when you pause to listen.





Bonnieux



Colmar



Blénod-lès-Toul



Sénanque Abbey

2. EAT WITH THE SEASON





Radis

€ 1.50
- 1.00 € les 2

Pois gourmand

4.50 € les 500g

Ail nouveau

2 € la boîte

Concombre

2 € la botte
1.50 les 2

Fèves

2 € les 3
500g

the secret rhythm of French life

If there's one thing France refuses to compromise on, it's the seasons — especially when it comes to food.

Menus change with the weather, and markets transform week by week.

In summer, stalls overflow with peaches, tomatoes, and courgettes; by November, pumpkins and chestnuts take their place.

It's less about "eating local" than about living in sync with time itself.

We've always loved wandering through village markets — not the polished ones made for tourists, but the modest ones where everyone knows each other.

In Provence, the markets of Bonnieux and Lourmarin were among our favourites, full of chatter, colour, and that irresistible scent of lavender mingled with goat cheese.

But the smaller markets — like the one in Saignon — were the most special.

There, the baker, the farmer, and the old lady selling eggs didn't just sell food.

They sold stories.

When you buy from someone who's harvested, baked, or ripened it themselves, the food tastes different. It carries the rhythm of the land — of patience, weather, and care. And when the seasons turn, they don't mourn the end of tomatoes; they celebrate the arrival of mushrooms. In France, the calendar isn't divided into months, but into flavours.



Local produce from Aime, French Alps



Dijon



Sarlat-la-Canéda



Chagny



Lourmarin

3. WANDER WITHOUT DESTINATION





Lacoste, Provence

how to get lost the French way

I love maps. Always have.

The lines, the routes, the possibilities — they make sense of the world.

But sometimes, the best way to discover France is to ignore the map entirely.

There's a particular freedom in setting out without a plan, especially on the little routes départementales that meander through the countryside.

You never know what you'll find — a Romanesque chapel tucked behind a hedge, a forgotten war memorial, or a café that still smells of yesterday's coffee.

When we have time, we love to take those narrow roads bordered by poplars or vineyards.

The GPS doesn't understand them, and that's precisely the point.

You may end up driving in circles — but circles in France are usually beautiful ones.

I've learned that when you let go of schedules and simply follow curiosity, France rewards you.

She hides her best treasures behind wrong turns: a field of sunflowers, a bakery you didn't plan to visit, a view that wasn't on the itinerary.

Wandering here isn't being lost; it's being found by surprise.

So, next time you're in France, choose a direction instead of a destination.

The road will take care of the rest.



Toulois, Lorraine



Brie



Luberon



Roman bridge, Provence



Meursault, Burgundy

4. FIND BEAUTY IN THE ORDINARY



RUE DES
CORDIERS

VINS D'ALSACE
Vignerons
Récoltant
Dégustation - Vente
Crémants et Eaux de Vie d'Alsace
→

shutters, cafés, architecture, details

France has a gift for making the ordinary beautiful.

A window with faded blue shutters, a café chair left slightly askew, a hand-painted sign from the 1950s — each detail seems to whisper a story.

I've learned, during countless wanderings, to look up.

When you take the time to notice your surroundings — really notice them — France rewards you with quiet poetry.

There's always something worth a second glance: the delicate ironwork on a balcony, the worn threshold of a bakery, the reflection of clouds on cobblestones after the rain.

In towns and villages alike, beauty hides in the unnoticed.

I often stop for photos of things most people would walk past: a row of mismatched shutters, an old shopfront with ghostly letters still visible, or a small stone niche in a grand house's façade where a tiny statue of Mary still keeps watch.

These aren't monuments; they're fragments of life.

Together, they tell the story of a country that has been lived in — really lived in — for centuries.

France doesn't need perfection to be beautiful.

She only needs a bit of light, a bit of age, and someone willing to stop and see it.



