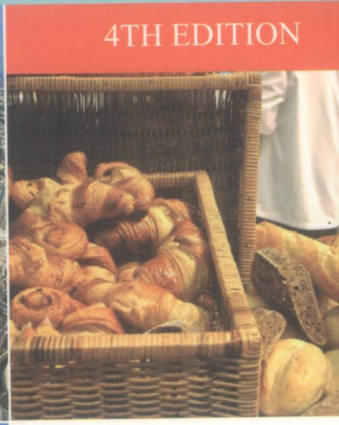
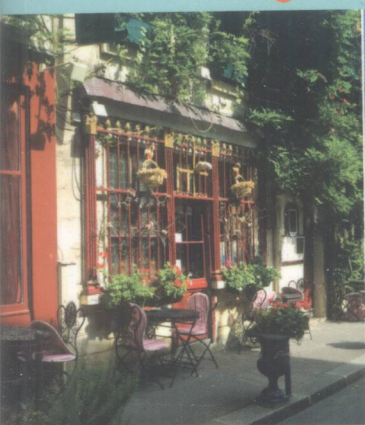


Geneviève Brame

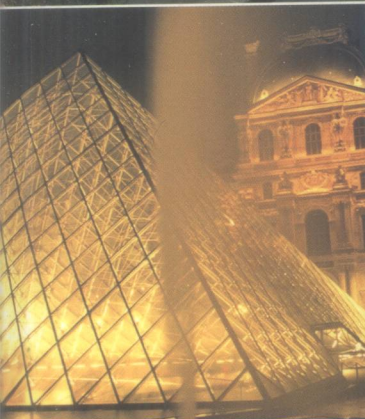
Living & Working in

# FRANCE

*Chez vous en France*



4TH EDITION



**ERNST & YOUNG**



Greater Paris Investment Agency



MINISTÈRE  
DES  
AFFAIRES ÉTRANGÈRES  
ET EUROPÉENNES

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# FRANCE

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4TH EDITION

Geneviève Brame



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Living & Working in  
**FRANCE**

# About the author

## 'UNE FRANÇAISE'

**Geneviève Brame** was born in Normandy. At the University of Caen, she took a degree in Humanities and then a Master's in International Human Resources Management. Since 1996, Geneviève has worked as a consultant in the International Mobility Department of Ernst & Young, Société d'Avocats in Paris. Inspired by her intercultural communications work with multinational companies, business schools and universities, she has written for French and foreign expatriates, both adults and children.

Geneviève Brame received a medal in the form of a star on a blue ribbon emblazoned with *République Française* at the Senat on 3 December 2002. She is a Knight of the National Order of Merit.

**Her publications** (books, articles and studies) include *Chez Vous en France* (Co-edition), *Lamy Mobilité Internationale* (Editions Lamy, 2002) and *Chez Vous en France Le Documentation Française – France info*. She is creative director and author of the Editions Hachette collection *Pays d'enfance: Chez Toi en France*, 2006 (English summary), *A chacun sa route des épices* (Les cahiers Ernst & Young editions Autrement), the website *asapfrance.info* (English/French), with the French Embassy in London, and in Brussels.

*I do not flatter myself that I can make you understand France. I do not know if I understand her myself. I do not try to understand her, because she does not leave me the time, she carries me along with her on her great adventure.*

Georges Bernanos, in a Letter to the English

Je ne me flatte pas de vous faire comprendre la France. J'ignore si je la comprends moi-même. Je n'essaie pas de la comprendre, parce qu'elle ne m'en laisse pas le loisir, elle m'emporte avec elle dans sa grande aventure.



# Foreword

Each year, a great number of people come to spend some time or even permanently settle in France. They include foreign visitors, tourists, investors, students, people in love with its landscapes and history and those attracted to its quality of life. France's culture, rich history and robust technology are among some of the factors contributing to France's status as the most visited country: 80 million chose it as a destination in 2007. However, the cultural mores of our country can lead to some confusing situations for our guests – this book attempts to guide you through the maze.

An author and consultant in international mobility, Geneviève Brame identifies and explains the many areas of French daily life with sharp insight and humour (covering social legislation, professional conduct and codes, etiquette, etc), in order to assist visitors or expatriates living in France.

Where do I get legal advice? How do I enrol my children in school? When can I use 'tu' without making a *faux pas*? *Chez vous en France* draws on the rich and varied experience of people and companies from all over the world who have chosen to come to France. Their accounts will help other residents come to terms with France's social and economic make-up.

