

# France – The Joy of Life

By Maximilian Trossen

France, the largest country in Western Europe, has ancient and fascinating places to visit. I want to visit France because of the glorious Catholic history, the unique culture, and the variety of climates. The beautiful pilgrimage sites ( Lourdes and Chartres) are of particular interest to me. They are outstanding examples of French architecture and design. From Paris to Bordeaux, I look forward to discovering the creative French people.

France has a very deep-rooted history. Julius Caesar conquered France (50 B.C.), and the Roman Empire fell 500 years later. In A.D. 800 Charlemagne became king. In 1792 the French Revolution occurred, and a republic was founded. In 1799, Napoleon Bonaparte seized power in France. During World War I and World War II, France was a war zone for the Allied Forces and the Nazi German Army. Today, France is a peaceful country.

A unique quality of France is the culture. It is known for excellent food. France produces more wine than any other country in the world. It has fabulous cheeses, delicious soups, and fresh bread or baguettes. The main language spoken is French which has Latin roots. Eighty percent of the people in France profess to be of the Roman Catholic religion. The museums and libraries are scholarly centers of learning. There are thirty government owned and operated museums. The most famous art museum is the Louvre. The largest library in Western Europe is the Bibliotheque Nationale de France.

A rare characteristic of France is the climate/terrain. The snowy Alps form the borders between France and Spain. The Alps also shield the beaches along the Mediterranean Sea from the cold north winds. France is twice as large as Colorado and one-fourth of the size of the population of America. Paris is the capital of France.

The place in France that I want to visit is Lourdes. On February 11, 1858, the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to fourteen year old Bernadette Soubirous. There were eighteen apparitions of the Blessed

Virgin Mary to St. Bernadette. Our Lady said, "I am the Immaculate Conception" (March 25, 1858). The Blessed Virgin Mary asked that Lourdes be a place of pilgrimage, and for a church to be built near the grotto. She asked St. Bernadette to tell the people (especially the sick) to pray through her intercession at the spring of water for healing. It is well documented that numerous medical miracles have occurred at Lourdes. Lourdes is located near the Pyrenees Mountains between France and Spain. I want to visit Lourdes to bathe in the spring/grotto water and see the beautiful church.

The other place I want to visit is Chartres Cathedral. It is one of the oldest Gothic Cathedrals in France. In A.D. 1223, it was completed. Chartres houses the famous relic of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Sancta Camisia. It has the magnificent stained glass windows from the thirteenth century with 3,899 figures. These beautiful windows were hidden during World War II to protect them from being broken or stolen. A lesser known fact is that Chartres Cathedral was a school. During the French Revolution, many artifacts were lost. The statues were ruined and smashed! Today Chartres is a famous place of pilgrimage. There is a large restoration in progress. I want to visit Chartres Cathedral to see the magnificent church and the veil of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

We should appreciate the colorful, rich, and long lasting Catholic heritage of France. I want to visit these phenomenal places of history, culture, and climate. Lourdes and Chartres are fascinating places of pilgrimage. I want to visit France to meet the French people. I want to eat the delicious food! Bon appetit! (Good appetite!)

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