

Your Essential First Steps & Insider Insights for Applying to French Universities



A Checklist & Guide for International Students



FRENCH LEAP

From Arrival to Belonging

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Chapter 1: Deciding to Study in France

Your Initial Checklist & Insider Scoop

Key considerations when choosing France as a study destination:

- **Academic reputation:** Firstly, the academic reputation of French institutions, renowned for their excellence in various fields, should align with your academic aspirations.
- **Program offerings:** The program offerings must match your specific area of study and career goals, ensuring a relevant and enriching educational experience.
- **City/region:** The city or region you choose will significantly impact your daily life, from cultural experiences to living costs.

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Your Initial Checklist & Insider Scoop

- **Language of instruction:**
Understanding the language of instruction is crucial for academic success, whether programs are in French or English.
- **Cost of living:** A realistic assessment of the cost of living in your chosen city and how it aligns with your financial resources is essential for a comfortable stay.
- **Personal interests:** Make sure your personal interests align with your destination to ensure a fulfilling experience beyond academics.

DID YOU KNOW?



- Your first step is Campus France. (*Click logo to redirect to link*). It is the official French government agency that guides international students.
- It primarily focuses on the application process, university placements and visa procedures.
- It is an essential tool for your initial steps to study in France.



French Leap (*click logo to redirect to link*) goes significantly beyond this by offering:

- Personalized support throughout the entire relocation and settling-in process.
- Deep cultural immersion and practical guidance for everyday life in France.
- Personalized attention and a supportive community to ease their transition.



Checklist: Initial Exploration & Decision

- ☐ Research potential universities and programs in your field.
- ☐ Identify programs taught in English (if applicable) or assess your French language proficiency.
- ☐ Estimate the cost of tuition and living expenses in your chosen city.
- ☐ Explore different French cities and regions that align with your interests.
- ☐ Understand the general academic calendar and application timelines.
- ☐ Discuss your study abroad plans with family or advisors.



"The 'proof of funds' requirement can sometimes be met through a guarantor in France. Research if this is an option for your situation, as it can simplify things."

As of 2024/2025, the standard minimum amount required is €615 per month. This is the amount considered necessary to cover basic living expenses (housing, food, transportation, etc.).

"Don't underestimate the Campus France interview! It's not just about your documents; they want to understand your motivations for studying in France."

Chapter 2: Navigating the French Student Visa

Your Application Checklist & Insider Tips

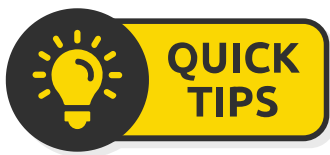
A step-by-step overview of the French student visa application process (requirements vary based on nationality):

- Research visa requirements, application forms, and required documents (passport, acceptance letter, proof of funds, etc.)
- Complete the Campus France procedure (if applicable), prepare for the visa interview, and understand processing times.

Note: Students must check the specific requirements for their country.

