Castle View School

French Reading Tasks

Year 10

2020/2021

Name……..

Year 10/11 Reading Booklet- FRENCH

Term 1.1

- Marriage and Divorce in France (code 401282 EN)

- Homelessness in France (code 401286 EN)

Term 1.2

- The top 10 French Festivals (code 401228 EN)

- Francophone Games (code 401288 EN)

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- Air pollution and climate change top French environmental concerns. (code 401290 EN)

- Effects of Global Warming (code 401294 EN)

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- The nine ghost villages of northern France (code 401296 EN)

- A French town's Green Policies aim to win over the working class. (code 401298 EN)

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- How do French people spend their holiday? (code 401300 EN)

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- AVIGNON (code 401316 EN)

- ARLES (code 401329 EN)

1. Marriage & Divorce in France

This article is an extract from *Living and working in France.*

Procedures, statistics and tips

The legal age of consent in France is 18; girls aged between 15 and 18 can be married with the consent of at least one parent, but the government is planning to abolish this concession. Non-French citizens are entitled to be married in France, but divorcees and widows must wait 300 days after their divorce or the death of their spouse before being allowed to remarry (in case of pregnancy).

Only some 50 marriages are performed each year for every 10,000 citizens – the lowest per capita number in Europe. As in many other Western countries, the average age for marriage is increasing and is almost 30 for men and 28 for women, who on average give birth for the first time at just under 30. Almost 7.5m French citizens live without a partner, around 1m of whom are divorcees, and the number is growing each year.

The number of unmarried couples in France has quadrupled to around 2m in the last two decades (among Europeans only the Swedes are less keen on marriage). It's estimated that 40 to 50 per cent of couples who get married have already cohabited for up to two years. Many couples don't bother to get married and simply live together, but French law distinguishes between partners living together 'unofficially' (en *union libre*) and 'officially' (en *concubinage*).

Those living together *en concubinage* have some of the same privileges in law as married couples, including social security. To qualify for these, you may need to obtain a (free) certificate from your town hall testifying that you're living together 'as man and wife' (take identification, proof of address and two witnesses), although town halls aren't obliged to issue them, in which case you can both sign a 'sworn declaration' (*attestation sur l'honneur*) that you live together. The major disadvantage of *concubinage* is that it isn't recognised under French inheritance laws, so partners can inherit only the amount allowed to non-relatives and they receive no state pension when their partner dies.

A *pacte civile de solidarité (PACS)*, which is signed at a court, confers some but not all of the legal benefits of marriage. In certain parts of Paris, it's possible for couples to have an unofficial 'marriage' ceremony, although gay marriages aren't legal in France (a recent 'union' in Bordeaux was declared unlawful).

It's reckoned that over 40 per cent of French children are born out of wedlock and a fifth are raised by a single parent (85 per cent women). Illegitimacy no longer carries the stigma it once did, and all children have the same rights; an unmarried mother (*mère célibataire*) is even paid a generous allowance by the state.

Procedure for marriage in France

To arrange a marriage in France, either partner must apply at least a month in advance to the town hall where they normally live (they must have lived there for at least 40 days – 30 days' residence plus ten days for publication of the banns). The bride and groom must each provide at least one witness and may provide two, whose names must be given to the town hall when the wedding is arranged. Both partners must also provide passports, residence permits (if applicable), birth certificates (stamped by their country's local consulate not more than six months previously), proof of residence in France, and a medical certificate issued within the previous two months (see below). A divorced or widowed person must provide a divorce or death certificate.

You may also be required to produce a *certificat de célibat* (which doesn't mean that you promise to be celibate but that you aren't already married!) no more than three months old, provided by your embassy and a notarised 'affidavit of law' (*certificat de coutume*), drawn up by a lawyer in your home country, to confirm that you're free to marry. For a church ceremony, you may be asked to produce other documents, such as a baptism certificate. All documents must be 'legalised' in your home country and translated into French by an approved translator.

No more than two months before marrying, a couple must undergo a medical examination (*certificat d'examen médical prénuptial*), including a blood test and chest X-ray. The cost is reimbursed by social security. The medical was originally intended to check compatibility between the blood groups of a couple, although with the advent of AIDS it has taken on a new significance. The results are confidential and cannot prevent a wedding from taking place. If a divorced or widowed woman wishes to remarry within 300 days of the divorce or death, she must provide a medical certificate verifying that she isn't pregnant. For a church wedding, you may be required to attend a day's *préparation de mariage* course.

You will then be issued with a pre-marital certificate. Notification of an impending wedding (*bans*) must be published ten days before the ceremony at the town hall where the wedding is to take place.

A civil ceremony, presided over by the mayor or one of his deputies, must be performed in France to legalise a wedding. Although around 50 per cent of couples choose to undergo a church 'blessing' ceremony, it has no legal significance and must take place after the civil ceremony. There's no fee for a marriage in France, although most town halls make a collection in aid of local charities.

Copies of the marriage certificate can be obtained at the *mairie*. Married couples are given a 'family book' (*livret de famille*) in which all official family events such as the birth of children, divorce or deaths are recorded.

Matrimonial Regimes in France

Marriages are performed under a marital regime (*régime matrimonial*) that defines how a couple's property is owned during marriage or after divorce or death. If you're married in France, the rules of the marriage *régime* apply to all your land or land rights in France, irrespective of where you're domiciled, and your total assets if you're domiciled in France.

There are four matrimonial 'regimes' (*régime matrimonial*): two communal regimes (*régime communautaire*) and two 'separatist' regimes (*régime séparatiste*). Under a *communauté universelle*, all assets and all debts are jointly owned; under a *communauté réduite aux acquêts*, each spouse retains ownership of assets acquired before marriage (and assets acquired after marriage in the form of inheritances and gifts), while all assets acquired jointly after marriage are jointly owned. Under a *séparation de biens*, nothing is jointly owned; and under a *participation aux acquêts*, nothing is jointly owned but if the marriage is dissolved, assets acquired during the marriage are divided equally.

A marriage contract isn't obligatory but is strongly recommended. A *notaire* will charge at least €300 to draw one up. If you're married in France and you don't specify otherwise, you will normally be subject to a communal regime. If you choose a separatist regime, it's usual to detail in a notarised contract how your assets are to be disposed of. If you were married abroad and are buying a house in France, your *notaire* will ask you which matrimonial regime you were married under and whether there was a marriage contract.

If there was no contract, you will usually be deemed to be married under a communal regime. You can change your marital regime, but not within two years of drawing up a marriage contract. However, changing your marital regime is expensive (up to €3,000) so it's best to make sure you set up the regime you want when you get married. If you're unsure about the implications of French marital regimes, you should seek advice from a *notaire.*

Divorce in France

As in most other Western countries, the divorce rate has risen alarmingly (by around 40 per cent) in the last decade in France, where more than a third of marriages end in divorce (there was even a best-selling *Divorce* magazine!), although it's still lower than in some other European countries, e.g. the UK. You can be divorced under French law only when either spouse is a French citizen or when two non-French spouses are resident in France.