Dinan, Brittany



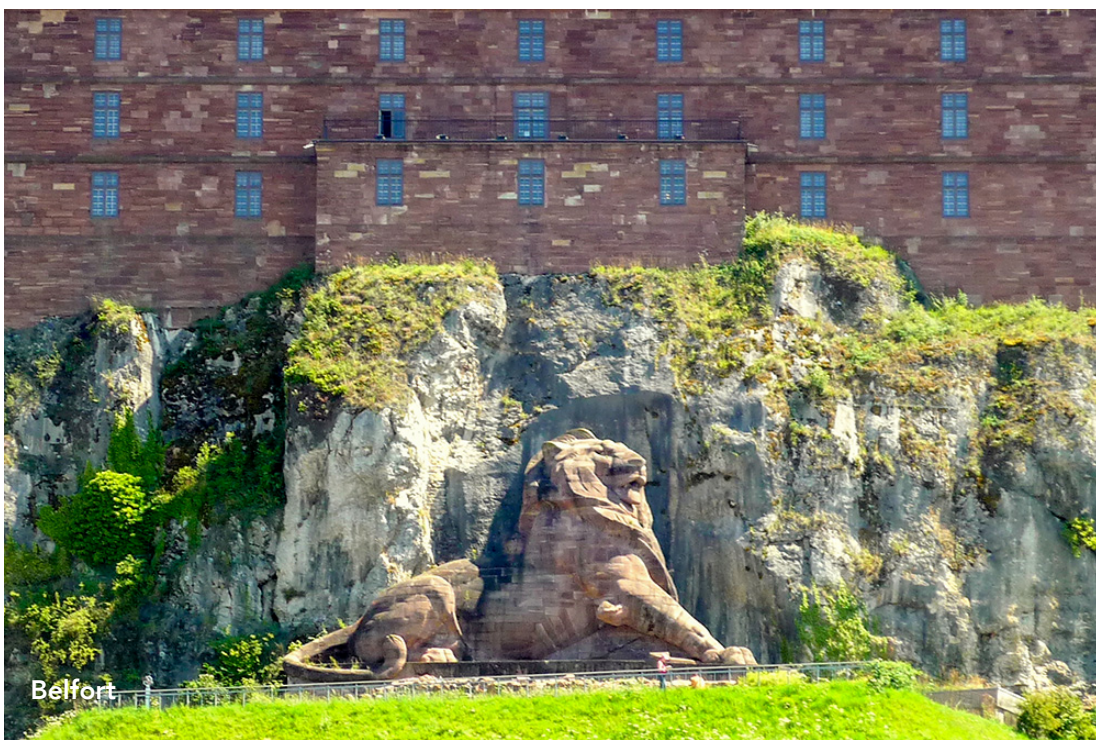
Colmar



Provins



Saint-Germain-en-Laye



Belfort

5. TRAVEL BY TASTE



COMPOSEZ VOTRE FORMULE

1 PLAT + FROMAGE ou DESSERT 23,50€

1 ENTRÉE + 1 PLAT + FROMAGE ou DESSERT 31,50€

MENU ENFANT (jusqu'à 12ans)

portion de légumes + viande ou poisson + dessert 11€

ENTRÉES :

• Soupe de légumes à la provençale

• Melon à l'orange ou à la menthe

• Fromage de chèvre de la Provence à l'ail et à l'huile d'olive

• Salade de tomates en gelée de gelée de légumes

PLATS :



bread, cheese, and terroir as geography lessons

One of the things I miss most about France, now that I live in England, is the regional diversity of its food.

Every corner of the country seems to have invented its own comfort dish — and refuses to share it.

That's how you know you're somewhere real.

In Provence, we loved the freshness of pistou, the saltiness of pissaladière, and the deep, sun-drenched flavours of bouillabaisse.

In Lorraine, the pâté lorrain and tourte were staples of every family gathering, with madeleines de Commercy to finish.

Head to the Périgord, and it's magret de canard, foie gras, and walnut cake.

Each region guards its recipes like heirlooms.

French cuisine is more than taste — it's geography made edible.

The landscape dictates the menu: olive oil in the south, butter in the north, cream in

Normandy, and wine everywhere in between.

To understand France, you don't need a map — just a good appetite.

Food is how the French remember who they are.

Each bite connects past and place, people and pride.

Traveling through France without tasting it is like reading a novel without turning the pages.



Dessert from Metz, Lorraine



Burgundy cellar



Madeleines de Commercy



Dish from Metz



Provencal market

6. VISIT A CASTLE





Cité de Carcassonne

where history lingers in stone and silence

Castles in France aren't just ruins — they're storytellers.

Each one keeps a secret: of feasts, of sieges, of forgotten kings and stubborn villagers who refused to leave their hilltop.

You can't drive far without seeing a silhouette of turrets or a crumbling keep perched above a river.

I've always loved castles because they add something ancient and slightly theatrical to the landscape.

They remind us that France has never been static; she's been built, defended, burned, rebuilt — and always with flair.

In Alsace, the pink sandstone of Haut-Kœnigsbourg glows at sunset like a dream.