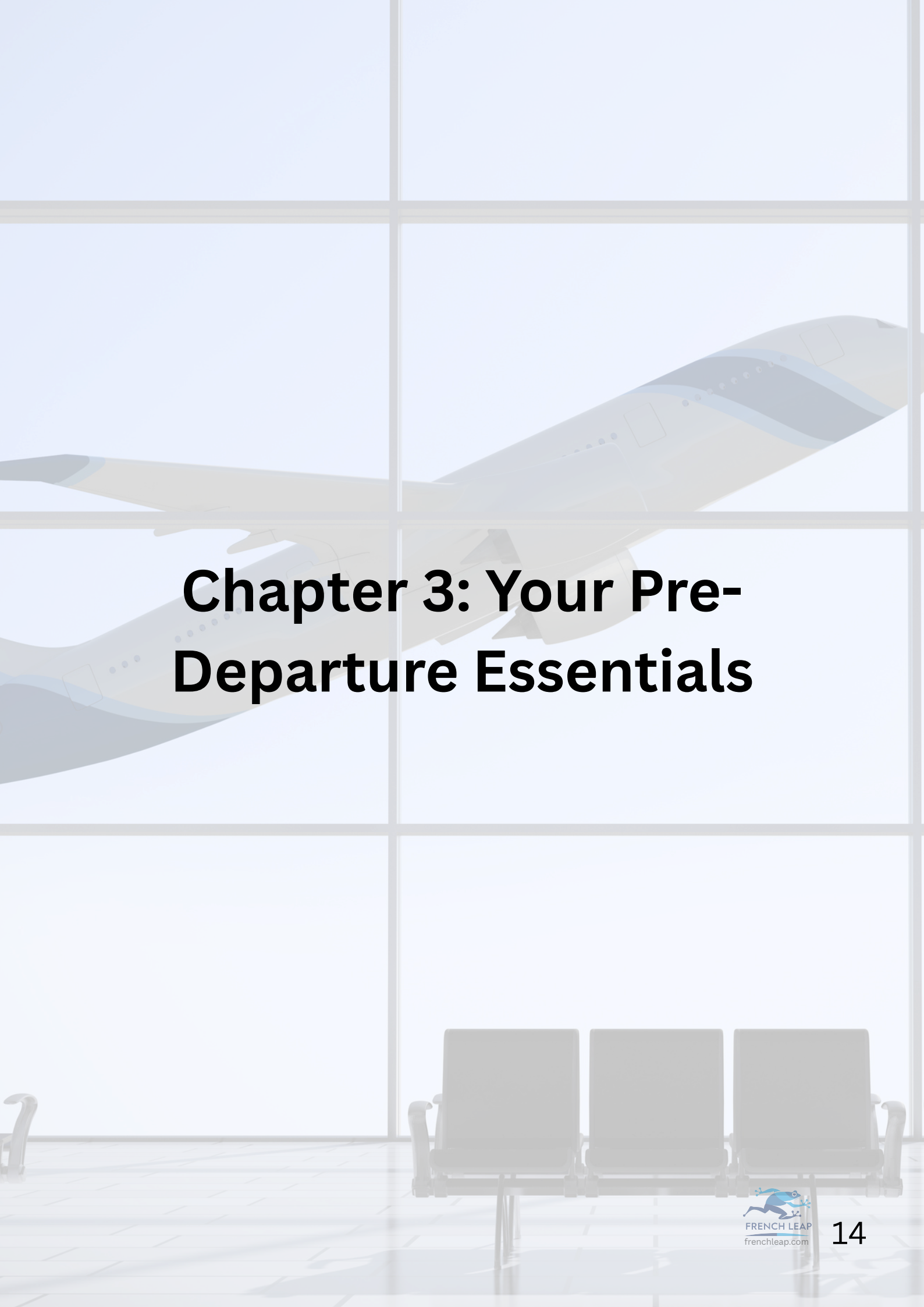
Checklist: French Student Visa Application

- ☐ Research the specific visa requirements for your nationality on the official French government website.
- ☐ Gather all required documents (passport, birth certificate, etc.).
- ☐ Obtain your acceptance letter from the French educational institution.
- ☐ Prepare proof of sufficient financial resources. Register with Campus France (if applicable for your country).
- ☐ Complete the online visa application form. Schedule and attend your visa interview.
- ☐ Keep copies of all submitted documents. Track the status of your visa application.



"While many shops accept cards, it's always wise to have some cash on hand, especially for smaller establishments or local markets. Tipping culture is also different – you don't add the tip in restaurants, as the service charge is already included. You might however, leave a symbolic amount as a token of your appreciation for the excellent service."

"Public transportation in French cities is generally excellent and affordable for students. Look into student passes as soon as you arrive."



Chapter 3: Your Pre-Departure Essentials

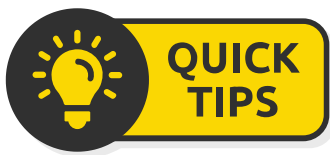
Your To-Do Checklist

Focus on crucial tasks to complete before leaving for France:

- booking flights
- securing initial accommodation (even temporary),
- informing your bank
- arranging travel insurance, packing essentials
- and making copies of important documents.

Checklist: Before You Fly to France

- ☐ Arrange initial accommodation (student residence, Airbnb for the first few weeks).
- ☐ Inform your bank about your international travel.
- ☐ Purchase comprehensive travel and health insurance.
- ☐ Make copies (digital and physical) of your passport, visa, acceptance letter, and other important documents.
- ☐ Research baggage allowances and pack accordingly.
- ☐ Exchange a small amount of currency for initial expenses.
- ☐ Download useful translation apps and offline maps.