To be divorced 'by mutual consent' (*divorce par consentement mutuel* or *divorce sur demande conjointe*), you must have been married for at least six months. Other types of divorce are 'consent to divorce but not to consequences' (*divorce sur demande acceptée*), divorce based on fault (*divorce pour faute*) such as adultery, and divorce based on termination of married life (*divorce pour rupture de la vie commune*).

The grounds for a divorce needn't be disclosed, provided both parties agree on the repercussions such as the division of property, custody of children, alimony and maintenance. A divorce is usually granted automatically by a judge, although he may order a delay of three months for reflection. A divorce becomes final one month after judgement or two months if it has gone to appeal. A contested divorce must be decided by a court of law.

PACS

Cohabiting partners (even those of the same sex) may sign a *pacte civile de solidarité* (*PACS*), which protects the individual rights of each party and entitles partners to share property rights and enjoy income tax benefits. To make a *PACS*, you must go to the

local *tribunal d'instance* (listed in the phone book) and submit a written statement that you wish to draw up a *PACS* under law no.99-944 of 15th November 1999, including details of the division of possessions between you. There's no standard form for this.

You must also provide identification, birth certificates, a certificate from the relevant *tribunal d'instance* confirming your place of birth, and 'sworn statements' (*attestation sur l'honneur*) that you live in the area and that there are no legal impediments to your making a *PACS* (e.g. one of you being married). Inheritance rights are the same as for married couples.

Homelessness in France

ON JUNE 1, 2020WORLD NEWS

PARIS, France — With the iconic Eiffel Tower and the Seine River, the country of France is rich with history and culture. Yet, the rich culture and history also come with a price tag that not everybody can afford. As housing costs rise and the melting pot grows, homelessness in France rose from 93,000 known cases in 2001 to a reported 141,500 cases in 2012. The number remains at around 200,000. However, the French capital Paris saw an additional 21% increase between 2018-2019.

The Homeless Demographic

More than half of the homeless in the country are not French-born. The majority are men living alone who arrive as immigrants, migrants or refugees looking for a safer, better place to live. Some are fathers who arrive in France in search of work to send money back to families in their home countries. However, they often find that their course goes wayward living in a social system that makes it hard to survive.

Without being able to speak the French language, integration into society is difficult. Such is the case of a Moroccan man, known as "Tango", who came to the streets of Paris back in the 1980s when the only housing available to him was the crowded living quarters with other immigrant men in the factory in which he worked. Somewhere along the way, his social isolation drove him to alcoholism and personal loss. Rough sleeping became his way of life. After twenty years of living on the street, Tango's life came to an end.

Lucy Williams of BBC News remarked, "A long-term home, without conditions attached, might well have been the key to getting Tango off the streets." Unfortunately, France didn't have enough social housing to make that a reality.

Shedding Light on the Issue

Since the start of President Emmanuel Macron's term in 2017, plans to thwart homelessness in France have fallen to the wayside. President Macron responded to anti-government protests with a four-year plan to fight poverty. However, it has failed to shed light on the hot topics of homelessness and higher housing costs in the country. With the rising cost of rent pushing people out of their homes and social housing and assistance programs maxing out, a lack of housing is intricately woven into the existence of poverty.

In the Greater Paris region, which is the richest part of France, only 50% of those prioritized as requiring immediate housing have received social housing units. The other half remain without a home due to the fact that there aren't any social housing units left. It is an unfortunate numbers game that can be significantly helped.

The case with emergency shelters shares a similar story. Even with the expansion of emergency housing with an annual budget increase, these shelters could only fulfill a quarter of the 35,380 requests they received daily. It is hard enough to be placed in emergency shelters through dialing the emergency hotline. The more egregious flaw isn't that there aren't enough units to go around, but that the short stay of a day or two is too

fleeting to wipe out homelessness in France as intended. Long-term housing is quickly burgeoning as the only solution to getting people off the French streets for good.

Government of France Lends a Hand

As news hit about homelessness steadily rising in the country, the government of France raised the budget from 305 million EUR to 820 million EUR between 2012 and 2017. It also made way for spearheading investments in housing with social support goals.
The power of the purse strings showed immediate results. As Leilani Farha, a U.N. Special Rapporteur, reported that the government of France found permanent residences for 70,000 people a year later in 2018. There are still around 200,000 homeless individuals that remain. However, France has enlisted a powerful strategy that not only builds more housing but ensures a swift transition off the street.

Housing First in France

In efforts to end homelessness for future generations to come, France has adopted the Housing First strategy to cities such as Bordeaux, Dijon, Lyon, Grenoble and Paris. True to its name, Housing First takes a unique approach of providing long-term housing to individuals who would otherwise be deemed unfit to receive social housing. It is already a popular strategy in several European countries. Experts say it is changing minds regarding social housing. The program addresses solutions to both a lack of housing and the long-standing issues perpetuating the cycle of homelessness.

Previous to Housing First, there were several prerequisites to accessing housing. People were expected to get sober or deal with any mental health issues in advance just to get temporary housing. “[And] then if you’re ready, you’ll get permanent accommodation,” explains Serme-Morin, of the European Federation of National Organisation. The organization “Housing First means long-term housing is a precondition for sorting out everything else.”

The program originally started under the program name, “Un chez-Soi d’abord” in 2001. It was previously intended to exclusively house those with existing mental conditions. Now, it has expanded to include a wider net of cases in the country. Two years following the pilot launch, the program streamlined an 85% housing retention success rate, which is aligned with the end goal of curbing homelessness in France entirely.

Future Projects

As Housing First continues to hold great promise for France, “Un chez-Soi d’abord” will develop 16 new housing projects from 2018-2022 in its five-year expansion plan, This should continue to drive down the number of homelessness with 2,000 more housing opportunities on hand. Nineteen European countries have already adopted the Housing

First initiative. So far, Housing First has proven successful in several countries. The reduction of homelessness in France would mean a collective win for all of Europe.
– *Grace Kim*

The top 10 French Festivals (code 401228 EN)

From the historical to the fantastic, France has amazing festivals on offer throughout the year – here are our top picks for French festivals.

If you're living in France, take the time to explore the small towns and the big cities alike. They all celebrate French history and myth with spectacular festivals. There's no better time to learn the smaller idiosyncrasies of local French culture than during a colourful festival. **France's top festivals** celebrate everything from kites to citrus fruit to opera to lights. Immerse yourself in French culture with this pick of top 10 French festivals.