In the Périgord, châteaux seem to rise every few kilometres, their reflections trembling in slow green rivers.

And sometimes, the most memorable ones are the quiet ruins covered in ivy, open to the wind and the birds.

Many French castles welcome visitors; others you simply stumble upon while driving along a sleepy valley road.

Stand in their courtyards and listen — not for ghosts, but for the echo of centuries that still hum beneath the stones.

History here isn't trapped behind glass.

It's under your feet.





Menthon Saint-Bernard



Provins



Dinan



Aloxe-Corton

7. CELEBRATE THE LIGHT





Luberon, Provence

why evening glow matters more than weather

France doesn't have the best weather in Europe — but she has the best light.

Painters came here for a reason : that soft, golden radiance that turns even laundry lines into art. I've seen sunsets I'll never forget — in Provence, where the hills blush pink; in the Alps, where the last rays brush the peaks like fire; and in Paris, where the Eiffel Tower stands against a sky that seems to melt from gold to indigo.

It's not the sun itself that matters, but what it touches: tiled roofs, fields of lavender, a glass of rosé that suddenly glows like a jewel.

The French instinctively notice light.

They build towns that catch it, paint shutters that reflect it, and linger outside just to feel it fade.

When you travel here, don't hide indoors when clouds roll in — wait.

There's always a moment when the sky forgives the day, and everything shimmers for a few heartbeats.

That's when France feels eternal.