"Did you know that French universities often have specialized 'rentrée' (back-to-school) events specifically for international students? These are great for meeting people and getting oriented."

"Unlike some countries, French academic culture often values direct debate and expressing your opinion in class (respectfully, of course!)."



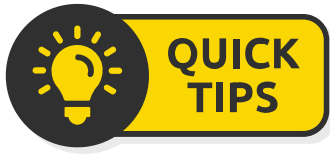
Chapter 4: Your Arrival in France

First Few Days Checklist & Practical Advice

Guide for navigating immediate tasks upon arrival: getting from the airport to your accommodation, reporting to your institution, starting the process for long-term accommodation, and understanding basic emergency procedures.


Checklist: Your First Days in France

- ☐ Have your accommodation address and directions readily accessible.
- ☐ Know how to contact your university's international student office.
- ☐ If in temporary accommodation, start looking for long-term options.
- ☐ Locate the nearest public transportation options.
- ☐ Understand the local emergency numbers (For Police: Dial 17, Fire Dept: 18, ambulance 15).
- ☐ Try to connect with other international students (orientation events, student groups).
- ☐ Purchase a local SIM card or ensure your international roaming is set up.



"Setting up a French bank account can take time. Be prepared for some bureaucracy, and don't be afraid to ask for help from your university's international student office."

"Healthcare in France is generally very good, but understanding the 'sécurité sociale' (national health insurance) system is crucial for long-term stays. Your university will likely assist with this."

A narrow, sunlit street in a French town, lined with colorful buildings and potted plants. The street is paved with dark asphalt and leads towards a bright horizon. The buildings on either side are multi-story, with balconies and various architectural details. The overall atmosphere is warm and inviting, typical of a French village.

Chapter 5: Embracing French Culture

Your Initial Cultural Awareness Checklist & Social Cue

An introduction to basic French cultural norms and etiquette: greetings (la bise), politeness (using "Bonjour," "S'il vous plaît," "Merci"), dining etiquette, personal space, and general communication styles.

French social interactions are governed by clear politeness rituals—always begin with "Bonjour" before any conversation and master the art of "la bise" (cheek kisses) for greetings between friends. The French appreciate formality in initial encounters, so maintain appropriate personal space and remember that dining is considered a sacred experience where conversation should flow naturally, never rushed.

Checklist: Getting Acquainted with French Culture

- ☐ Learn basic French greetings and polite phrases.
- ☐ Be aware of the common practice of "la bise."
- ☐ Understand the importance of politeness in daily interactions.
- ☐ Observe dining etiquette in restaurants and homes.
- ☐ Be mindful of personal space in public settings.
- ☐ Be open to trying new foods and experiences. Show patience and respect when communicating, especially with language barriers.

Insider Tip: Ordering Food in French



"When ordering in restaurants, start with 'Je voudrais...' (I would like) rather than 'Je veux...' (I want). This small difference in phrasing is considerably more polite to French ears.

In fact, saying “Je vais prendre” followed by the menu item will make you sound more fluent!

Also, don't be surprised when waiters don't bring your bill until you specifically ask for it with 'L'addition, s'il vous plaît'—it's considered rude to rush diners!"

Insider Tip: Essential French Etiquette



"Always greet shopkeepers with 'Bonjour Madame/Monsieur' when entering and 'Au revoir' when leaving—this isn't optional! DO maintain eye contact during a toast ('santé!') as failing to do so is considered bad luck.

The French usually don't eat while walking in the street (except for ice cream or a quick snack) as the French prefer to sit and enjoy their food. And never ask for your steak 'bien cuit' (well-done) unless you're prepared for a disapproving look from your server!"

Cultural Integration Quick Tips



Language Beyond the Classroom

Identify language exchange meetups in your area where locals practice languages with foreigners

Download French podcasts for beginners to train your ear during commutes

Find a French "buddy movie" you enjoy and watch it with subtitles first, then without

Cultural Code-Switching

Note how communication styles differ in academic, professional, and social settings

Practice the appropriate level of formality with different people (professors vs. classmates)

Observe how French students participate in class discussions

Social Cue



"Meal times in France are often considered social events. Don't be surprised if lunch and dinner last longer than you're used to! It's a time for conversation and connection."

