

## Welcome Speech – French Impressions

Bonsoir, everyone, and bienvenue!

Welcome to French Impressions: From the Loire Valley to Lyon and Paris. Over the next 16 days, we're going to explore France together — not just its monuments and landscapes, but also its everyday life, its flavors, and its people.

A particularly warm welcome goes to our Sir Edmund Hillary Club members. For those new to OAT, this is our community of seasoned travelers who have journeyed with us three times or more. From your third adventure, you join the club.

And now, a little about me: My name is Gwen, and I'll be your Trip Experience Leader. My role is to bridge our cultures, handle the logistics, and help you discover not just the France you expect — but the one that surprises you.

But before we dive in, I'd love to hear from you. We'll keep it short: just tell us your name, the state you're from, and one thing you hope to experience during this journey. Don't worry — we have 16 days together to learn the rest.

### Traveler Survival Guide

Now, as OAT travelers, you're not tourists — you actually have a job!

Your job is to explore, be curious, step outside your comfort zone, communicate, and be a kind group member.

Here's how we'll do that:

- L&D – Learning & Discovery: every day we'll dig into history, art, and culture.
- EDL – Everyday Life: markets, cafés, neighborhoods where real life happens.
- CT – Controversial Topics: sometimes challenging conversations to understand France today.
- Local Interactions: meeting people and hearing their stories.
- Free Time & Choice: you shape your experience at your own pace.

A small disclaimer: pacing and choices are yours. I'm rated for it — but you're in charge of it.

### A Few Rules for Happy Travels

- Be on time.
- Respect everyone and everything.
- We'll rotate bus seats — it's part of the fun.
- And one golden rule: no U.S. politics on tour. We'll have plenty of French debates instead!

### French Culture 101

You've heard the stereotype that the French can be rude. Let's bust that myth right now.

The secret? Make eye contact. No hats indoors. Smile. And always: Bonjour, s'il vous plaît, merci, au revoir, bonsoir. Those words will open doors.

Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner are fixed times. In France, sitting at a restaurant means ordering a meal — not just coffee or dessert. Bills can be split, no problem.

Sobriété écologique: You'll notice air conditioning feels different here — lighter, more ecological. That's

normal. It's the law.

Showers, ice cubes, room sizes: Rooms are smaller, showers quirky, and ice rare, butter with bread non-existent, except for breakfast. That's part of the experience.

Restrooms: cafés are our friends — buy a coffee, use the restroom.

Road safety & pickpockets: stay alert in big cities, especially in the metro. Use ATMs attached to banks.

Housekeeping for Tonight

TOMORROW's program

TO DO TONIGHT:

- RSVP for TEL optional for tomorrow
- fill in menu choices
- grab a whisper
- think about Paris plans
- think about optional tour Rocamadour

Get a good night's rest, because tomorrow we begin our adventure in Angers.