1. Berck Sur Mer Kite Festival

Giant pigs (and crabs, whales, lizards, and assorted cartoon figures) really might fly in the skies high above the vast expanses of sand at the Berck-Sur-Mer International Kite Festival. Wrap up warm and get yourself a good place on the sand dunes to watch experts from all over the world compete against the wind and each other.
www.cerf-volant-berck.com

2. Menton Lemon Festival

For two weeks every spring, oranges, and lemons take over Menton, the *Cité des Citrons* (City of Lemons). There are parades of fruit-covered floats by day; by night, you'll see 10-meter statues and models made from citrus in the Biovès Gardens. You can buy locally made drinks, jams, soaps, perfumes – all made from lemons, of course.
www.fete-du-citron.com

3. Festival(s) of Avignon

Watch a French or world premiere of a new musical or theatrical production in the historic courtyard of the Pope's Palace and elsewhere in the city of Avignon. The Festival of Avignon is known as the 'IN' because another Festival of Avignon, known as the 'OFF', which is an alternative festival of independent theatre companies runs alongside it.
www.festival-avignon.com | www.avignonleoff.com

4. Bastille Day in Paris – July 14

July 14 (*le quatorze Juillet*) is the biggest and most important festival in France. It celebrates the storming of the Bastille (*la Prise de la Bastille*) and the beginning of the French Revolution (*la Révolution Française*) with a massive parade (*le défilé*), fireman's balls, free concerts and, at the Eiffel Tower, some of the best fireworks (*le feu d'artifice*) you'll ever see. For the best view of the fireworks (and atmosphere) go early to the Trocadéro gardens, the Parc de Belleville, the Champ de Mars or for a bird's eye view, the Sacré Cœur or Montparnasse Tower. You can also adopt a few French vocabulary for the day, such as *Vive la France* (long live France) and *Bonne fête!* (happy holiday).
www.parisinfo.com

5. Cannes Film Festival

Film buffs will want to head down to the world's most famous film festival. Here, actors and directors show their newest films and compete for the prestigious award the *Palme d'Or*. Most screenings are invitation only. But don't be too despondent; there are plenty of opportunities for red carpet star-spotting. There's also the *Cinéma de la Plage*, a huge open-air cinema on the beach showing Out of Competition films and Cannes classics. Buy tickets from Cannes Tourist office.
www.festival-cannes.com

6. Nice carnival

The Carnival King will show fans 'he has more than one string to his bow' promises the event campaign, as this year's theme of the spectacular French *mardi gras* is 'King of Media'. Join 600,000 other revellers and party in the streets of Nice.
www.nicecarnaval.com

7. Chorégies d'Orange

This Roman theatre in the city of Orange, with its semi-circular tired stone seating and acoustic stone stage wall, must be one of the world's best settings in which to enjoy *al fresco* opera. Every summer the festival puts on a programme of well and lesser-known productions starring international opera stars. Even if you're not an opera fan, it's an experience not to be missed.
www.choregies.fr

8. Festival Medieval de Sedan

The castle is known as the giant of Sedan for good reason – it's the largest medieval castle in Europe, at 35,000sqm set over seven floors (expect lots of stairs) – and where the Sedan Medieval Festival takes place every May. Find out what life was like back in medieval times: think knights, archery, jousting, swords, banquets, wrestling and more.
www.chateau-fort-sedan.fr

9. La Fête de la Musique

There's music in the air throughout France on the day of the summer solstice June 21. *La Fête de la Musique* is a celebration of all genres of music, performed on the streets, in bars and restaurants, museums, concert halls and parks by professionals and amateurs alike – and it's completely free. Take part if you play an instrument or sing, or just watch and enjoy.
www.fetedelamusique.culture.fr

10. Festival of Lights

For four days at the beginning of December, the city of Lyon becomes the city of lights – a truly magical sight. There are thousands of flickering candles in windows and on balconies, the city's buildings and bridges are lit up with multi-coloured lights and there are light installations by artists from all over the world. Come prepared for crowds; it's said that the festival draws up to four million over the four days.
www.fetedeslumieres.lyon.fr

Francophone Games

By Jeanne Grunert - Canada's Participation

The Francophone Games, also called the *Jeux de la Francophonie*, is an event held in a French-speaking country every four years. It's a combination of sporting events and artistic presentations to celebrate the cultural diversity and cultural treasures among the participating French-speaking nations.

The Francophone Games

The Francophone Games began in 1989, although sporadic events were held since the 1970s in Francophone countries. The games were officially organized and launched in 1989. Every four years, member countries send their best athletes to compete in Olympics-style events. Other celebrations include artistic presentations. Songs and poetry, as well as native dances and other presentations, offer an artistic counterpoint to the games themselves. The 2009 games were held in Beirut, Lebanon and were watched by more than 70 million people worldwide.

Related Articles

- List French Speaking Countries
- Popular French Sports
- French Speaking Chat Rooms

Some believe that the Francophone Games began as competition with the Commonwealth Games. The Commonwealth Games celebrate the countries belonging to the former British Empire. Approximately the same number of countries participate in the Commonwealth Games as in the Francophone Games, but their origins are British, rather than French.

It's fascinating how the old rivalries between these two countries have been channeled through the centuries into sporting events. England and France have long been rivals; throughout history, the two countries fought, and for a long time France was the language of the courts of England. With the rise and fall of the British Empire from the 19th through the 20th century, the rivalry became friendship…but the two distinct cultures, the French infused culture and the British Empire culture, have now been channeled into the two major sporting events.

Member Countries

Fifty-five countries participate in the Francophone Games. Members include the obvious, such as France and Canada (primarily Quebec), but other countries throughout Europe, the Middle East, and Africa send athletes and artists to participate. From countries were French is spoken by only sections of the population, such as Canada and Belgium, participation is restricted to athletes from the French speaking sections alone. Participation varies between about 1,500 and 3,000 athletes annually, with the 2009 Beirut games welcoming over 3,000 athletes.

Sporting Events

The Francophone Games include events popular in French-speaking countries, such as tennis, table tennis, and judo. Track and field is extremely popular, and is simply called 'athletics' by the French-speaking countries. Men and women participate in most of the

events and compete separately, men against men and women against women. Other sporting competitions held at the Francophone Games include wrestling, volleyball, handball, boxing, and football (soccer).

Artistic Events

Because the games are a celebration of culture, rather than athletic prowess alone, many artistic events and celebrations enhance the games. Songs and music are quite popular, with many famous French-speaking vocalists and musicians from around the world performing for millions of fans. Traditional folk dances are also quite popular, and it's not uncommon to see performance by African dancers followed by European folk dancers in lederhosen and dirndl skirts.

