



French or Foe?: Getting the Most Out of Visiting, Living and Working in France

Polly Platt

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Polly Platt's title *French or Foe?* is more timely than ever, as the Franco-American alliance frays a little more with each day, the exchanges more vitriolic than ever before. Her book has long been the reference for what it is about the French that rubs Americans the wrong way, why the Franco-American alliance has difficulties, and how to handle French people.... and find out, she says, "how wonderful they are." Now in the third edition, she examines the revolution of the last few years brought about by the computer and the Internet. Interviews with many American and French executives explain the differences .. and the similarities .. in procedures in the work place compared five years ago. In addition, *French or Foe?*'s third edition describes the "French exceptions" of the last few years: the Messier scandal, the reasons why France was voted the Workers' Paradise in 2002; the romantic Look, version 2003; the government's new measures to combat the number of road deaths and to reduce smoking; the new Mayor's campaign against dog poop and his transforming of the banks of the Seine into Paris Plage, a beach resort; the havoc wrought by the hurricanes at Christmas 2000. The third edition tells what happened to various French heroes such as Jean-Paul Belmondo and Yves Saint Laurent and describes events like the reburial of Alexandre Dumas in the Pantheon, the French hall of fame. It portrays the success of determined French individuals, from Eric Srecki, world fencing champion, to Peggy Bouchet, the first woman to row across the Atlantic, and the rocker Johnnie Halliday, who gave the biggest concert ever organized in France in the Stade de France, one year after the greatest celebration of all..... when the French won the soccer World Cup there in 1998, in one of the country's most exciting and dramatic national triumphs. The addition of an Index makes this third edition one that everyone will want to have in their library.

French or Foe?: Getting the Most Out of Visiting, Living and Working in France **Details**

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From Reader Review French or Foe?: Getting the Most Out of Visiting, Living and Working in France for online ebook

Alice Rachel says

I don't know what kind of France that person went to, but this book is filled with nonsense and preconceived bias! Most of the things in there are just common logic... I mean, snooping around someone's house is rude, whether you live in the US or in France. It's just common politeness. I wish people stopped writing prejudiced books about my native country. Thanks! : (

Courtney says

Living with the French can be very difficult if you're not prepared or open to learning about their history, language, and culture. Platt welcomes you to France by giving a brief history of the country and explaining cultural norms that will seem odd to Americans at first. By the end of the book, if you have applied everything you've learned, you may have more French friends than Americans! If you have lived in France you will be able to relate the l'Administration, l'exception Française, the French sense of urgency (or the lack of it). You'll laugh and nod as she explains each of these topics as well as basic French, dining etiquette, and more to les débutantes.

Dayla says

This is the best book to read if you are working or staying in France for awhile. You will learn why the French

- 1) Are always turning out lights and insist that you WON'T ruin your eyes if you watch TV or read in the dark.
- 2) Never leave a meeting to use the restroom
- 3) May show up to a scheduled meeting with nothing accomplished from the previous meeting.
- 4) Are serious about a classical education
- 5) Have the best behaved children in the world
- 6) Are never going to let you in to their circle unless you grew up with their children
- 7) Will never ever be accepted by a French mother in law (if you are from the US)
- 8) Never leave the house unless fully coiffed with make-up and blouse ironed.
- 9) Have confidence in their bodies, especially the woman; they love their bodies

This and more awaits the reader of this book. (However, the version I read was a little dated, but that is okay when reading things about the French, because as it turns out, they rarely change.

Kari says

If I had read this when I arrived in France, I could have avoided a lot of frustrations, anger and tears. Platt's

explanations make sense of the French to Americans.

Chris Keswick says

Fun

Linda says

French or Foe is a must-read for anyone who is planning to travel/work/live in France, more especially Paris. Just a good comprehensible understanding of some basic cultural differences which will make your trip/stay much more all-around pleasant. Even if a person is not planning on any of the above, it is still a good read, just for getting a good grasp on another culture.

An update: Author Polly Platt passed away December 26, 2008. There is a lovely tribute to this phenomenal woman at <http://french-word-a-day.typepad.com/...> Please take the time if you are interested in all things French.

Marissa Pineda says

This book starts out by saying that the French aren't all the stereotypical things Americans think they are, and if you can understand where the French come from culturally, you'll find they are just wonderful. Well. I already thought the French were wonderful, so I picked up this book just to see what "stereotypes" were going to be explained away. Unfortunately, the attempts at explaining and clarifying to Americans the French worldview were lousy. If I had not already had experience with French people and culture, this book would surely have scared me away entirely. Some of the anecdotes about miscommunication were amusing, but I don't think this book painted a very nice picture of France or the French.

Manik Sukoco says

Polly Platt's book is a mixture of valuable insight and eye-rolling pompousness. To give her due credit, the first chapter is full of useful information and essentially contains all that you will need to know from this book. Soon thereafter the book descends into a name-dropping snobbery and gives all the tips you'd need to know if you were visiting with the upper 3% of French society. Much of what Ms. Platt reveals about French culture seems to be outdated and of little relevance to the middle and lower-class French people that a visitor will no doubt actually be coming into contact with. Indeed, the author leaves the reader feeling that they would not be allowed at Ms. Platt's own dinner table.

When I visited Paris I certainly found some of her information useful, such as her recommendation to use "The Ten Magic Words" (again, in the first chapter), and whether many of the French we came across were smiling and accommodating for this reason, I cannot say. Read this book and you will likely make fewer cultural mistakes in France than you would have if you hadn't, but read it knowing it is not the last word on French culture, and does not apply to most of the French population.