"While the French are generally direct, politeness and formality in initial interactions are highly valued. Using 'Monsieur,' 'Madame,' and 'Mademoiselle' is common until you're invited to be more informal."

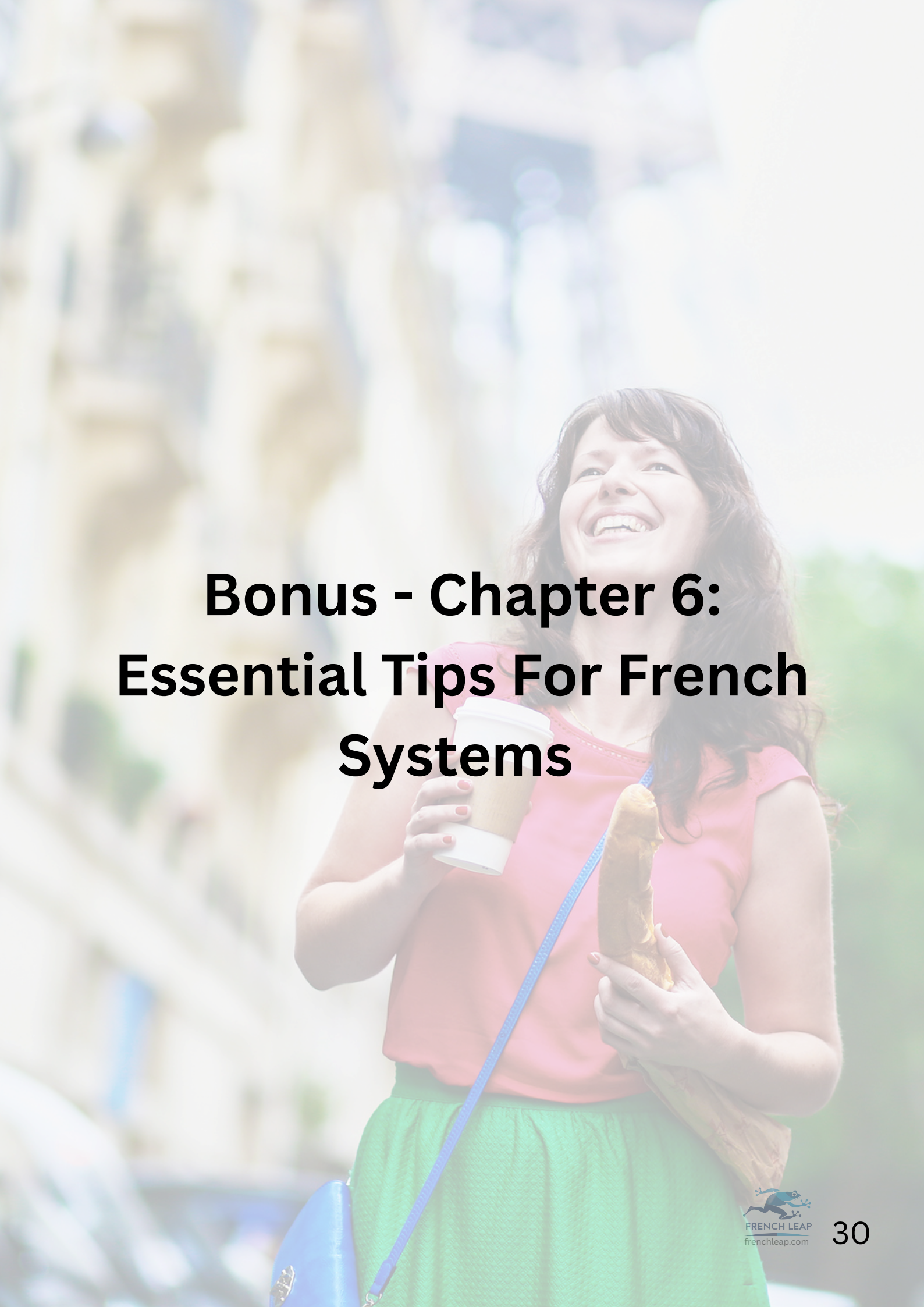
However, this also depends on the neighborhood you find yourself in. But stick to formal to be on the safe side.

