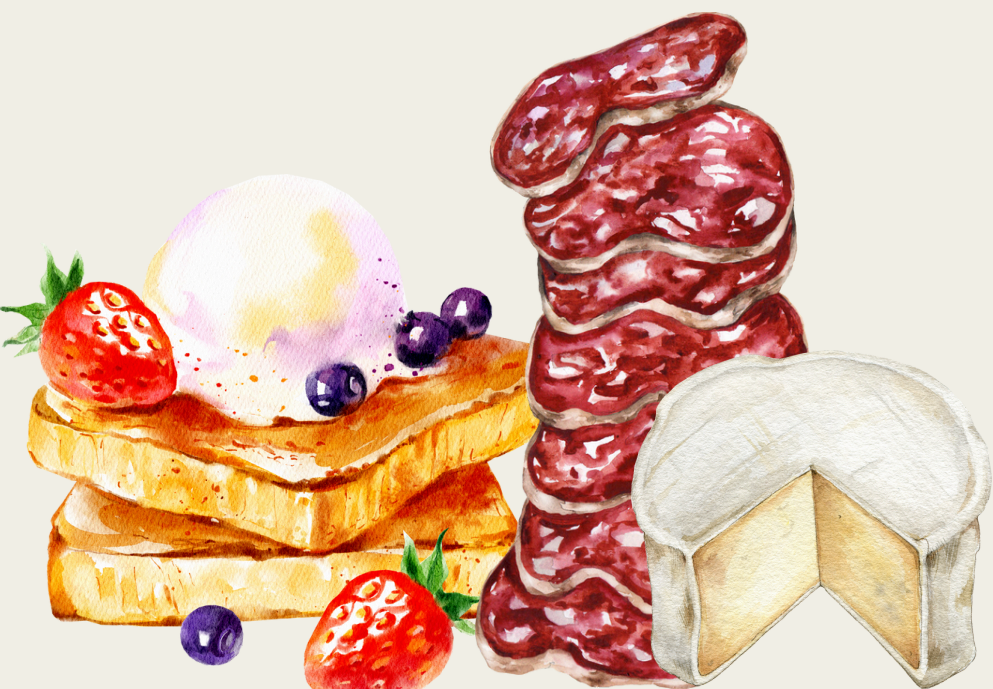




# **The Ultimate Guide to French Dining Etiquette**



# WHY DINING ETIQUETTE MATTERS IN FRANCE



France is famous for its rich culinary heritage, where food is not just a necessity but an art form. Dining is a social and cultural experience, and following proper etiquette ensures a respectful and enjoyable meal.

French people take their food and table manners seriously, and while they don't expect foreigners to be perfect, demonstrating good manners and cultural awareness will earn you respect and enhance your dining experience.



This guide will help you navigate the unspoken rules of French dining, from ordering like a local to using utensils correctly, understanding tipping culture, and avoiding common faux pas.

# 1. TABLE MANNERS & CUSTOMS

French dining has a formal yet relaxed rhythm. Keep these basic rules in mind:

- ✓ Wait to be seated – In restaurants, the host or waiter will guide you to your table.
- ✓ Napkin etiquette – Place your napkin on your lap as soon as you sit down. Never tuck it into your shirt.
- ✓ Hands on the table – Unlike in some cultures, the French keep their hands (but not elbows) on the table while eating.
- ✓ Pace yourself – Meals in France are leisurely. Savor your food and avoid rushing.
- ✓ Bread etiquette – Place bread directly on the tablecloth, not on your plate. Tear off small pieces instead of biting into a whole piece.

## 2. ORDERING FOOD LIKE A LOCAL

Understanding the French menu and ordering properly can enhance your dining experience.

✓ Greet the waiter – Always start with a polite “Bonjour” (good day) or “Bonsoir” (good evening).

✓ Understanding the menu – French menus follow a structure:

- 🍹 Apéritif – Pre-dinner drinks (e.g., Kir, Pastis)
- 🍲 Entrée – Starter (not the main course as in English)
- 🍖 Plat principal – Main course
- 🥗 Fromage – Cheese course
- 🍰 Dessert – Dessert
- ☕ Café – Usually an espresso after the meal
- ✓ Don't rush the waiter – Service is more relaxed in France; waiters won't check on you constantly.

### 3. PROPER USE OF UTENSILS & NAPKINS

The French dining style is more formal than in some other cultures.

✓ Fork in the left hand, knife in the right – Keep utensils in this position throughout the meal.

✓ Resting position – If taking a break, place the knife and fork crossed on the plate. If finished, place them parallel at 5 o'clock.

✓ Spoon and soup etiquette – Sip soup from the side of the spoon and never slurp.

✓ Napkin use – Dab your mouth gently; don't wipe excessively.



## 4. TIPPING ETIQUETTE IN FRANCE

Tipping culture in France is different from countries like the U.S.:

- ✓ Service charge included – Most restaurants include a 15% service fee (service compris) in the bill.
- ✓ Rounding up is appreciated – While not mandatory, leaving small change or rounding up is a nice gesture.
- ✓ For exceptional service – Leave €1–€5 per person in casual places, and €10–€20 in fine dining restaurants.



## 5. COMMON DINING PHRASES

Here are some useful French phrases for dining out:

👋 Entering a restaurant

- "Avez-vous une table pour deux?" – Do you have a table for two?
- "Je voudrais réserver une table." – I'd like to book a table.

🍴 Ordering food

- "Que recommandez-vous?" – What do you recommend?
- "Je prendrai..." – I'll have...
- "L'addition, s'il vous plaît." – The check, please.

👍 Politeness





## 6. CULTURAL DINING TRADITIONS

- ✓ The long French meal – Expect to spend 2–3 hours at dinner.
- ✓ Cheese comes before dessert – Unlike in many cultures, cheese is served before the sweet course.
- ✓ Wine pairing matters – Red wine for meats, white for seafood or poultry. Asking for soda with wine is a faux pas.