Other artistic events include exhibitions of sculpture and art from participating French-speaking countries, and celebrations of traditional fairy tales, folk tales, and poetry. In 2001, a street fair was set up to encourage visitors to enjoy the wonderful artistic and culture treasures from participating nations.

Air pollution and climate change top French environmental concerns

By Valéry Laramée de Tannenberg | Journal de l'environnement | translated by Samuel White

13 Apr 2016

The French General Commission on Sustainable Development (CGDD) has published its annual study on France's environmental concerns. Air quality has become a more prominent issue than ever before.

French citizens ranked air quality as their second most pressing environmental concern in 2015. Never before has the issue been so prominent in the annual CGDD report on the environmental opinions and practices of the French population.

One of the most plausible explanations for this is change of attitude is the awareness raised by the implementation of road space rationing in Paris (on 17 March 2014, the again on 23 March 2015), following spikes in atmospheric pollution.

Researchers link air pollution to heart diseases

Responsible for 400,000 deaths each year globally, air pollution has yet to be sufficiently addressed by the world's governments, researchers have warned. EURACTIV France reports.

Climate change held on to the top spot, bolstered by the international climate conference (COP 21), held in Paris from 30 November to 12 December last year.

Noise pollution largely forgotten

Natural disasters have also become a major cause for concern (chosen by 18% of respondents) since the flooding on the Côte d'Azur in October 2015, ahead of the pollution of water, rivers and lakes (10%).

The increase in household waste, the erosion of biodiversity and the degradation of marine environments have visibly dropped off the radar for many citizens. And noise pollution is almost entirely forgotten.

Sharing out responsibility

While most of the people questioned were able to cite a number of "environmental problems", one third said they were not directly confronted, or concerned, by any of these issues. For individuals, it is the challenges of their own environment, like a lack of public transport or excessive noise, which push them to act.

But can their actions have any effect? “Almost half of French citizens still believe that it should be up to the public authorities to protect the environment,” the CGDD wrote. And businesses are also increasingly cited as “having a leading role to play for the environment”.

The truth about London's air pollution

“In the morning, this traffic island is packed with children and pushchairs and they are about a metre from all the exhausts,” says Shazia Ali-Webber. She is walking her three boys to school in Hackney, the eldest of whom, Zain, is eight and asthmatic.

In 2012, the French public still believed households and businesses shared an equal responsibility for action on environmental pollution, but in 2015, a considerable gap has emerged. Today, only 20% of French citizens believe households should make environmental action “a priority”.

The dominant vehicle

61% of respondents use a car or other motor vehicle to get to work or go shopping. Two thirds of these do not believe they have a viable alternative, and the number of those who think they will one day be able to do without a motor vehicle has risen very little in the last five years.

Price seems to have little dissuasive influence when it comes to motor vehicles: much more effective in motivating a change in travel habits are factors like the availability of public transport and the quality of cycle routes.

Cycling is still a very marginal activity, with only 1% of French citizens traveling to work or doing their shopping by bike.

. Effects of Global Warming

The signs of global warming are everywhere, and are more complex than just climbing temperatures.

CAUSES AND EFFECTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE
What causes climate change? And how does it relate to global warming? Learn about the impact and consequences of climate change and global warming for the environment and our lives.

The planet is warming, from North Pole to South Pole. Since 1906, the global average surface temperature has increased by more than 1.6 degrees Fahrenheit (0.9 degrees Celsius)—even more in sensitive polar regions. And the impacts of rising temperatures aren't waiting for some far-flung future–the effects of global warming are appearing right now. The heat is melting glaciers and sea ice, shifting precipitation patterns, and setting animals on the move.

Many people think of global warming and climate change as synonyms, but scientists prefer to use "climate change" when describing the complex shifts now affecting our planet's weather and climate systems. Climate change encompasses not only rising average temperatures but also extreme weather events, shifting wildlife populations and habitats, rising seas, and a range of other impacts. All of these changes are emerging as humans continue to add heat-trapping greenhouse gases to the atmosphere.

Scientists already have documented these impacts of climate change:

- Ice is melting worldwide, especially at the Earth's poles. This includes mountain glaciers, ice sheets covering West Antarctica and Greenland, and Arctic sea ice. In Montana's Glacier National Park the number of glaciers has declined to fewer than 30 from more than 150 in 1910.
- Much of this melting ice contributes to sea-level rise. Global sea levels are rising 0.13 inches (3.2 millimeters) a year, and the rise is occurring at a faster rate in recent years.
- Rising temperatures are affecting wildlife and their habitats. Vanishing ice has challenged species such as the Adélie penguin in Antarctica, where some populations on the western peninsula have collapsed by 90 percent or more.
- As temperatures change, many species are on the move. Some butterflies, foxes, and alpine plants have migrated farther north or to higher, cooler areas.
- Precipitation (rain and snowfall) has increased across the globe, on average. Yet some regions are experiencing more severe drought, increasing the risk of wildfires, lost crops, and drinking water shortages.
- Some species—including mosquitoes, ticks, jellyfish, and crop pests—are thriving. Booming populations of bark beetles that feed on spruce and pine trees, for example, have devastated millions of forested acres in the U.S.

Other effects could take place later this century, if warming continues. These include:

- Sea levels are expected to rise between 10 and 32 inches (26 and 82 centimetres) or higher by the end of the century.
- Hurricanes and other storms are likely to become stronger. Floods and droughts will become more common. Large parts of the U.S., for example, face a higher risk of decades-long "megadroughts" by 2100.
- Less freshwater will be available, since glaciers store about three-quarters of the world's freshwater.
- Some diseases will spread, such as mosquito-borne malaria (and the 2016 resurgence of the Zika virus).
- Ecosystems will continue to change: Some species will move farther north or become more successful; others, such as polar bears, won't be able to adapt and could become extinct.

The nine ghost villages of northern France

Over 300 days during World War One, these villages were completely wiped out – along with hundreds of thousands of French and German soldiers – during the Battle of Verdun.
By Melissa Banigan -22 November 2018

I was walking with a few friends on a mossy forest path through Fleury-devant-Douaumont, a small village nestled in the pastoral landscape of north-eastern France. It had rained heavily the night before and a fine mist still hung in the air. A cacophonous flock of birds hid in the lush canopy above my head, their lively song juxtaposing the deep silence of the tens of thousands of unknown soldiers who lay in the hallowed ground below my feet.

During World War One, French and German soldiers completely razed nine villages during the Battle of Verdun, the longest and one of the fiercest artillery battles of the war. Raging for around 300 days and nights in 1916, troops used giant guns – including Germany's infamous 'Big Berthas' – to rain a never-ending barrage of shells over the combat zone. The shells contaminated the earth so badly with lead, arsenic and **lethal poison gas**, France determined that most of the villages couldn't be rebuilt. Casualties of war, it was said they had 'died for France'.