La Roche-sur-Foron



Paris



Toulois



Luberon



Maisons-Laffitte, Île de France

8. LEARN TO PAUSE



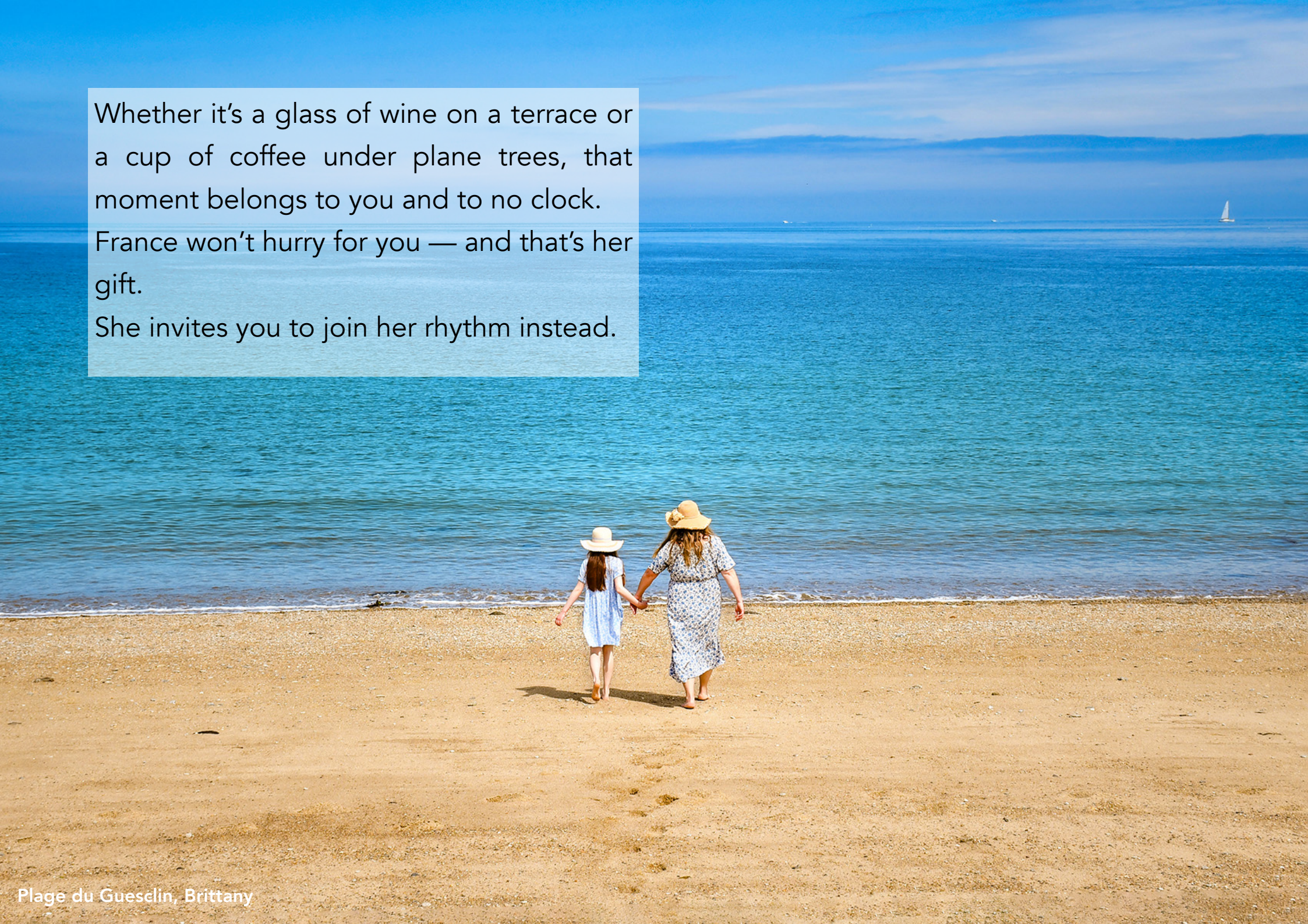


Île Saint-Louis, Paris

cafés, apéros, and the art of waiting

I confess — when I travel to France these days, it's often for work.
I arrive with lists, appointments, and the familiar rush to "get things done."
But France, kindly and stubbornly, teaches me to slow down.
There's the café that still takes five minutes to bring your espresso, the shopkeeper who wants a chat about the weather before handing you your change, and the endless lunch breaks that make you rethink the word "urgent."
At first, it's infuriating.
Then it becomes addictive.
The French understand something most of us forget : efficiency doesn't make life richer; pauses do.
L'apéro embodies that idea — a ritual that says, "We've done enough for today."
It's not about alcohol; it's about presence.

Whether it's a glass of wine on a terrace or
a cup of coffee under plane trees, that
moment belongs to you and to no clock.
France won't hurry for you — and that's her
gift.
She invites you to join her rhythm instead.





Fontaine-de-Vaucluse



Nolay



Gordes



Sarlat-la-Canéda

9. OBSERVE FIRST, SPEAK BRAVELY





Tuileries Gardens, Paris

decoding gestures and silences — and knowing when to speak

Language in France isn't only words; it's rhythm, tone, posture.

A raised eyebrow can express an entire paragraph.

A tiny shrug can mean yes, no, maybe, or "don't be ridiculous."

The French communicate as much with silence and gestures as they do with grammar.

As a French teacher, I tell my students that learning the language isn't just about vocabulary — it's about listening with your eyes.

Watch how people greet one another, how they hold a conversation, how they interrupt (which is, in France, a form of enthusiasm).

Observe before you speak — it teaches you the rhythm, the politeness, the invisible codes.

But then — speak.

Even if your sentence isn't perfect, even if your accent feels clumsy.

Because the French, contrary to myth, love when foreigners try.

They'll correct you, sometimes with passion, but rarely with malice.

The real secret is balance.

Observe enough to understand the melody — and then dare to join in.

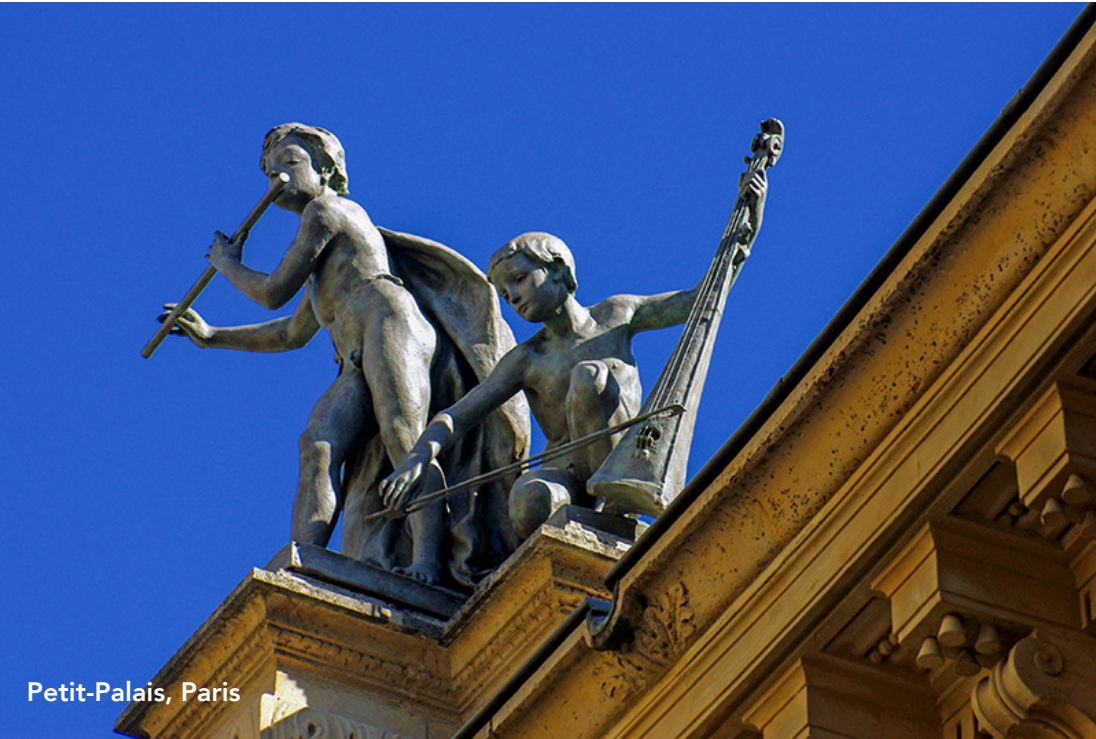
Language, like travel, isn't about perfection.

