

## FRENCH

### Characteristics

*Greetings.* These are important to any French person. To shake hands or kiss on meeting shows that you are acknowledging the presence of the other person.

*Entertaining.* The first time you are invited to a French home the hostess will go out of her way to fix you a special meal (come later rather than too early!) Bring a present. Do not ask to go into the kitchen or visit the rest of the house unless you are invited to do so. The meal will take a long time: it is an opportunity to socialise. Do not help yourself at the table; wait until food is offered to you. As time goes on and more frequent visits are made, the atmosphere becomes more relaxed. Do not expect a French person to drop by at your house at any time. An invitation is required at least at the beginning of the relationship.

*People of Passion.* Many French people today are Epicurean (devoted to sensuous pleasure and luxury). They are very much influenced by Latin culture and are inclined to follow their emotions. This is particularly evidenced in the religious life of the country. Anything that stirs up passion, and arouses feelings meets with success (e.g. the worship of Mary at Lourdes). This also explains why Pentecostalism is successful and appeals to the French. As a general rule, the modern French person will convert to Christianity more readily if one speaks to his heart, rather than to his intellect through argument.

*Powers of Reasoning.* Although there is the modern element of passion, the French person is also an independent thinker. Many French people are still Cartesian (prone to abstract ideas and like to be persuaded of the truth). His personal opinion is important and a Frenchman will fight for his rights. Group decisions are difficult to reach. He tends to be blunt and assertive when expressing himself. He may be sceptical, and demand tangible proof, even though this in most cases is only a pretext. He may like to analyse, and to talk in circles, but this may be a form of protection to avoid taking risks and making rash mistakes.

He is inclined to think, question, discuss, debate, and disagree, before accepting your idea. He may not accept 'pre-packaged' answers and wants to know 'why?' rather than consider the practical consequences of a decision. He will probably bring out the negative side of a situation before seeing the positive.

*Self-image.* This is often poor, due largely to the French school system that puts down the academically poor student. He wants to prove himself to others. He probably has not received much encouragement in his life.

*Privacy.* The French person enjoys the privacy of his home. In a similar way certain topics of conversation are private, such as religion and politics. Certain questions may be offensive because they are too personal, e.g. "How much money do you have?" Or, to a teenager, "Do you have a boyfriend/girlfriend?"

*Attitude to authority.* In political life, the French are 'allergic' to authority and those who represent it. The French person tends to resent laws and regulations, as a French saying affirms: 'Laws are made to be broken'. However, if a person in authority carries with him a certain charisma which has emotional appeal, a French person will make great sacrifices for such a leader, even to the point of dying for the cause (e.g. those who followed Napoleon, or De Gaulle).

The French are wary of religious authority, and dislike the Church as an institution. This anti-clerical feeling developed under the French Revolution. The French are suspicious of the unfamiliar, such as religious sects. In certain regions, Protestantism is unknown.

*Religious belief.* For the French this is very broad. One can believe in God without ever going to church. Romantic literature has helped promote this idea. Rousseau said, 'If I go for a walk and admire the beauty of nature, I am worshipping God.' The French detest being told what to do in religious matters. They are idealists, and the French Revolution reinforced the three ideals of liberty, equality and brotherhood. Whilst they are strong advocates of liberty and equality for all, the "brotherhood" may not extend to sharing with strangers.

*Relationships.* Time is needed to build relationships. A French person will first test how genuine you are before trusting you. He will not express his feelings of love, appreciation, etc. Outwardly he doesn't need to because there is an unspoken understanding between friends once trust is established. The friendship will grow and last. A French person will be a faithful friend and will show it by his actions. He will have few close friends.

*Family.* Parents and children are important. Strangers are not welcome to impose their view on family matters. Parents no longer teach their children to believe in God and in schools it is strictly forbidden to teach religion. Behaviour today in France is modelled more and more on a kind of 'world culture'. The media plays an important role in French life. Generally it is very much a materialistic society.