France
WITHOUT THE TOUR

# Plan Your France Trip

INDEPENDENT FRANCE PLANNING WORKBOOK

One decision at a time. A little preparation. A lot more confidence.

## Your planning path


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Independent travel. Thoughtfully planned.

YOUR INDEPENDENT FRANCE PLANNING WORKBOOK

# Plan Your France Trip

## One Decision at a Time

# From “Where do I start?” to a trip that fits you.

You can put this trip together yourself. You do not need to know every train route, book every hour or see every famous place. You just need a sensible order for making decisions.

This guide follows the same seven steps as **Plan Your France Trip** on France Without the Tour. Work through the exercises, check the connections, and leave room for the lovely bits you cannot plan.

> **Inside:** A clear planning flow, a worked calendar example, practical worksheets, a booking tracker and a final departure checklist.

## Make it your own

My trip / travelers: _____

My travel dates: _____

Use this digitally alongside your own notes, or print the worksheet pages and write directly on them. The writing spaces are not interactive form fields.

START HERE

# Your planning path

Read the steps in order. Make provisional choices first, then revisit them as real prices, availability and journey times come into focus.

01 Establish your time and priorities 4

02 Choose your destinations and bases 6

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> **Start these checks early.** Documents and entry requirements, insurance and access needs can affect what you book. See page 12 before making nonrefundable commitments.

## A simple way to use this workbook

- **Do one step at a time.** Complete the small exercise, then use the “before moving on” check.
- **Keep one home for your plans.** A notebook, spreadsheet or itinerary app is fine. I use TripIt to keep travel details together.
- **Work at your pace.** The timing guide on page 14 is a reminder, not a booking rule. Important events or limited availability may need attention sooner.

STEP 01

# Establish your time and priorities

Start with the time you actually have and the experience you want. The destination wish list can wait a moment.

- **Count nights and usable days separately.** Write down the local arrival date and time, departure date and time, and any overnight flights.
- **Choose two or three priorities.** Beaches, food, museums, villages, markets or a relaxed pace? Give the trip a purpose.
- **Plan for your people.** Discuss walking, energy, children's needs and how often everyone is happy to change accommodation.
- **Check fixed events first.** If a festival or concert is the reason for going, confirm its dates and availability before building around it.

> **My first planning trick:** Put the trip on a calendar before choosing hotels. I travel from California, so getting to France takes a sizeable bite out of my vacation time. Seeing the actual days makes a big difference.

## Your first decisions

**Leave home / arrive in France / fly home**

**Our top three priorities**

**Our pace, walking needs or fixed event**

> **Before moving on:** Know your approximate dates, number of nights and main priorities. Use the next page to see why nights do not equal sightseeing days.

YOUR CALENDAR EXERCISE

# See the time you really have

An illustrative 10-calendar-day trip: September 11-20, 2027. This demonstrates the counting method, not a suggested route or confirmed flight schedule.

| Dates | What happens | Usable time |
|---|---|---|
| Sep 11 | Depart for Nice via Paris | Travel day |
| Sep 12 | Arrive Nice at 16:45; check in | Possible part-day |
| Sep 13-15 | Stay in Nice | 3 full days |
| Sep 16 | Check out 09:00; flight to Paris 12:00 | Transfer day |
| Sep 17-19 | Stay in Paris | 3 full days |
| Sep 20 | Fly home | Travel day |

**The result: 8 nights, 6 full sightseeing days.** Nice: September 12-15, four nights. Paris: September 16-19, four nights. Arrival may leave some usable time, depending on delays, check-in and energy. A 16:45 landing is not a full day.

## Now map your own trip

| Date(s) | Base / travel / arrival | Full or part-day? |
|---|---|---|
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

**My total:** _____ nights | _____ full days | _____ useful part-days

**A useful rule of thumb:** Three nights between an afternoon arrival and a morning departure usually give you two full days, plus some of the arrival day. Mark moving days before adding activities.