It's about connection.

And when you speak after truly listening, your words — no matter how simple — will sound unmistakably alive.



Simiane-la-Rotonde, Provence



Petit-Palais, Paris



Notre-Dame de Paris



Saint-Germain-en-Laye



Oppède-le-Vieux

10. RETURN OFTEN — AND ALWAYS DIFFERENTLY





Annecy, French Alps

because France changes as you do

No one ever finishes discovering France.

You can visit the same village five times and never see it the same way.

The light shifts, the vines grow, the bakery changes hands, and somehow everything — and everyone — evolves.

Every return feels both familiar and new.

That's the quiet miracle of this country: it mirrors your own life.

When you're young, France is adventure — the thrill of discovery, of croissants and castles.

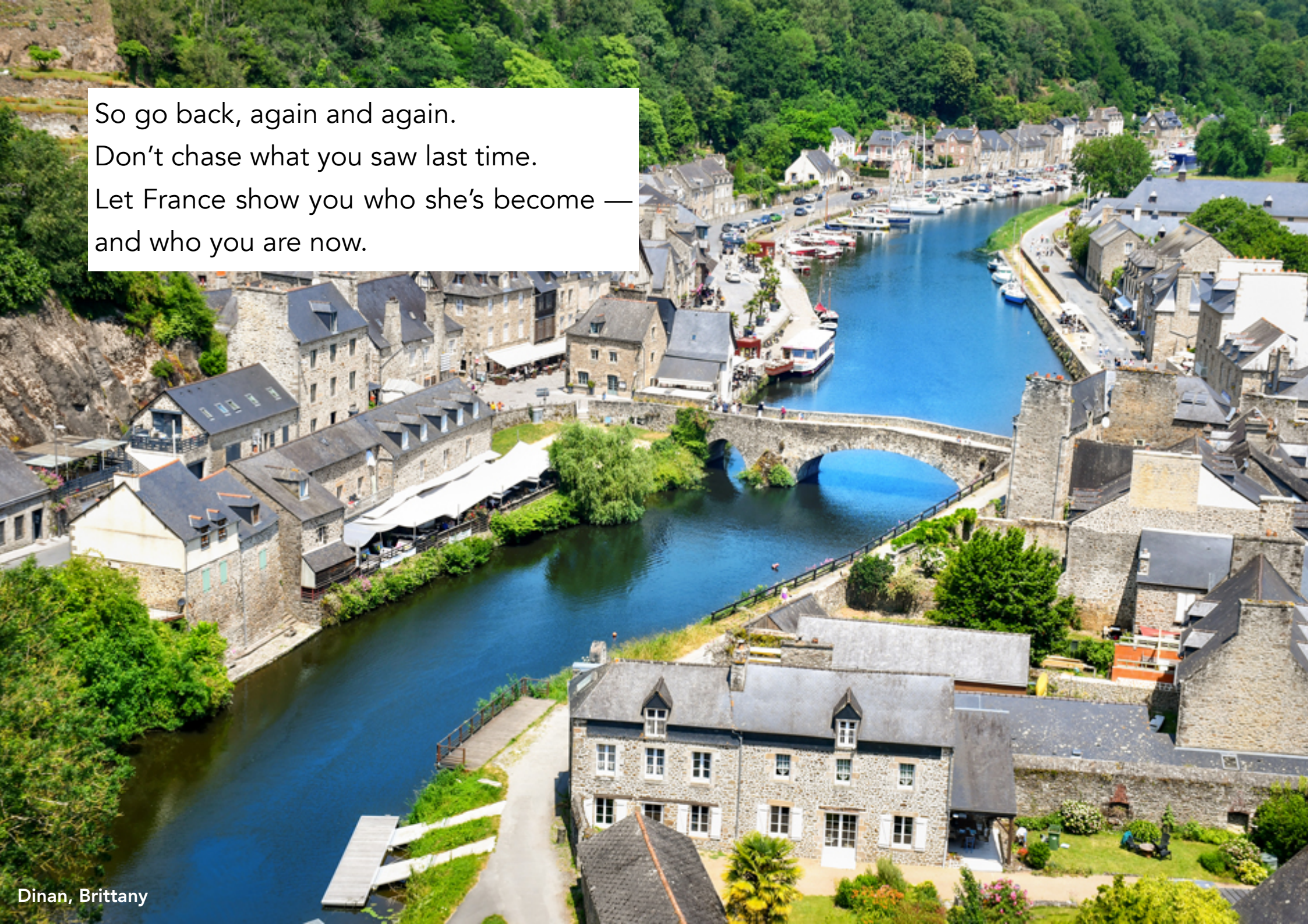
Later, she becomes nostalgia — a place of memories, of cafés where time stands still.