Over the last 100 years, only one of the destroyed villages has been reconstructed. Another two have been partially rebuilt, but the remaining six, including Fleury-devant-Douaumont, sit uninhabited within France's *Zone Roug*e, or Red Zone.

After the war ended in 1918, the French government deemed 1,200 sq km of non-contiguous land near Verdun too dangerous to inhabit and too costly to rehabilitate. Although no-one lives in any part of the Red Zone and much of it is still considered too dangerous for visitors, French law recognises the destroyed villages as municipalities – there are even designated mayors who receive government money to receive guests and preserve the memory of what's left. Besides the villages, which are **open year-round** and deemed safe to visit, a few museums and other sites have been erected to memorialise the soldiers who lost their lives for their countries.

Just outside the Red Zone, a small private museum, **Romagne '14-'18**, tells the personal stories behind a large collection of war memorabilia. Inside the zone, south of Fleury-

devant-Douaumont, the **Mémorial de Verdun** (a museum and memorial opened in 1967 by the government) offers stunning exhibits that give visitors a more comprehensive overview of the war.

Just a few minutes' drive away, the **Douaumont National Necropolis and Ossuary** contains the skeletal remains of about 130,000 French and German soldiers. Located on a hill that cascades from the necropolis and ossuary, a cemetery contains a sea of more than 15,000 white headstones – Christian, Jewish and also **Muslim**, reminders that French colonial forces were instrumental in defeating the Germans at Verdun.

Yet while these sites deserve attention, it wasn't until I walked through the trenches in and around Fleury-devant-Douaumont that I started to feel the true magnitude of the war.

Nine French villages, including Fleury-devant-Douaumont, were destroyed during the Battle of Verdun

The path we were walking along was an old communications trench. Once, soldiers skittered back and forth along the path carrying messages between bunkers. Today, old cement posts still line some portions of the route, which is at constant threat of being engulfed by the forest. Suddenly, the path ended and we reached a small clearing.

"Be careful," warned our guide, historian **Guillaume Moizan**, pointing towards twisted cords of rusted metal that thrust from the ground like roots. We were standing on top of the ruins of a bunker. Small stones and pine needles were scattered over the moss that blanketed the structure. Moizan picked up a stone and handed it to me. I was surprised by its weight. It was a small, rusted part of an exploded shell. I rolled it gently between my fingers.

The birds overhead had grown silent. I could feel my heart beating in my chest as I peered down at the amalgamation of metal, moss and pine needles on the bunker. A single small, pink flower grew amid it all. In this open-air memorial, life finds a way.

The cemetery at the Douaumont National Necropolis and Ossuary contains the graves of more than 15,000 soldiers who perished during the Battle of Verdun

Some historians call the Battle of Verdun a 'meat-grinder': healthy men were pushed into the fray only to be masticated and torn asunder by the war's hungry machine. First-hand **accounts of the battle** mention that the sky, thick with acrid smoke, was animated at

night by a horrifying fireworks display of flaming blue, yellow and orange shells. The dead couldn't be removed from the battlefield, and living soldiers were forced to sleep, eat and fight beside the stinking, rotting corpses of their friends.

Standing in the forest, it was difficult to imagine the carnage. The mastermind of the battle, the German Army's chief of staff, Erich von Falkenhayn, had tried to end the whole bloody war by forcing his enemy into a trap where "**the forces of France will bleed to death**", but in the process, he also very nearly bled his own army dry. Together, both sides suffered an estimated 70,000 casualties per month – or a total of more than 700,000 (it's thought that between 80,000 to 100,000 of the dead still remain **lost in the forest**).

Today, nothing remains of Fleury-devant-Douaumont except for stone ruins of the foundations of a few buildings (Credit: Melissa Banigan)

Jean-Pierre Laparra, the mayor of Fleury-devant-Douaumont, helps keep the ghosts from the war alive. His great-grandfather settled in the village in 1909, but was evacuated along with his wife after war descended upon them in 1914. Their son – Laparra's grandfather – stayed behind to fight.

Nothing remains of Fleury-devant-Douaumont except for stone ruins of the foundations of a few buildings. Laparra, who lives nearby, often leads visitors from around the world across a thin path that has been constructed over the ruins. Along the way, he points out various landmarks: the grocery, the foundry, the blacksmith. He talks about how the inhabitants lived and notes where the children went to school.

The villages in the Red Zone "are the symbol of the supreme sacrifice," Laparra said. "You must always know what happened in the past to avoid reliving it. We must never forget."

Museums like Romagne '14-'18 and the Mémorial de Verdun preserve the stories of soldiers who fought in the Battle of Verdun.

After the war ended, acorns and chestnuts were collected from the ravaged battlefield and sent by the Mayor of Verdun to Britain as **remembrances of the battle** between French and German soldiers. A couple were planted in the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, and others have been traced to various grounds across the United Kingdom. Today, these trees tower over the land.

In the ghost villages of the Red Zone, nature also thrives. In the decades after the war, millions of saplings – including thousands of Austrian pines given as war reparations by Vienna – were planted in and around the cratered trenches. Today these stalwart pines share the land with some of the same species of magnificent oak and horse chestnut that made their way to Britain.

Olivier Gérard, director of the Douaumont Ossuary Foundation as well as the mayor of Douaumont (another destroyed village, located just north of Fleury-devant-Douaumont) – tells me: “Nature and life always find a way.”

Debris from the Battle of Verdun, including dog tags, shells and silverware, can still be found in the forests of the Red Zone

Over the course of a century, the trees have absorbed enough of the contaminants from the toxic earth to allow other species of flora to thrive, and the land is teeming with life. In effect, the bucolic countryside of the Red Zone is turning into a Green Zone, although with arsenic levels in the soil up to **35,000 times higher than normal**, the forest is nowhere near pristine.

You must always know what happened in the past to avoid reliving it

As we walked, Moizan paused, bent down and plucked a piece of metal from the ground: a fork. The rain from the night before had washed away the top layer of soil, yielding detritus from the war. In addition to shells, dog tags, helmets and even bones sometimes appeared. We stared at the fork for a few moments, and I wondered to whom it had belonged. The average age of soldiers who enlisted in World War One was 24. Someone’s son once ate using that fork. Perhaps he also used it to eat his last meal.

At the edge of the forest, we came to a small chapel, constructed after the war was over as a place to pray and remember the dead. We walked around it, and I was mesmerised. It’s the only building for miles, and I recalled a rhyme my stepfather, a minister, taught me when I was a young child.

“Here is the church,” he said, while hiding his fingers within his hands. Then, thrusting up two fingers in a triangle shape, he continued: “Here is the steeple.” Finally, while opening his hands and waving his fingers, he exclaimed: “Open the doors, and see all the people!”