STEP 02

# Choose your destinations and bases

A base is somewhere you sleep. A day trip is somewhere you visit and return from. You do not need to move hotels to see somewhere new.

- **Shortlist places that serve your priorities.** Choose what you want to do there, rather than adding a stop simply because it is famous.
- **Compare one base with several.** One base means fewer check-ins and less packing. More bases can shorten repeated long return journeys.
- **Allocate nights before outings.** Mark every move on your calendar. Include checkout, luggage, transfers, the journey and check-in.
- **Remove a stop if it feels rushed.** An extra destination costs time as well as money. Save something for another trip.

> **From my own trips:** My husband and I based in Nice on both Riviera visits. We could take nearby day trips and break them up with a local day or time at the beach. That rhythm suited us better than constantly moving.

## Your provisional route

| Base | Nights | Why this base fits |
|---|---|---|
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

**A place we can visit as a day trip / a stop we can save for later**

> **Before moving on:** Have a provisional list of bases with nights assigned to each. They should add up to your trip calendar.

Explore destination ideas

STEP 03

# Set a working budget

Choose a comfortable total spending range, then test it against real options for your dates. This is a working estimate, not a promise to spend exactly that amount.

- **Start with the whole trip.** Include travel to France, baggage, airport transfers, accommodation, intercity journeys and everyday spending.
- **Keep the units clear.** Accommodation is often per room or property per night. Food and admissions may be per person. Multiply by the correct nights, days and travelers.
- **Choose your tradeoffs.** Decide where you would happily save and what is worth a splurge. A kitchen, fewer bases or a different neighborhood can change the picture.
- **Leave a margin.** Allow for unexpected costs and a worthwhile treat. Update your figures as you book and avoid adding the same allowance twice.

**Allow for travel insurance.** Review existing coverage and decide whether to buy a policy. Leave room in the budget while comparing options, and check purchase deadlines early.

## Your first budget sketch

| Category | Estimate in your chosen currency |
|---|---|
| Flights + baggage + airport transfers | |
| Accommodation: nightly total × nights | |
| Between-base + local transport | |
| Food + activities + other essentials | |
| Travel insurance, if purchasing | |
| Contingency / treats | |
| TOTAL TRIP ESTIMATE | |

**Comfortable total range:** _____ to _____

> **Before moving on:** Have a total budget range and know where you prefer to spend more or save. If the estimate does not fit, revisit the route before committing.

Use my budget guide and free budget worksheet

STEP 04

# Check how your route works

Test each journey before committing to places to stay. A route that looks close on a map may take much longer door to door.

- **Compare arrival and departure cities.** Flying home from a different city may reduce backtracking. Compare the time saved with the full price difference.
- **Compare complete journeys.** Include reaching the station or airport, waiting, changes, the main journey and onward travel to your accommodation.
- **Compare the full cost.** Count baggage and transfers. For a rental car, add fuel, tolls, parking and any one-way charge.
- **Check practical arrival details.** Look at service hours, exact stations, luggage storage before check-in and any station or airport changes.

## Test one move at a time

| Journey check | Your notes |
|---|---|
| From base / to base | |
| Transport + exact stations or airports | |
| Door-to-door time + arrival time | |
| Full cost + luggage / changes | |
| Backup or unresolved question | |

> **Before moving on:** Know how each move could work, its approximate cost and how much of the day it uses. You can mix transport: rail for city stays and a car for a rural section.

Read the France by Train guide

STEP 05

# Choose accommodation that supports the trip

Choose the location and type of stay around your days and your group. Then compare individual properties.

- **Map the location first.** Check the actual journey to transport and the places you expect to visit often. “Central” can mean different things.
- **Choose the kind of stay you need.** Compare hotel services with a vacation rental’s space, kitchen or laundry. A gîte is a self-catering holiday rental, often a house or cottage suited to a countryside stay.
- **Read beyond the photographs.** Check beds, stairs or lifts, air conditioning, check-in hours, luggage storage and recent reviews.
- **Compare the full price and conditions.** Include cleaning and other listed fees. Note cancellation deadlines and deposit or payment terms.