I've lived in several of her regions — Paris, Alsace, Lorraine, Franche-Comté, Savoie — and each time I go back, I find something I'd missed.

Maybe that's why I keep crossing the Channel, even now that I call England home.

I can't see France from my window, but she's always there, just beyond the horizon, waiting to surprise me again.

So go back, again and again.
Don't chase what you saw last time.
Let France show you who she's become —
and who you are now.



Dinan, Brittany



Château de Chantilly

CONCLUSION

LISTENING TO FRANCE



France doesn't reveal herself all at once.

She's too proud, too modest, too layered for that.

She prefers to appear in fragments — a bell in the distance, a scent of bread, a window half-open on a quiet street.

The longer you stay, the more she unfolds — not to impress you, but to let you belong for a moment.

To discover France differently is to stop chasing her and start noticing her.

It's the sound of footsteps echoing on cobblestones after rain.

It's the light that turns an ordinary façade into gold.

It's the taste of strawberries that remind you which month it is.

It's the gentle realisation that beauty here doesn't shout; it lingers.

I've walked her streets in every season — through the mists of Alsace, under the summer sun of Provence, along the quiet rivers of Lorraine.

And each time, she's been a little different, as if testing whether I'm still paying attention.

If this guide has made you pause, smile, or dream, then France has already worked her charm.

And if you'd like to keep discovering her — slowly, deeply, through stories, history, and moments that feel both ordinary and extraordinary — I'd love to have you join me.

👉 **Subscribe to French Moments** — my weekly letter from across the Channel, where I continue to explore the hidden soul of France, one story at a time.

SUBSCRIBE TO OUR SUBSTACK!

Because France isn't a place you see once.

She's a conversation you keep having — softly, for the rest of your life.





Provins, Brie



Annecy, French Alps



Beaune



Dinan



Mont-Saint-Michel



Gordes



Hospices de Beaune



Versailles



Chantilly



Chantilly



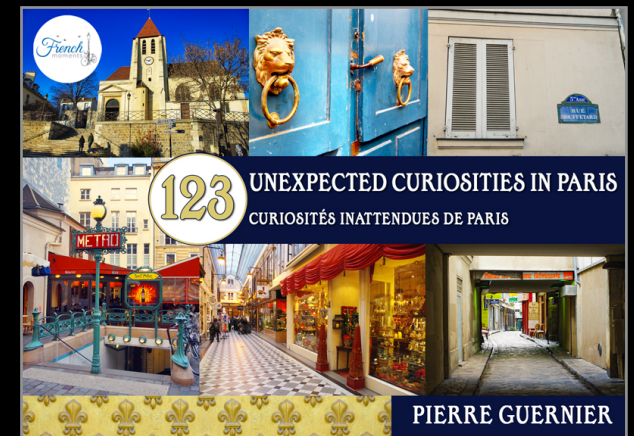
Mont-Saint-Michel

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This eBook has been made based on my travel experience in France.

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Vanoise National Park, French Alps