

Actualité en France

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“France is the country with the best quality of life in the world”



Booksellers on the banks of the Seine (Paris).
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It's not French people irritated at hearing their compatriots “moaning on” about everything that is wrong with France who say so, it's *International Living Magazine*, an American magazine which publishes a quality of life index each year. Remarkably, this is the fifth consecutive year that France has come top of the list, this time followed by Australia, Switzerland, Germany and New Zealand. Next come Luxembourg, the United States, Belgium, Canada and in tenth position Italy, land of *La Dolce Vita*, immortalised in film.

Jackie Flynn, director of this magazine for expat retirees, is not surprised by the ongoing victory of a country whose “*tiresome bureaucracy and high taxes are outweighed by an unsurpassable quality of life, including the world's best health care*”. You don't need number-crunchers to tell you “*its bon vivant lifestyle is special (...) step off a plane and you'll experience it first-hand*”.

To draw up its annual Index, now thirty years old, which in 2010 includes 194 countries, the American magazine considers nine categories: Cost of Living, Culture and Leisure, Economy, Environment, Freedom, Health, Infrastructure, Safety and Risk, and Climate. It draws information from various “*official*” sources, such as national statistics or International Organisations such as the WHO or UNESCO, but also takes into account what its editors from all around the world have to say on these subjects and on the results of these classifications. Freedom, Health and Safety and Risk are the three categories in which France comes top, often of course ranking equal with several other countries. It comes fourth for Infrastructure (rail, roads, waterways, airports, Internet service providers, etc.) and the cost of living in France is a lot lower than in many other developed countries. But culture lovers will be sorry to see that the score is not so good for the Culture and Leisure category, in which France ranks only 19th.

As to the reasons for France reaching the supreme place in the Quality of Life Index, Jackie Flynn cites “*the joy of lingering for hours over dinner and a bottle of red wine in a Parisian brasserie*”.



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Or strolling beside the Seine on a spring morning, poking through the book vendors' wares. Hearing Notre Dame's bells or buying buttery croissants in bohemian Montmartre ..."

Clearly, "*Romantic Paris offers the best of everything,*" but services don't fall away in Alsace's wine villages... in "*wild and lovely*" Corsica... or in lavender-scented Provence.

Jackie Flynn had already mentioned the small details that make France so charming, such as the "*little window boxes filled with flowers, tidy gardens, pretty sidewalk cafes, and clean streets,*" as well as cities that "*are well tended and with little crime.*"

The magazine has no hesitation in giving American retirees, looking for the most desirable place to live overseas, advice on the French regions where it is a lot cheaper to buy a house than in Paris, and where foie gras, Armagnac or pink garlic are just an ordinary morning's shopping...

Clean villages, the variety of landscapes, traditional three-course lunches for 14 dollars and the quality of its restaurants, are part of France's art of living, as are peaceful Sundays, August holidays and even "*fresh bread twice a day*". That beats everything!

Claudine Canetti