Cultural Wisdom:



"The French concept of 'la convivialité' goes deeper than mere politeness. It refers to the joy of sharing good food, conversation, and company. Accept invitations to meals whenever possible – these gatherings are where meaningful connections happen and cultural understanding deepens."

"Many international students find it challenging to break into French social circles initially. Understanding the distinction between 'tu' and 'vous' isn't just grammar – it reflects relationship dynamics that reveal when you've truly been accepted into someone's inner circle."



Bonus - Chapter 6: Essential Tips For French Systems

Banking, Healthcare, Getting Around

Navigating French banking and healthcare systems is a crucial step for a successful stay in France. French banks offer specialized student accounts with reduced fees, but require specific documentation.

Similarly, the French healthcare system (Sécurité Sociale) provides excellent coverage for students, though initial setup requires patience and attention to detail.

Checklist: Setting Up Your French Banking

- ☐ Research student-friendly banks (BNP
- ☐ Paribas, Société Générale, etc.)
- ☐ Prepare required documents (passport, visa, enrollment certificate, proof of address)
- ☐ Schedule an appointment rather than walking in
- ☐ Request a RIB (Relevé d'Identité Bancaire) document immediately
- ☐ Ask about mobile banking options and international transfer fees
- ☐ Understand how French cards work (Chip and PIN system)
- ☐ Consider keeping your home country account active during transition

Insider Tip: Opening a French Bank Account



"Most French banks require proof of address to open an account—a classic catch-22 when you've just arrived!

Ask your university if they can provide an *attestation d'hébergement* or consider services like *Wise* or *Revolut* as temporary solutions until you're settled."

Checklist: Healthcare Enrollment & Access

- ☐ Register for student Sécurité Sociale (usually through your university)
- ☐ Obtain your attestation de droits and temporary social security number
- ☐ Consider complementary insurance (mutuelle) for additional coverage
- ☐ Locate your nearest general practitioner (médecin traitant)
- ☐ Understand the reimbursement process for medical expenses
- ☐ Download the Ameli app for managing your healthcare account
- ☐ Keep a small fund for upfront medical payments before reimbursement

Insider Tip: Navigating French Healthcare



"When setting up your French health insurance (*sécurité sociale*), request your *attestation de droits* as soon as possible—this document proves your coverage status and is frequently requested by healthcare providers. Also, most pharmacists speak some English and can provide basic medical advice for minor concerns when doctors aren't available."

Insider Tip: Getting Around French Cities



Paris has an excellent metro system, but don't overlook the Vélib' bike sharing program or the scenic bus routes.

In smaller cities like Lyon or Bordeaux, trams often provide the most scenic and efficient transportation. Remember to always validate your ticket before boarding trains or trams—controllers perform random checks and fines are substantial!

Your French Leap Starts Here



Congratulations on taking this important step towards your academic adventure in France! We hope this guide has provided you with valuable insights and practical checklists to navigate the initial stages of your journey.

At French Leap, we understand that moving to a new country involves more than just packing your bags.

That's why our services are built on three core pillars to ensure your transition is as smooth and enriching as possible:

Cultural and Language Immersion: We go beyond basic language lessons, offering real-world cultural insights to help you understand and adapt to French etiquette and ways of thinking, bridging the gap between speaking French and living it.

Administrative Assistance: Let us take the stress out of French bureaucracy. From visa guidance to navigating banking, healthcare, apartment rentals, and insurance, our expert support allows you to focus on settling in while we handle the formalities.

Relocation Support: You're not alone! Join our community of specialists and fellow expats. We provide personalized guidance to help you adapt, find trusted resources, and ensure you feel at home in France from day one.

Ready to experience the French Leap difference?

Book Your Free Welcome Consultation

[Book Now](#) >>

We'll discuss your specific needs, answer your questions, and outline how our personalized services can pave the way for a successful and enjoyable study experience in France.

Our Student Packages



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We look forward to welcoming you to the French Leap community!



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