

French Fluency

Daniel Ward recommends France's Rhône-Alpes region for French immersion

Bastille Day Celebrations at the Lyon Cathedral

Its two most important geographical features, the Alps and the River Rhône, give to this region both its name and its dramatic character. The east is dominated by majestic snowcapped peaks, while the Rhône provides a vital route between north and south. The Romans recognized this strategic significance when they founded Lyon over 2,000 years ago. Today Lyon, with its great museums and fine Renaissance buildings, is the second city of France. It is one of the country's most vital commercial and cultural centers as well as the undisputed capital of French gastronomy.

Rhône-Alpes is the only region of France that contains three major cities which form the triangle Lyon — Grenoble — Saint-Étienne. This triangle is the economic core of the region, and its economy is second in size only to Paris Île-de-France region.

To the north lie the flat marshlands of the Dombes and the rich agricultural Bresse plain. Here are the world famous Beaujolais vineyards which, along with the Côtes du Rhône, make the region such an important wine producer.

The French Alps are among the most popular year-round resort areas in the world, with internationally renowned ski stations such as Chamonix, Megève, and Courchevel, and historic cities like Chambéry, capital of the Savoie before it joined France.

Elegant spa towns line the shore of Lac Lemman (Lake Geneva), while Grenoble, a bustling university and high-tech center, is flanked by two of the most spectacular nature reserves in France, the Chartreuse and the Vercors.

To the south, orchards and fields of sunflowers give way to brilliant rows of lavender interspersed with vineyards and olive groves. Châteaux and ancient towns dot the landscape. Mountains and pretty, old-fashioned spa towns characterize the rugged Ardèche, and the deeply scoured gorges along the river Ardèche offer some of the wildest scenery in France.

Every form of sport is readily available, set against an impressive natural backdrop: hiking, mountain biking, or even paragliding and canoeing — the Rhône-Alpes is not only the second most important golfing region in France with over 60 courses but it also has the largest ski area in the world and has hosted the Winter Olympics three times.

Enthusiasts of art and culture will not be disappointed by the region's

Villes d'Art: Lyon, which is classified by UNESCO as a World Heritage site, Annecy, Grenoble, Chambéry, and Saint Étienne.

Although nearly everyone speaks French, residents of the northern part of the region have spoken several dialects of the Arpitan — a romance language also known as Franco-Provençal — since the Middle Ages. The Lyonnais dialect was partly replaced by French as the importance of the city grew. However, it is still alive and, in addition, some "frenchified" Arpitan words can also be heard in the French of the Lyonnais, who call their little boys "gones" and girls "fenottes" for example.

The traditional language of the south of the region is Occitan, a romance language and the closest relative of Catalan.

Last, but not least, the region is renowned for the excellence of its educational institutions led by the universities of Lyon and Grenoble, and its hi-tech research centers, including CERN, the world's largest particle physics laboratory, where the Large Hadron Collider (LHC) is due to restart this year.

ESL-École Suisse de Langues offers French courses for adults and youth in Lyon and in Switzerland. Students 18 and older have the opportunity to study French in the center of cosmopolitan Lyon. The city's location also allows students to discover other parts of France, including Paris or the Côte d'Azur (French Riviera). The school offers various French courses in groups, private courses, special courses for seniors, and exam preparation courses. Accommodation is organized in host families, shared student apartments and local hotels or hostels, and a varied and exciting activities schedule completes the program. The course offering also includes French language camps for teenagers from 10 to 17 years old in four course centers in Switzerland and France. These programs, which are organized in spring, summer, and autumn, include French courses, activities, excursion programs, 24-hour supervision, and accommodation on the campus or in host families.

Located in the French Alps, **Centre International de Langue**

