



HELP IN FRANCE

Assistance for British people moving to or living in France

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Retiring in France

Many UK citizens are making the choice to pull up their roots and retire in France. When the 'pros and cons' have been sifted through and you've worked out who you'll miss (and who you might not) then the choice is made to make the move.

We have put together a checklist of things that need to be looked at before the move. It is not a complete list but there is more information available via the internet.

For those of you already receiving a state pension in Britain, you will need to apply for form E121GB. This is available from : DSS - Overseas Branch, EU Office, Longbenton, Newcastle upon Tyne NE98 1YX Tel: 0191 213 5000

This form allows you state healthcare in France but it would still be wise to take out private medical insurance (called a Mutuelle) as state healthcare will only cover up to around 70% of the cost of treatment.

For those who are taking early retirement you will need to apply for form E106 which entitles you to healthcare in France but only for 2 years, after which there could well be a problem with healthcare as once form E106 runs out and you are not working or of pensionable age or registered unemployed or have lived here for 5 years, you will need to take out private medical insurance to cover the total cost of medical care. (For those of you not yet accustomed to French bureaucracy and as current laws are being changed day to day, we will do our best to keep you informed of the present situation.)

As stated in the December edition of 'The Connexion' newspaper, the recent fears that those already in France would have their medical cover taken away from them in April 2008 have now been quelled. Those already in the French medical system will remain in it.

(Information on UK pensions and health is available from : www.dwp.gov.uk You can also download leaflet SA29 : "Your social security insurance, benefits and healthcare rights in the European Economic Area" at <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/international/sa29/>)

- Inform your social security office, HM Revenue & Customs National Insurance Contributions Office (International Services) and the Department for Work and Pensions when you move and provide them with your contact details abroad.
 - inform your family doctor, dentist and other relevant practitioners of your move.
 - If you are keeping a property in the UK, inform your insurance company that it will be empty for long periods as it can affect your cover.
 - Inform your local council of your move.
 - Inform your utilities companies and supply a forwarding address.
 - Have your mail redirected. (Post office.)
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A French Christmas

by Joanna W Simm

If this is to be your first Christmas in France you could be forgiven, in the run up period, for feeling perhaps a little homesick, a little nostalgic for Christmases past, for the traditions of an English Christmas that you have now swapped for the traditions of a French one. Will it be as magical? Will you be able to find the perfect presents for family and friends, in these unfamiliar shops? Do the French really eat oysters on Christmas day instead of turkey...and can you, after all, enjoy Christmas and the festivities as much as you use to do in the UK?

Fear not...as the angel said, of course you can. Some of the traditions may be a little different, but the Christmas message of love and peace to all men is alive and well in France, and the celebrations are delightful. You might have to do without your Christmas pud...unless, of course, you can get to the UK to bring one back!

Exploding mince pies...and other stuff....

So what are the essential differences between the French Christmas and the English one?

Well, the French don't do crackers as such, for one thing. Unless you live in a heavily ex pat populated area and have a particularly well stocked Brit shop you will definitely need to import these from the UK if you are determined to have them. What are available, though, are prettily wrapped sweets that contain a snap, making them into a type of mini cracker. They don't have mottoes or hats and toys in them, but they are fun and will help to dress a Christmas table prettily.



The French don't seem to do mince pies either. I made some for elderly French neighbours last year, and they regarded them with deep suspicion...seemingly expecting them to explode in much the same manner as the crackers they had just been persuaded to pull. Madame finally (out of pure politeness rather than any genuine desire to eat the thing) finally took a tiny bite, and judging by the expression on her face she was not at all impressed, even if she was relieved that it didn't go BANG! The old gentleman couldn't bring himself to go even that far, taking out his dentures to prove that it would not be possible for him to 'mange' such a thing...!. I tried them myself, (the pies, that is, not the dentures) and they really weren't that bad...Mr. Kipling would have been proud!

Turkey or oysters?

Well both actually, if my French friends are anything to judge by. They have the oysters as a first course, or sometimes as a Christmas Eve treat. The Christmas meal is often turkey, just as it is in Britain, but don't expect to pick one up from the supermarket on Christmas Eve, You will need to order it from a farmer, or perhaps from your butcher. Chicken is another popular alternative, as is goose.



To be honest, there are so many culinary delights around at this time of year that you will be hard pressed to feel badly done by even if you can't find all your favourite English treats. For Christmas cake substitute the lighter but equally glorious Couronne, a sugared ring sometimes with the addition of a Christmas novelty baked into it...collect them all and you will probably be about a stone heavier than you were when you started! Then there is chocolate, marzipan, Turkish delight, fruit confits...stop me someone!

Christmas Eve or Christmas Day?

When I lived in the UK I was always told that the French open their presents on Christmas Eve rather than on Christmas morning, but this does not seem borne out by my own experiences here. All my French friends open presents on Christmas Day much as we do in England. The lovely legend of Father Christmas...under, of course, the guise of Père Noel... is also alive and well, and much loved by children.

'Tis the season....

The Christmas season of celebration starts later and ends later in France...at least, the decorations side of it does. Most towns wait until December 1st to switch on their Christmas lights, and I, for one, find this something of a relief after the relentless commercialisation of Christmas in England which begins earlier and earlier each year, now beginning, apparently, somewhere in October! There doesn't seem to be any 'Twelfth night' tradition here, however, and lights frequently stay on right through January, although the shops return to normal of course.

The best of Christmas in France

Christmas in France offers many joys, as does Christmas in all Christian countries. For me, living near the Pyrénées, one of the best things about the Christmas season is being able to head for the mountains and find snow, and there is something very festive about skiing on Boxing Day (which, by the way, isn't a holiday in France). A visit to the wonderful Christmas markets held all over France is also a must, and ideal for soaking up the atmosphere and finding those last minute gifts.

You might miss family or friends on your first Christmas in France, but I don't think you'll regret not being in the UK once you have a taste for a French Christmas!

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Joanna is a freelance journalist and also teaches English to adults and children of all levels. She lives near Castelnaudary in the Aude..”

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And speaking of Christmas, we here at Help in France would like to take the opportunity to wish all our customers and friends both in France and in Britain a very happy Christmas and a prosperous new year. The work we do here can sometimes be very challenging but also very rewarding and the people we have met on the way have helped our business to grow. We thank you all for your custom and for making our work a pleasure.

If you, or anyone you know have any problems that need solving, please do get in touch with us, we'll be only too pleased to help.

With our best wishes,

Nadège and Anthony.

THE HELP IN FRANCE NEWSLETTER

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