> **What matters to me:** A separate sitting area and a kitchen are must-haves. After sightseeing, we like a glass of wine somewhere other than a hotel bed. Your nonnegotiables may be completely different.

**Our three must-haves**

| Compare | Option A | Option B |
|---|---|---|
| Location / transport access | | |
| Total price / cancellation | | |
| Practical fit / missing details | | |

> **Before moving on:** Have accommodation options that fit the route, group and budget. A lower room price may not help if it adds costly transfers or a difficult daily journey.

Compare accommodation types and travel resources

STEP 06

# Coordinate your main bookings

Check dates, availability and connections together before paying. There is no single booking order that works for every trip.

- **Check availability across the route.** Compare flights, accommodation and essential onward travel before making several nonrefundable purchases.
- **Make the dates agree.** Check the local arrival date, every accommodation night and the journey between each base. Watch for overnight flights.
- **Know what is flexible.** Read change and cancellation terms. If a ticket is not on sale yet, record a reminder rather than treating it as booked.
- **Keep a single record.** Save confirmations, actual tickets, balances, payment dates and cancellation deadlines. An itinerary summary is not always the ticket you must show.

## Your booking tracker

| Booking / date | Status / reference location | Next action / deadline |
|---|---|---|
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

**Before paying:** correct traveler names, dates, locations, total price, inclusions and cancellation terms checked.

> **Before moving on:** Have a confirmed backbone, with remaining tasks clearly recorded. If an essential booking is unavailable, revisit the plan before locking in the rest.

Read What to Book Before Traveling to France

STEP 07

# Add activities and breathing room

Now build enjoyable days around your bases. Secure what matters most and leave space for discoveries.

- **Pick the experiences you would hate to miss.** Choose a few priorities: a museum, concert, day trip, food experience or beach-club day.
- **Check before reserving.** Confirm opening days, seasonal availability, timed entry and exactly what the ticket includes.
- **Group activities sensibly.** Consider location, travel time, meals, walking and your group's energy. Leave a buffer between separate reservations.
- **Protect flexible time.** Keep room for weather, a market, a long lunch or an afternoon when you would rather stay nearby.

> **My preferred rhythm:** A relaxed morning, an easy day trip, then a local day to shop, wander or enjoy the beach. On our Riviera trips, nearby places did not always need a full day. We could go as quickly or slowly as we liked.

## Build a day you will enjoy

| Part of the day | Your idea |
|---|---|
| Main experience / fixed time | |
| Nearby lunch or easy second stop | |
| Travel + rest buffer | |
| Weather alternative / open time | |

> **Before moving on:** Have essential activities arranged and enough open time to enjoy the trip. You are planning a holiday, not filling an appointment book.

GET READY TO TRAVEL

# Check early.
# Arrive with a plan.

These checks support all seven steps. Start the first three early, since they can affect your bookings.

## Start early

- **Travel documents and entry requirements.** Use official guidance for your nationality, passport, trip length and every country visited or transited. Check validity, renewals and any visa or travel authorization required for your dates. Save copies securely.
- **Insurance.** Check existing health and card benefits before buying more. Compare relevant medical, emergency transport, cancellation, interruption and delay coverage. Read exclusions, limits and purchase deadlines; save the assistance number.
- **Assistance and access.** Confirm facilities directly with accommodation and transport providers. Check assistance booking deadlines for every relevant airport, station and connection. Save written arrangements and meeting points.

Check official France entry guidance

Compare travel insurance on Squaremouth

## Make your first arrival straightforward

- **Know your arrival point.** Record the airport or station, terminal if relevant and local arrival time. Compare transfer hours, luggage arrangements and full cost.
- **Save the last part of the journey.** Keep your accommodation address, entrance details and check-in instructions offline. Have a backup transport option and a contact for delays.

**My arrival plan and backup**

GET READY TO TRAVEL

# Prepare for everyday travel

A few checks at home make day-to-day travel easier. You do not need to buy every travel gadget to be ready.