A small chapel was constructed near Fleury-devant-Douaumont after the war as a place to pray and remember the dead

Staring at the church, I felt as though I could see the ghosts of the people who once lived in the area. As we left, an old man slowly passed us on the path. Who is he, I wondered? A descendant of one of the soldiers? Or perhaps a retired soldier from another war, there to pay homage to his brethren? I looked back at the man, towards the church and beyond, at the forest, which swayed in the wind over the cratered battlefield. The sun had risen high over trees and the forest was bathed in golden light. I noticed a number of young birch trees standing together like waifs, their leaves glittering.

I realised that I was still carrying the piece of shell Moizan had handed me at the bunker. I let it drop heavily to the ground with a soft thud. From somewhere out of the last vestiges of the fog over the forest, a flock of birds took flight. The air was punctuated by a mad rush of feathers, and then the tiny souls lifted and disappeared into the light.

A French Town's Green Policies Aim to Win Over the Working Class

By Constant Méheut - July 25, 2019

GRANDE-SYNTHE, France — Colourful condominiums with low-energy fixtures have replaced dreary old buildings. Community gardens have sprouted at the foot of public housing projects. And a flashy new fleet of buses runs on natural gas — the fare free.

It is not, perhaps, what one would expect of a bleak coastal town in a crumbling industrial area of France. But Grande-Synthe, near the northern city of Dunkirk, stands out as an unlikely laboratory for working-class environmentalism.

That, at least, was the vision of Damien Carême, the town's Green party mayor since 2001, who was elected in May to the European Parliament, which he intends to use as a larger stage to extend his idea of "social environmentalism."

Formerly with the Socialist Party, Mr. Carême joined the Greens in 2014 and was carried to Brussels on the swelling tide of support for the party that has swept across much of Europe. The Greens garnered 9.8 percent in the Europe-wide voting in May. In France, the Greens finished third with 13.5 percent of the vote.

The party now faces the challenge of convincing an even greater share of voters that concern for a changing climate and the environment is not an elitist cause, but one for everyone.

To do that, in his corner at least, Mr. Carême introduced a range of changes that made Grande-Synthe an incubator of innovation as he sought to demonstrate that green policies could directly improve people's lives.

"People have to understand that green policies are the best response to social and economic issues," Mr. Carême said on a recent afternoon in his City Hall office before his move to Brussels.

It was, and remains, an uphill battle in a town of around 23,600 people that is one of the poorest in France despite his improvements. As mayor, Mr. Carême, 58, had to tackle a distilled version of some of the most pressing issues facing the country.

Grande-Synthe, like many of the towns around it, has suffered from the shuttering of outmoded factories, leaving it today with a record unemployment rate of 28 percent, well above France's average rate of 8.7 percent. More than 30 percent of households live below the poverty line.

Just 25 miles from the port of Calais, it has also become a way station for hundreds of migrants hoping to cross the nearby English Channel.

Despite Mr. Carême's election as mayor, support for Marine Le Pen's far-right National Rally, formerly known as the National Front, remains strong.

In the European election in May, Ms. Le Pen's party came first in Grande-Synthe — as it did nationwide — but it was down six percentage points in the town from the previous elections five years ago. Meanwhile, the Greens' score surged from 6 to 22 percent in Grande-Synthe.

Mr. Carême said he was not surprised by the result. "We got to the root of problems. We made concrete changes,'' he said. ''That is the only way to cut the National Rally's score."

Mr. Carême, who has distinctive round glasses and a bowl haircut, spent most of the campaign presenting his policies as proof that environmentalism could be practical.

This year, Grande-Synthe expects to save nearly half a million euros, or about $560,000, on street lighting thanks to the installation of low-energy consumption LED bulbs. The savings will be applied to a new income supplement for people living below the poverty line.

Such grass-roots achievements stand out in a state-dominated France, where many policies are centralized and mayors have few financial levers.

"Damien Carême has succeeded in removing a contradiction that is deeply rooted in France between social and environmental issues," said Daniel Boy, a political scientist at the prestigious Sciences Po university in Paris.

"His policies showed that environmentalism is not only for the rich," Mr. Boy said. "Mr. Carême proved that it is as important to restore social housings as it is to build bike lanes."

"It is only through this pragmatic approach that the Greens will win in the polls," Mr. Boy added.

It was much the same contradiction that President Emmanuel Macron failed to address last year, when his government allowed a gasoline tax increase that hit rural, low-income workers hardest, setting off the Yellow Vest protests.

A fierce opponent to Mr. Macron's policies, Mr. Carême likes to say that Green policies have to tackle the end of the world as much as the end of the month. "Environmentalism is all about social justice," he said.

At times, that attitude has put Mr. Carême in conflict with the French government. Mr. Carême recently sued the French state for "climate inaction," riding a wave of climate activism that erupted in France early this year.

He first came to prominence when the French state refused to help Grande-Synthe house around 2,800 migrants who were living in precarious conditions at the height of the 2015 migrant crisis.

With the help of Doctors Without Borders, Mr. Carême decided to build a camp with proper sanitary conditions for nearly 1,500 people, making him one of the rare mayors in France to take in migrants.
When it comes to a lasting impact for his environmental policies, the verdict is still out. Some are sceptical.

“One cannot say if, on the long term, his policies will result in job creations,” said Iratxe Calvo-Mendieta, an economics professor at the University of the Littoral Opal Coast in Dunkirk.

“The city alone cannot create many jobs,’’ Ms. Calvo-Mendieta said. ‘‘And in an area still labelled very industrial, Grande-Synthe struggles to attract entrepreneurs and start-ups.”

For Yannick Lefranc, 39, who went to school in Grande-Synthe, Mr. Carême’s green policies are merely fine words.

“He is trying to make reality more beautiful, but the truth is that the city only survives,” he said, standing in front of a cement factory where he works.

Behind Mr. Lefranc stood massive ocher warehouses that are part of a sprawling industrial park stretching for miles along the coastline. It includes France’s oldest nuclear plant and dozens of factories that spit out dense, white fumes around the clock.

“We grew up with these factories,’’ Mr. Lefranc said. ‘‘That is what feeds our families here.”

The paradox is that Grande-Synthe’s green policies depend on a declining industry from which the town draws most of its financial resources, especially in business taxes.
It’s a point that Mr. Carême concedes, even as he tried to build a new business ecosystem less dependent on old industry.

Recently, the town leased a 200-acre plot of land, the “Urban Farm,” to farmers at the lowest market price.

“Without it, I would never have embarked on this project,” said Gérald Maison, a 41-year-old farmer. His vegetables now supply Grande-Synthe’s school cafeterias.

Just how far such small steps can take the Greens remains to be seen at a moment when populist forces are pushing hard against them. Mr. Carême professes to be undaunted.