Readers will be deeply grateful to the author for having offered such a clear and unequivocal guide, without compromising any of the pleasures of new discovery. We wish them luck on their journey with *Chez vous en France*.

*Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
Communication and Information Directorate*



# *Preface*

France has a big place in my heart and always will. It has been home to the start of many adventures for me... Preparing my boat for my first solo transatlantic race, the Mini Transat, in 1997, working for nearly six months in a French boat yard. I became immersed in the French way of life and culture, working alongside people from the boat-building industry, that have such expertise... I learnt to speak French in this period and it was where the expression 'a donfi' originated as it captured my philosophy to 'just go for it'. I will never forget my first Route du Rhum in 1998 departing from Saint Malo lined up against the very best French solo sailors and for the first time experiencing the awesome enthusiasm the French hold for this sport. I was a newcomer, inexperienced and totally unknown but all the French who had come to see the skippers depart wanted to wish me well – it was very humbling for me. And, of course, the Vendée Globe, an event that captures the imagination of so many and that the French hold close to their heart. It seems France will always have a role to play in my life – even my sponsors are both French and English!

I have been very fortunate to live and work in France for periods of time over the last few years. I feel at home there as much as I do in England and I know this will always be the case.

I will certainly recommend Geneviève Brame's book to fellow sailors and team members that often go to France – I am sure they will find it useful to quickly feel 'Chez vous en France!'

Dame Ellen MacArthur

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What a wonderful experience as a chef, than to convert so many products full of rich history, into such a tremendous culinary joy! In a convivial and peaceful atmosphere around the table guests savour French cuisine.

Together, chefs and guests are the best ambassadors of the 'Joie de vivre' on this planet. Welcome to France, where the 'art de la table' forms part of our culture. It is even our signature tune!

Guy Savoy  
Chef – Three Michelin stars

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It is not that easy to grasp the subtle paradox of France. Elias Canetti stated that France, as well as its entire history, represent the Revolution, just as the forest represents a true image of Germany. What could give a more enchanting picture of France, before experiencing it for oneself on a daily basis, than Geneviève Brame's book, by its colourful palette painting successive images of this revolutionary country?

Gerard Mortier  
Directeur de l'Opéra national de Paris

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In ten chapters Geneviève Brame sets out more details about life in France than I learned in my first ten years living here. The new edition of this handy and well-written survival guide is packed with facts and information, items not always in oversupply. Whether you are just visiting France or planning a life-changing move, you can start off no better than reading this lively and authoritative handbook to French life.

Jim Bittermann  
CNN Senior Correspondent, and resident of France since 1980

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For my part, I include France in my world not just because I admire the French countryside or its monuments, wonderful though they are, but rather because French people have been willing to share their experiences with me, which are even more wonderfully varied, warm and cold, enriching, touching and ridiculous, an inexhaustible commentary on wisdom and folly. A shared experience is more than a bond; it is a joint discovery of unexpected possibilities. That is why no life can be full until it has at least a small French element in it. And no French life is in fact totally closed to foreigners or foreign ways.

Professor Theodore Zeldin  
St Anthony's College, Oxford, UK

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Everywhere I travel around the world, people talk about the French 35-hour week and how the French live from holiday to holiday. On the contrary, I see lights in offices and people working much later in the evenings than in most parts of the world and the level of productivity is second to none. This is part of the paradox of France.

I am always fascinated by the attention to details, which for me is a major success factor for France in the luxury sector. Whether it be the tassel around a niche perfume bottle or the way a shop-window is decorated, every detail is clearly thought through and lends to the overall effect.

Geneviève Brame's book will teach many French what they do not know about their own country. From the rich historical and cultural heritage to the intricacies of the administration, it is a must read for anybody who wants to better understand the French way of life.

Michaël Carlos  
President, Givaudan France Fragrances

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As Europe becomes border free, and with the euro, united as one continental culture, its people are clinging on to what differentiates them from their neighbours, namely their social customs. The French, long known for their strict character and their sophisticated *savoir faire*, are particularly rejecting the temptation to erase cultural differences in favour of homogenization of Europe, as has happened in the last decade in the United States. As a result, their Frenchness is becoming even more acute, and the secret to decoding it is to first understand the history and second know the rules.

