

FRENCH REGIONS AND THEIR SPECIFICITIES

Marie-Christine Weidmann Koop, Ph.D.

University of North Texas

I. Introduction to French Regions

Origins of regions

Regional languages

Diversity of regional characteristics

II. ALSACE

A. Background information

B. Regional specificities

D. Noteworthy places and events:

- Strasbourg at the crossroads of Europe
- Colmar and its “Petite Venise”
- Wine Route and Riquewihr

III. BRITTANY

A. Background information

C. Regional specificities

D. Noteworthy places and events:

- Prehistoric monuments: Megaliths
- Natural wonders
- Brest and its Maritime Festival (Tonnerres de Brest)
- Rennes
- Saint-Malo
- Lorient and the Interceltic Festival

IV. NORMANDY

A. Background information

C. Regional specificities

D. Noteworthy places and events:

- Caen
- Rouen and Joan of Arc
- Bayeux and its tapestry
- Le Havre
- Honfleur
- Etretat and its cliffs
- Mont Saint Michel
- Normandy’s Parisian Riviera: Deauville

V. PROVENCE AND FRENCH RIVIERA

A. Background information

C. Regional specificities

D. Noteworthy places and events:

- Marseille
- Vaison-la-Romaine and its Roman vestiges
- Avignon Festival and Palace of the Popes
- Camargue
- French Riviera
- Nice and its Carnival
- Cannes and the Film Festival
- Grasse, world capital of perfumes
- Saint-Tropez

THE GEOGRAPHY-LANGUAGE CONNECTION

In each table below, languages in the same color family are closely related. See the map at right to find origin countries for these linguistic relations.

English	French	Breton	Welsh
dog	chien	ki	ci
rain	pluie	glav	glaw
wife	femme	gwreg	gwraig

English	French	Alsatian	German
bread	pain	Brot	Brot
dentist	dentiste	Zahnarzt	Zahnarzt
earthworm	ver de terre	Rajewurm	Regenwurm

English	French	Provençal	Spanish
planet	planète	planeta	planeta
pharmacy	pharmacie	farmacia	farmacia
mountain	montagne	montanha	montaña

English	French	Corsican	Italian
century	siècle	seculu	secolo
sky	ciel	cele	cielo
ten	dix	deci	dieci

English	French	Catalan	Spanish
cat	chat	gat	gato
door	porte	porta	puerta
school	école	escola	escuela

English	French	Basque	?
rabbit	lapin	untxi	?
sea	mer	itsaso	?
wind	vent	haize	?

A SAMPLING OF FRANCE'S REGIONAL LANGUAGES

Though on the decline, dozens of regional languages in France are still spoken. Central to regional culture, these tongues tell us stories of migration and conquest, of cultural assimilation and language prohibition.

When Britons from Wales settled in northwestern France after the fall of the Roman Empire, they gave rise to Breton, a sister language of Welsh. We see this relationship in words such as *glav*, Breton for "rain"—it's almost identical to the Welsh word *glaw*.

Closely related to Spanish, Italian, and French (all Romance languages) are Provençal, Corsican, and Catalan. These regional languages, as well as those not shown here, demonstrate the link between language and geography (see table at left).

BRETON

A Celtic language closely related to Welsh, Breton is in decline (200,000 speakers). Still, some 15,000 children were schooled in Breton in 2013.

ALSATIAN

Spoken by more people (600,000) than any other regional language in France, Alsatian is closely related to German.

PROVENÇAL

There is a debate over whether Provençal is a bona fide language or merely a dialect of Occitan, a Romance language. It is spoken in homes and rural communities in southeastern France.

CATALAN

Because Catalan is a Romance language, it shares many word roots with Spanish and French. Only a minority of people in France's Catalan-speaking area actually speak Catalan, the result of language shift.

CORSICAN

Closely related to Italian, Corsican is mandatory for primary-school students but optional for secondary-school students. Like many regional languages in France, its use has been waning.

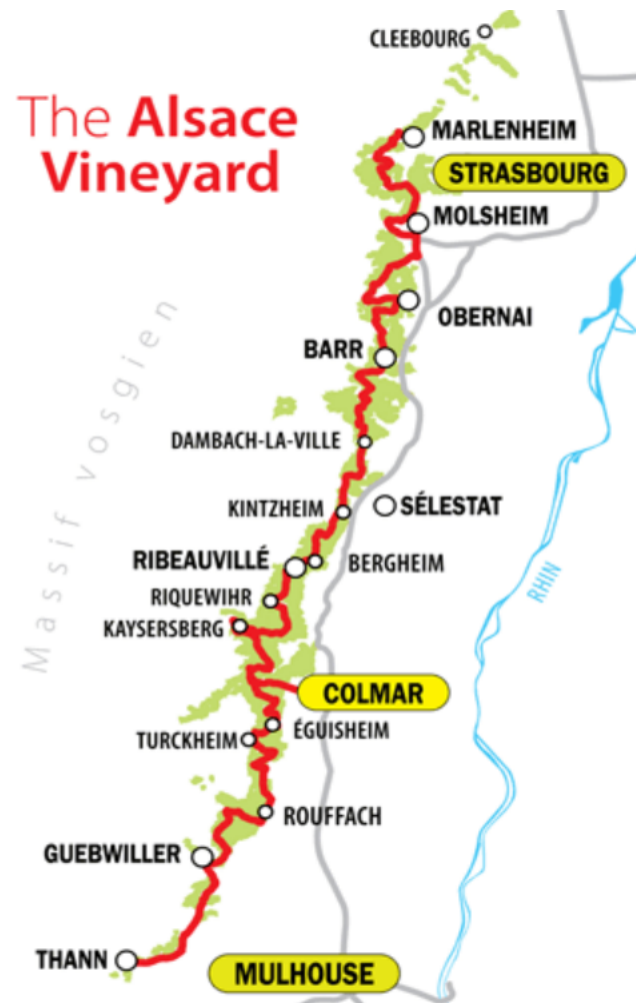
French Tourist Regions



French Administrative Regions and Departments



Maps of Alsace



Maps of Brittany



Maps of Normandy



Maps of Provence and French Riviera





Suggested References

- Explore France. <https://www.france.fr/en>
- France. Eyewitness Travel Guide. London: Dorling Kindersley Ltd., 2019 ed.
- France Tourisme. https://www.francetourisme.fr/index_en.html
- Mayle, Peter. *A Year in Provence*. Vintage, 1991.
- Michelin Green Guides in English:
 - *Alsace-Lorraine-Champagne*
 - *Brittany*
 - *France*
 - *French Riviera*
 - *Normandy*
 - *Provence*.