Suzanne says

I found this book really informative about how the French think. I looked back on last year's trip to France and saw how in some cases I instinctively did the right thing, and in others how I could have taken a different approach to make things easier (even though I thought the French were very agreeable and helpful anyway). Although I didn't agree with her on every single point, on balance it lent a depth of understanding that will certainly be useful for the next trip. And it was fun to read if you didn't get too bogged down in the sections about corporate management. It was poignant to see her e-mail address offered for comments, sadly knowing that she had passed away last December.

Brenda Cregor says

Before we left for Paris, my friend, Amy, gave me this book to read. And thank goodness!

I tend to be loud and over-friendly.

Me? Really?

Yes.

If I had not learned to be more "French", I might have prattled away on the subways, tried to make jokes with strangers, or turned up my nose at the dogs I saw inside the grocery stores.

When our other traveling companion and I found ourselves separated from Amy, or dear guide and translator, our first night in Paris, we used the knowledge gained from this book, to learn to say (in French) "Pardon me, Sir. We have a problem, " in the most dramatic pathetic way possible, we may never have been given the help we needed in order to reunite.

I did call a French lady a liar. That is a no no. But, she surely must have been deceiving me about how much my baggage weighed. Naughty.

I still had a McDonald's manager treat me with rudeness after I took a photo of the storefront, but I attribute this to the nearly imbred tactic to be as rude as possible. Baroness Emmuska Orczy stated in THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL about the French..."it was a sure sign of servility to meekly reply to civil questions." The French "republicans" must be snotty in order to show they will never again be subservient to anyone who appears to be "above them" in society, aristocrat or not. :O)

If you are going to France, read this book. Make it your Bible!

Vincent says

Polly Platt's *French of Foe?* is a mixture of valuable insight and suggestive pompousness. To give her due credit, the first chapter is full of useful information and essentially contains all that you will need to know from this book. Soon thereafter the book descends into name-dropping and gives all the tips you'd need to know if you were visiting with the upper echelon of French society. Much of what Platt reveals about French culture seems to be outdated and of little relevance to the middle and lower-class French people that a visitor will no doubt actually be coming into contact with.

When I visited Paris I certainly found some of her information useful, such as her recommendation to use "The Ten Magic Words" (again, in the first chapter). Whether many of the French we came across were smiling and accommodating for this reason, I cannot say. Perhaps they were just more sociable than Platt

would have us believe. Read this book and you will likely make fewer cultural mistakes in France than you would have if you hadn't, but read it knowing it is not the last word on French culture, and does not apply to most of the French population.

Felipe says

Is a very interesting insight to French Life and behavior. Contains a lot of information on the history of France and how it relates to their culture and behavior. I liked specially the first half of the book, but I dragged during the second half. The reason is that the book is targeted to a high-society, bussiness manager public, and I'm neither. So I could have lived without the description of the dinner party behavior and the very long chapters about how the enterprises operate. I also think that a lot of the analysis is a bit outdated. Most of the stories and examples and from the 80s-90s and a lot don't match with the behavior that I've seen living in France of 2009.

Overall I think it could be very useful to anyone from another culture looking to come to France to live. Just beware that not everything is as the books puts it. Some things seem different, some for better and some for worst.

Vanessa says

Overall, this is a good resource and I wish I had read this sooner. At the same time, reading it nearly a year into living in France allowed me to assess the info through the lens of my own experience. There are some serious flaws in the book, though, not all of which are the author's fault, i.e. this book was published in 1994 and a lot has changed since then.

The bad stuff: besides being nearly 20 years old, the book is horribly Paris-centric and obviously aimed at an audience of white anglo upper-management unilingual types. I hate to say it but I really did not enjoy the author's persona - she writes about herself and her experiences a lot - although her writing style is direct, lively and funny. I found it difficult to identify with this aged, upper-class (her husband was a high-ranking UNESCO official and she lived across the street from the Prime Minster's official home in Paris- need I say more) white woman. Also, she twice tied her dog outside of a shop and forgot about him. Anyway, mainly it was hard for me to identify with her experiences because she obviously moved in an upper-class Parisian world that I have no experience with here on the Côte d'Azur. For all I know, it may very well be a world that's gone.

The good stuff: the book is a quick and fun read. I found myself laughing a lot and there is so much that is true. It's full of insightful anecdotes from both French and non-French. There's a lot of information about the French workplace that I imagine would be very helpful for those working here. The section on why the French don't smile or give good service was a revelation to me and now I feel better about all the expressionless stares I get. At the end of the book, Platt sums up the main difficulties for foreigners living in France, which I can confirm are still present. The French live a strange paradox - they've created a strict, conservative, regimented, hierarchical society, yet they break the rules and do what they want. It's a sort of controlled anarchy that is sometimes enjoyable (but never when you have to deal with the administration).

In sum, I recommend this to anyone moving to or living in France but keep in mind that some info is dated and doesn't apply to non-upper-class, BCBG Parisian society. There ARE French people who eat crap, smile, say 'enchanté', dress like slobs, etc. The book is full of explanations and suggestions and funny-sad anecdotes. The other book I read about living in France, 'Sixty Million Frenchmen Can't Be Wrong', is more of a historical/cultural analysis of the components of French society. The two books together give a good general understanding of the French, where they're coming from, where they're at, and show how to navigate French society in daily life.

Theresa Nardi says

A little dated but still the best book I have read about Le French!

Christian says

I had read French or Foe just before going to live in France for about a year. About a week after I got back to the US, I picked up the book once again to see if what Polly Platt says in the book corresponded to my experience. There are a few points in the book that seem to be about right, but there are plenty of times where she is absolutely dead wrong. I hope that people don't read the book believing every word of what it says about the French people.

Example: The book says that every French meal is considered like a sacred ceremony, that people don't like to share recipes because it's considered like a family secret.

Do you really think there aren't people who eat microwave meals or canned food? Not every person in the whole country is a gourmet chef.

This is just one of many inaccuracies I found in the book.