On election night in May, Sylvie Desjonquères, a friend of his who runs the Emmaüs center in Grande-Synthe, sent him a text saying, “You have much to do now.”

“Not even scared,” he texted back.

How do French people spend their holiday?

Signs announcing a shop or restaurant is '*fermé pour les congés annuels*' are a familiar sight in France during the months of July and August because whilst you're enjoying your summer holiday, so are the French, many of whom will take around four weeks off work in one go.

But if your idea of a relaxing holiday involves trawling markets in Provence or people watching from pavement cafés *à Paris*, had you ever stopped to wonder how the French like to spend their *congés annuels*, where they go and whether we might be missing out on anything?

Historically, it seems that French people are less inclined to holiday abroad than English people. However, when they do, the proximity of the border ensures Spain is a popular choice. Countries where French is widely spoken, such as Tunisia, Morocco and Senegal are also top of the list.

Further afield, it is the overseas departments of Guadeloupe, Martinique and La Réunion that attract the most holidaymakers from France. In 2009, the Ministry of Overseas Territories worked with tour operators to further boost tourism in Guadeloupe and Martinique by offering bargain price breaks.

But as the effects of the recession continue to be felt, more French people than usual are expected to spend their holiday in France this year. For those who can afford to travel within France, hotspots include: Brittany, the Côte d'Azur and mountainous areas such as the Alps and the Pyrénées.

Bear in mind that between the end of July and the beginning of August, when the French are either returning home from their holidays or beginning their *congés annuels*, France's main motorways become particularly congested and are best avoided.

The A5/A6 autoroute goes all the way down and has its fair share of traffic jams in peak season. Some tailbacks have been known to stretch for kilometres, so before setting off on a car journey it is advisable to check for traffic alerts on the **Bison Futé** website.

In the event that taking a month's holiday from work is unrealistic for parents, French children can still enjoy a range of activities without them by attending one of France's many ***colonies de vacances***. The opportunity to spend a few weeks at holiday camp or a day at the leisure centre is open to most.

Ways to Vacation Like the French

What a decade of living in France taught one traveller about the art of taking time off.
W*hen she moved from Philadelphia to Paris in 2006, writer Lindsey Tramuta expected to fall in love with the French food scene and the culture. But what she didn't expect has made the biggest impact: learning how to take a proper vacation.*

In the decade I've lived in France, I've learned how to dine and make time for art and culture. But what has most radically shaped my life is the French art of *savoir-vivre*, which translates (in practice) to savouring life and its pleasures. The most evocative example of this is *les grandes vacances,* the extended and sacred summer holidays that begin in France as early as June. For the French, the question isn't *if* you'll take time off but *when* and *where*. Here are some lessons I've learned from living and vacationing in France.

Take a month off—or at least a full two weeks

French workers are guaranteed by law a minimum of five weeks paid annual leave—a fact that no longer surprises me but rather feels like a humane gesture to collective well-being. That's in addition to 11 national (paid) holidays each year.

Even without the luxury of taking five weeks off per year, you can adopt the French mentality of saving as much time as possible for a solid break. And let's not forget that the French work hard for that freedom. My Parisian husband's colleague, for example, spent a summer month traveling across Australia and New Zealand. "It had a positive impact on his work," my husband said. "But wasn't his job at risk?" I asked, a little shocked. His response: "If you work hard the rest of the year and play your cards right, there's no reason it can't be done."

Unplug completely

Unlike in the United States, where vacation time is largely considered a privilege (and one that some people forgo altogether), in France, time off is both expected and encouraged. "People come back from vacation well-rested and more productive," says Elodie Giraud, the founder of Etchola, a creative and strategic planning agency. "It's in management's interest to encourage time off."

In my experience, the French are far less likely to check email or bring work on vacation. Some, like my husband, can't even access their in-boxes remotely. Les vacances, whenever they're taken, are an opportunity to leave behind the routine of *metro, boulot, dodo* (subway, work, sleep), the colloquial French expression for the daily grind, and breathe easy. Summer breaks are for lingering around the lunch table for hours, soaking up fresh air, and doing a whole lot of nothing.

Even if you only have a week off, reconsider how you structure it. Plan less. Eat more slowly. Don't check your email. You might be surprised by what results from this unplugged time. As research is continuing to prove, a complete disconnect can have a profound effect on our work *and* on our personal lives.

Sebastien Kopp, the cofounder of the sustainable shoe brand VEJA, says that taking time off with his family—and properly disconnecting—has enabled him to come up with new

business ventures: “I had the idea for [our store] Centre Commercial in 2008 while I was on a Greek island and we made it happen!” Imagine what might emerge from a proper break.

Rent a house in the country

As anyone who’s travelled to France in August knows, many restaurants and independent shops shutter for weeks at a time during summer. The owner of one of my favourite mom-and-pop bakeries in Paris’s 11th arrondissement says that he and his family decamp to a small country home in Burgundy for four to five weeks from August to early September. They don’t spend a month traveling—they spend it resting in a home far from the pressures of their daily lives. Priority number one: sleep in! They’re used to waking up before dawn to prepare bread and pastries, but during vacation, there are no alarms and no set routines. They take walks, watch movies, go wine tasting—whatever allows them to unwind.

Article continues below advertisement

Thanks to services like Airbnb or Gites de France, finding a country home in, say, the Alps or Normandy is simple and convenient. One of my favourite summer memories was when my husband and I rented a chalet with friends in La Clusaz, a small village in southeast France. We went on hikes and bike rides every day, cooked at home, and relaxed on the deck with books and nothing but the view of the Aravis mountains to distract us.

Do your own cooking

As Parisians with small living quarters (and as someone who writes often about food!), my husband and I tend to dine out frequently. Vacation, especially when spent in a rented house with a large kitchen, is when we take the time to prepare more than three-ingredient meals and actually enjoy it. We visit the baker, cheesemonger, and butcher nearest to where we’re staying, buy quality ingredients, and break out recipes we’ve ignored for months. It’s also a way for us to get familiar with regional specialties and connect with local artisans.

Go far—but not jet lag far

The most common summer travel spots for the French are under six hours (by plane) away. Southern Europe is a perennial favourite, with Spain and Greece among the most popular destinations. But there’s growing interest in places even closer to home, including Brittany, Corsica, Biarritz, and Arcachon. So, unless it’s the year of your epic overseas trip, consider booking a vacation that’s within six hours by plane. And don’t rule out the vacation possibilities of a destination wedding. (Not an exclusively French concept, I know.) So many of our trips throughout France have started or ended with a wedding, which took the indecision out of vacation planning. One year, we travelled to the Dordogne for a wedding hosted in a restored chateau and made that the starting point for a road trip that took us through Basque country. Another wedding took us to southern Corsica, where we spent the week leading up to it exploring the Mediterranean island.

