

# Welcome to French Public Holidays - 2012

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## January 2012



**January 1st** - New Years Day - New Years eve is called la Saint-Sylvestre and is celebrated with another feast le Réveillon de Saint-Sylvestre traditional foods include foie gras and champagne. At midnight it's traditional to kiss under the mistletoe and exchange wishes and new years greetings.

Many people in France start New Year's Day at midnight while celebrating with friends or family members. Public and private fireworks displays are common. Many people drink champagne, sparkling white wine or hot wine (vin chaud). People generally spend the rest of the day quietly.

Public life is generally quiet in France on January 1. Post offices, banks, stores and other businesses are closed. Outside of tourist areas, restaurants and cafes may be closed. However, some stores in Paris, as well as at airports and railway stations and along major highways, may be open. Public transport service schedules vary depending on where one lives and intends to travel.

## April 2012

**April 6<sup>th</sup>** - Good Friday - Good Friday is an occasion for many Christians in France to remember the sacrifices Jesus made and his crucifixion. It is a public holiday in some parts of France.

Observant Christians, particularly in the Alsace region, take time to attend special church services. However, church bells are not rung. Some people do not eat any meat or fast totally.

Simple crosses, often made of twigs or palm fronds, and images of Jesus on the cross are common symbols of Good Friday. In some areas, people eat Brioche du Carême. These are small rolls made of bread containing dried fruit and marked with a cross. They are similar to the hot cross buns eaten on Good Friday in the United Kingdom.



## **April 8<sup>th</sup>** Easter Sunday (le Dimanche de Pâques)

Many Christians may attend special church services to celebrate Jesus' resurrection on Easter Sunday. Church bells are not rung on the Friday and Saturday before Easter Sunday as a general rule. This is a sign of mourning. However, church bells are rung for a long time and in a celebratory manner during the church services on Easter Sunday. These are known as the Easter bells.



Many people spend Easter Sunday with family members or friends and eat a festive meal. Roast lamb with spring beans or other freshly harvested vegetables or leaves, brightly colored boiled eggs and omelets are popular. Easter eggs made of chocolate or candy are popular gifts and children are told that Easter hares, rabbits or bells bring the gifts.

Public life is generally very quiet on Easter Sunday, as on other Sundays, in France. Post offices, banks, stores and other businesses are closed. Outside of tourist areas, restaurants and cafes may be closed. However, some stores in Paris, as well as at airports, railway stations and along major

highways, may be open.

Public transport service schedules vary depending on where one lives and intends to travel. Museums that are normally open on Sunday may be open or closed. Churches may be closed for visitors who do not wish to take part in the services and guided tours may not be available.

### **April 9<sup>th</sup> Easter Monday (le Lundi de Pâques)**

Traditionally, Easter egg hunts start when the church bells ring on Easter morning and you will find this practised in many towns and villages giving great joy to children of all ages.

Many people spend Easter Monday quietly with family and close friends. They may spend time outdoors to enjoy the spring weather. If children are present, they are often allowed to participate in decisions for family activities and meals.



Public life in France is quiet on Easter Monday. Post offices, banks, stores and other businesses are closed. Outside of tourist areas, restaurants and cafes may also be closed.

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## **May 2012**



### **May 1<sup>st</sup> - Workers' Day (Fête de Travail)**

May 1st is a commemoration of the success of the American Unions in achieving an eight hour working day (in 1886.)

Manifestations are organised by the unions to celebrate and symbolise the unity of the workers.

May 1 is also La Fête du Muguet, and the tradition is to give the ones you love a little bouquet of lily-of-the-valley, for good luck and

to celebrate the arrival of spring. Originally the idea was to pick your own muguet in the forest. Of course, in the city you will more likely buy it from the florist's, or better yet, from one of the countless stands that sprout up overnight on every street corner and every road in France, most of them doing this as a fundraiser for one cause or another.

### **May 8<sup>th</sup>** - WWII Victory Day (Victoire 1945)

Commemoration of the end of the Second World War (in Europe).

Ceremonies take place to remember the soldiers killed during the war. Wreaths are placed on the tomb of the unknown soldier, at the base of the Arc de Triomphe in Paris and at monuments to the dead of the war, throughout France.



### **May 17<sup>th</sup>** - Ascension Day (Ascension)

40 days after Easter, this holiday celebrates Jesus's ascension to heaven following his crucifixion and resurrection. Mass is celebrated in churches and cathedrals throughout France.

Ascension Day falls on a Thursday so many people take a day of their annual leave on Friday and so enjoy a four-day weekend. They often use the opportunity to take a short vacation.

### **May 27<sup>th</sup>** - Pentecost (Pentecôte)

Many Christians in France attend a special church service on Pentecost Sunday to celebrate the Holy Spirit's descent on Jesus Christ's followers. People blow trumpets during the service in some churches.

The sound reminds them of the mighty wind that blew when the Holy Spirit descended onto Jesus' followers.



### **May 28<sup>th</sup>** - Whit Monday (Lundi de Pentecôte)

Whit Monday does not hold great religious significance for many people in France in modern times, but was a public holiday until 2005 and again from 2008.

The holiday was reintroduced after about 15,000 elderly people died in a heatwave in the summer of 2003. The French government made a commitment to financially support the elderly and people with disabilities by deciding that Pentecost Monday would no longer be a public holiday from 2005 onwards. The public holiday was replaced with 'The Day of Solidarity', on this day people work for no pay.

## July 2012

### July 14th - Bastille Day (Fête Nationale)

Bastille day symbolises the end of the Monarchy and the beginning of the First Republic. It is celebrated with parties and spectacular fireworks all over France.

There is a large military parade in Paris in the morning of July 14. Service men and women from various units, including cadets from military schools, the French Navy and the French Foreign Legion, participate in the parade. The parade ends with the Paris Fire Brigade. Military aircraft fly over the parade route during the parade. The French president opens the parade and reviews the troops and thousands of people line the route. Other people spend the day quietly and eat a celebratory meal or picnic with family and close friends.



## August 2012

### August 15th - Assumption Day (Assomption)

Celebrated by Catholics throughout France, the feast commemorates the departure of Mary from this life and the assumption of her body into heaven (taken up whole without passing by the grave and the corruption of the flesh that would be implied by that.)

Regardless of religious orientation, the day is observed as a national holiday during which many shops and businesses may be closed. Many people attend church services and there is usually a grand service at Lourdes.



## November 2012

### November 1st - All Saints Day (Toussaint)

It is traditional for the French to visit the graves of their loved ones and decorate them with Chrysanthemums.

Many Christians visit special church services on All Saints' Day. All Saints' Day is also an opportunity for many people to spend time with family members and close friends. This holiday falls during the autumn (fall) school holidays, it is a popular time for families to take a short vacation or to visit relatives living in other areas.



### November 11th - Armistice Day (Jour de l'Armistice)

Armistice Day is observed on 11 November to recall the end of World War I on that date in 1918. (Major hostilities of World War I were formally ended at the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month of 1918 with the German signing of the Armistice.)



## December 2012

### December 25th - Christmas Day (Noël)

An important part of Christmas for many families in France is



Midnight Mass on Christmas eve. Following this there is Le Réveillon a late supper feast; in some areas oysters are traditional while in Burgundy it's traditional to serve Chestnuts and turkey.

The Bûche de Noël or Yule log is very popular and is traditionally made with chocolate and chestnuts, it is served all through Christmas.

A christmas tree is traditional along with a traditional nativity scene. Small presents are generally given to children on Christmas eve but main gifts and cards are exchanged on New Years day.

**December 26th** - 2nd Day of Christmas (Alsace & Lorraine only)



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