## Phone and access

- **Choose a setup that works abroad.** Check country coverage, roaming fees and limits. For a SIM or eSIM, confirm phone compatibility, unlocking requirements and whether it includes calls and texts or data only.
- **Test important access.** Know how you will receive bank verification messages on your usual number. Save maps, addresses, tickets and confirmations offline. Pack charging cables and a suitable plug adapter.

## Payments and backups

- **Check your cards before leaving.** Confirm foreign transaction fees, ATM fees, withdrawal limits and overseas-use restrictions with your providers. Carry a separate backup and save bank contact details.
- **Choose euros when offered a currency choice.** This lets your card provider handle conversion. Watch for cash-machine or merchant conversion offers and separate withdrawal fees.
- **Plan access, not a large cash supply.** You do not need to buy euros before departure just to reach your hotel if you arrange a card-payable transfer. Confirm payment before taking a taxi. Keep some cash for small purchases once settled; understand deposit holds on available funds.

Read my guide to paying for things in France: cards, cash, ATMs and backups

## Luggage and travel-day essentials

- **Pack for your actual route.** Check each provider’s allowances. Test lifting and moving the packed bag, including stairs. Keep documents, medication and travel-day essentials accessible; check applicable restrictions.
- **Choose comfort.** Bring worn-in walking shoes and clothing for your season and activities. Your bag should be manageable by you, not just look manageable in the shop.

> **One last test:** Can you find your tickets, contact your accommodation, access your bank and reach your first stop if mobile data is unavailable?

THE SENSIBLE DECISIONS TIMELINE

# When to do what

Follow the seven-step flow. Use this timing guide to keep things moving, not as a reason to wait on an important booking.

## When you first start planning

Work through steps 1-3: establish time and priorities, choose provisional bases, and set a working budget. Check documents, insurance and assistance needs early. Confirm any fixed event that anchors the trip.

## As soon as the route starts to fit

Work through steps 4-6: test journeys, shortlist accommodation and coordinate your main bookings. Compare availability across the whole route before making irreversible commitments.

## When booking windows open

Monitor the transport and experiences you need. Sales windows vary by service and date. Set reminders for tickets not yet released; check official provider information rather than assuming a fixed number of days.

## As departure gets closer

Complete step 7 and the everyday preparations. Book priority experiences when needed, leave flexible blocks, check phone and payment access, and make the arrival plan practical.

## In the final week

Reconfirm arrangements, review outstanding balances and deadlines, download tickets and addresses, check current transport notices and weather, and test your packed luggage.

> **Starting later?** Do the same steps in a shorter period. Focus on a workable route and essential availability first. A simpler trip can be a very good trip.

**My next three actions and dates**

BEFORE YOU GO

# Your plan is ready when...

You do not need to schedule every hour. Get the essentials organized, then leave room to enjoy France.

- [ ] Your dates, bases and accommodation nights agree.
- [ ] You know how you will travel between places.
- [ ] Your budget reflects the trip you are actually booking.
- [ ] Essential bookings are confirmed or recorded as outstanding tasks.
- [ ] You know your remaining payment and cancellation deadlines.
- [ ] You have an arrival plan, address and backup transport option.
- [ ] Your tickets and confirmations are easy to find offline.
- [ ] Documents, insurance and assistance checks are complete.
- [ ] Phone access, payment backups and manageable luggage are ready.

## Keep planning with me

Return to Plan Your France Trip

Build your budget with the guide and free worksheet

Review what to book before traveling to France

Explore France by Train

Explore destinations and practical travel resources

> **Your trip. Your pace.** A clear plan gives you the confidence to travel independently, with space for an unexpected view, an extra coffee and a very good lunch.

France Without the Tour | October 2026 edition. Planning guidance, not live schedules or individual entry, insurance or financial advice. Confirm current requirements, availability and provider terms for your dates. Examples are illustrative. External links are regular links with no affiliate tracking added.