No matter where we go, the French *work-to-live* philosophy drives the journey.

. AVIGNON

THE PAPAL PALACE WAS LIKE THE LAS VEGAS OF THE MIDDLE AGES

As the world's largest Gothic castle, the Papal Palace dominates Avignon more completely than the Eiffel Tower does Paris. But awe-inspiring as the edifice is, we must use a little imagination today to picture the interior in its medieval heyday, when it was home for nearly a century to nine pontiffs.

Like almost all Gothic structures in Europe, the palace's interior has been slowly stripped of decoration and furniture, so today the bare stone walls give us the impression that the residents existed in austere, monastic self-denial. Nothing could be further from the truth! The medieval Popes, who had abandoned Rome because of its political instability, enjoyed a level of sensual luxury that many of the faithful considered scandalous, earning the nickname, "the Babylonian Exile." The Papal Palace was like the Las Vegas of the Middle Ages, with state-of-the art décor designed purely to delight and impress its occupants. Every floor gleamed with brilliant marble tiles, elaborate tapestries covered the walls, and statues lined the corridors. In the Grand Tinel (Banquet Hall), the ceiling was once hung with purple velvet studded with solid gold stars in order to evoke the night sky.

Two rooms in the palace still contain remnants of their original decoration. In the Pope's Bedroom, every inch of wall space and ceiling is covered with a tempera mural of a forest, the delicate leaves hiding colourful wildlife. The painted birds were echoed in reality, as the Popes loved to keep caged nightingales to serenade them to sleep. The adjoining Stag Room was once Clement VI's study, and its walls are covered with hunting scenes. For good measure, a unicorn and dragon frolic in the woods. These miraculous survivals were only discovered in 1906 because they had been painted over by French soldiers when the palace was used as a military barracks in the 19th century, an act of vandalism that accidentally preserved them. The subsequent layers were simply scraped away.

PARTYING WITH THE POPES - THE POPES OF AVIGNON KNEW HOW TO PARTY

The Popes of Avignon certainly knew how to throw a party. When Clement VI celebrated his ascension to the Pontiff's office in 1342, the surrounding farms were decimated for the feast. Records show that for this single-day extravaganza, the kitchens prepared 118 roast oxen, 1,023 sheep, 914 lambs, 7,428 chickens, 1,195 geese, 3,043 fowl, 39,980 eggs, 6,000 pounds of almonds, 50,000 tarts, and 90,000 loaves of bread. Several hundred of the most important guests gathered in the Banquet Hall for this most elaborate meal.

Naturally, the medieval dining arrangements were far different from todays. Food did not arrive in courses. The dishes were laid out on trestle tables before the guests arrived for an impressive visual effect, and diners had to choose from whatever they could reach from their assigned seat. Medieval cooks loved to make the food itself brightly colourful and even patterned, using contrasting dyes made from herbs, flowers, saffron, and gold leaf, and finishing with pomegranate seeds to resemble rubies. The meal was a carnivore's paradise, with beast after beast arriving from the kitchen. The meat-carving was a prestigious, noble skill, and was often performed by the Pope himself, using an ivory-handled knife. The Pope's own portion would then be passed under a narwhal's horn, which was thought to detect poison.

There were no individual plates at that time. Each guest lay his meat on a thick slice of bread called a trench, which soaked up the juices and would be devoured in turn. The only eating utensil was a knife, so well-mannered diners used only their thumb and two first fingers to eat, with the little finger kept clean to dip into the salt. And there were no napkins. Guests would wipe their hands on the table cloths. The Papal feast ended with desserts highly prized in the Middle Ages: wafers, marzipan treats, jams, and candied fruit, all prepared within the palace itself.

HOW A BRIDGE TURNED A LITTLE SHEPHERD BOY INTO A HERO.

The most striking sight in Avignon is the Bridge of Saint Bénézet, which juts into the Rhône River for four elegant spans then abruptly ends half-way, like a forgotten artwork. It may no longer have practical use today, but the truncated bridge is one of the most beloved structures in France, and surrounded by charming legend. Its story begins in the Middle Ages, when a shepherd boy named Bénézet declared that he had been told by angels to build a bridge across the mighty river. Locals scoffed, but Bénézet proved that God was on his side by lifting a giant rock above his head and laying it by the river as the first foundation stone. Eight years later, in 1185, the 2700-feet-long bridge was completed. Bénézet became a local hero. After his death he was declared a saint and buried in a small chapel that can still be visited on the riverbank. For centuries, the structure enjoyed enormous strategic importance as the only crossing of the Rhone in southern France, and it was immortalized in a popular nursery rhyme, Sur le Pont d'Avignon. But the bridge created by religion was eventually ruined by it. In the 1600s, Avignon was officially governed by the Pope from Rome. When the bridge was weakened by floods, no money for repairs was forthcoming, and the French king refused to help out a "foreign" town. The bridge had been teetering dangerously for years when around 1660 it finally collapsed, leaving the poetic stump we see today.

ARLES

THE EXPAT SCENE IN GAUL

A HABIT LAID DOWN 2,000 YEARS AGO

Thanks to British author Peter Mayle—whose popular memoirs about the expatriate life in Provence were turned into a 2006 film, A Good Year, starring Russell Crowe—this sun-dappled pocket of southern France has become the ultimate choice for Europeans to retire and renovate old farmhouses. Few realize they are echoing a habit laid down 2,000 years ago.

The ancient Romans conquered the whole of Europe, and they, too, had a soft spot for Provence, which was their first acquisition outside of Italy. (The very name Provence comes from the Latin provincia). No sooner had it been taken in 121 BC than its delightful ports and pretty rural villages began to attract wealthy Roman citizens looking for fresh air and sunshine. Today, the landscape of Provence is rich with relics from that ancient golden age, especially in the city of Arles. Around 50 BC, Arles had the good judgment to support Julius Caesar in Rome's civil wars, and was showered with rewards when he won. As a result, Arles was transformed into the hub of the Western Empire, and a miniature version of Rome itself.

Modern visitors can still stroll from the Arena (a scaled-down Colosseum, where today bullfights have taken the place of gladiators) to the Place du Forum (the site of an ancient market and meeting place), inspect the Crypto-porticus (the granaries), and see the Baths of Constantine (where citizens would while away whole days swimming, exercising, and flirting). The new Museum of Ancient Arles puts it all in context. Built next to the Roman Circus on the edge of the city, where chariot races were once held, the museum contains a wonderful set of scale models and dioramas recreating Arles in its Roman heyday. You can almost hear the Arena packed with 20,000 citizens howling for blood, the Forum filled with food vendors, and the riverfront promenade lined with wealthy tourists from Italy, lounging on marble benches and enjoying the sun—not so different from today, after all.