Geneviève Brame's book *Chez Vous en France* cracks the code and explains step-by-step how to integrate in French society, from how to cut through government red tape to how to behave at a formal dinner party, and puts it all in perspective historically. As Geneviève Brame points out, France is more than 'culture, cuisine and couture'. And it's becoming more so everyday.

Dana Thomas  
Author of *Deluxe: How luxury lost its lustre*

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The day I officially arrived in France, in the fog-bound Norman port of Ouistreham, I had to find a customs official to stamp my long-stay visa. When a laid-back *douanier* eventually emerged from the port terminal and inspected my passport, his eyebrows shot up. 'You're from New Zealand? Why do you want to live here?' he asked, grinning. 'The taxes are far too high.'

A few months later, I was having my hair cut in Caen. 'Perhaps if I cut your hair just like mine, we could swap passports', the hairdresser said. We looked at each other in the mirror and laughed. He was only half joking.

France is at a turning point. It retains a great deal of justified pride in its values and achievements, but it is only just beginning to realize the depth of the problems it faces. At the same time, it seems to me, the French people in general remain remarkably open to others, curious about others' lives and willing to stick together to ride out the rough patches. Why do I love living in France? I think it is partly because of this intriguing mixture of self-confidence, self-doubt and solidarity.

Andrew Johnston  
New Zealand poet & journalist, *International Herald Tribune*

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I love China, I also love France. They are two countries who have a long history and brilliant civilization. I studied in France for four years, and with my colleagues we have developed a good Sino-French cooperation between Nanchang University and Poitiers University. The fruit of which is the creation of the first Confucius Institute in France in 2005.

When we started to work for our cooperation, I told my French friends: *comme le disait le philosophe Laozi 'il faut trouver la voie'*. I think that the Sino-French cooperation in education has found a road to understand each other for us, and Geneviève Brame's book *Chez Vous en France* has found another road, which will help more Chinese to know France. I hope that our two countries can amicably develop what Confucius calls '*harmonie mais différence*'.

Dr Gan Xiaoqing  
Président of Jiujlang University  
Directeur de l'Institut Confucius à Poitiers

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My love of France stems from my childhood. At the age of six, I left Spain with my parents and brother for new horizons in France. Indelibly marked in my memory is my father's great admiration for the social advancement of this country which welcomed us. He told us that in France, health care and state-education were available for all. Even for me as a young child, it was clearly obvious that France has so much to offer. A country that allows the same right for everyone to learn, to create, to progress, to succeed. This has always seemed to me to truly define the country.

It is also so endearing, with a melodic and sophisticated language, never satisfied with just being itself, but playing an international role with such pride. It is for these very reasons, that today, even many years later, I am so attached to France! A 'Republic' as well as a host, a generous and somewhat

demanding country, with a desire to be on the world stage. At the same time both small and large, a little grumpy sometimes, but nonetheless, so touching.

I feel one should fight unceasingly each day to ensure that this 'certain *idée de la France*' continues to exist, so that she remains the welcoming, diverse country that she is, that she maintains her specific and fascinating model of integration, with her belief in shared knowledge and that she never doubts for one moment that a 'small' country can be politically, economically and culturally rich. This perception of France has always inspired me and has enabled me to forge ahead day after day.

Merci la France!

Mercedes Erra  
Executive President, EURO RSCG Worldwide

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I have had the pleasure of meeting literally hundreds of other people, both in France and abroad, during my interviews and research to update the book, and I thank each and everyone.

The French Embassies and Consulates, and the Alliances Françaises have always kindly welcomed me. Greetings to Yann Battefort who is a BA, not a Business Angel but he has been my real 'Book Angel' since I first met him at *le Quai d'Orsay* in 2001.

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Furthermore, I am really delighted that my book can be read twice, once in English (Kogan Page publisher) and again in French (Edition La Documentation française et France info, 2007).

All my gratitude goes to you, Madame, Monsieur, for so generously taking the time to read, reread and enrich the manuscript of my books *Chez Vous en France* and *Living & working in France*.

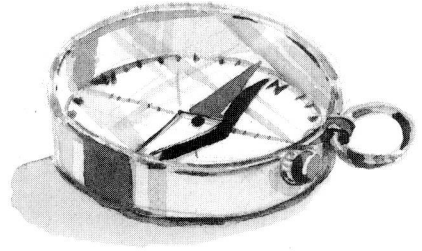
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