



A Week with Me in Paris

BY CAROLINE COUSIN

FRENCH
Café
ETIQUETTE

Feel confident in every French café.
Learn the unspoken rules that make you
sound — and feel — like a local.

10 ESSENTIAL TIPS · NATIVE FRENCH TEACHER



Café de Flore — Saint-Germain-des-Prés, Paris

EST. 1887

"In Paris, a café is never just a place to drink coffee. It is a stage, a sanctuary, and a school — all at once."

— Caroline Cousin

A NOTE FROM CAROLINE

I have been teaching French for over 25 years — and I still believe that the café is the finest classroom in France.

This guide gives you the unspoken codes that most visitors never learn. Not grammar rules — real habits that make you feel at ease, and that Parisians genuinely appreciate.

A WEEK WITH ME IN PARIS · 10 ESSENTIAL TIPS

01

Always say "Bonjour" first.

Always greet the staff before you say anything else — before you order, before you ask a question. In France, not saying "Bonjour" is considered almost rude. You simply don't exist yet.

CULTURAL NOTE

Even in a busy café, a genuine "Bonjour" changes everything. The Parisians aren't cold — they're formal. Unlock the warmth with a smile and a greeting.

🇫🇷 SOUND LIKE A LOCAL

Bonjour, s'il vous plaît.

Hello, please.

02

Don't expect free refills.

In France, you pay for each coffee separately. The concept of "unlimited refills" doesn't exist — and that's not a flaw. One perfect espresso, sipped slowly, is the Parisian philosophy.

CULTURAL NOTE

Quality over quantity. A café in Paris is not about volume — it's about the ritual. If you want another, simply order one. The waiter won't be surprised.



terrasse parisienne — morning light



The art of the Parisian table

TIPS 03 - 04

03

Sit down if you want table service.

In most French cafés there are two prices: at the counter (*au comptoir*) and at a table (*en salle*). The table costs more — because someone comes to you.

CULTURAL NOTE

If you sit down, don't go to the counter to order. Wait for the server. It's a different experience — slower, more relaxed, very Parisian.

🇫🇷 SOUND LIKE A LOCAL

Sur place ou à emporter ?

For here or to go? (they'll ask you)

04

Don't rush.

The French café is not a pit stop — it's a destination. Lingering is not just accepted, it's expected. No one will hurry you. No one will check on you every five minutes.

CULTURAL NOTE

Your table is yours for as long as you want it. Stay an hour with one espresso. Watch the street. Read. This is not wasting time — this is living like a Parisian.

"On prend le temps."

We take our time. — The Parisian motto

05

Ask politely for the bill.

The bill in France is never brought automatically. This is intentional — the waiter will not interrupt your moment. When you're ready, catch their eye and say it quietly.

CULTURAL NOTE

Don't snap your fingers. Don't call "garçon" — that's outdated and rude. A simple eye contact and a polite phrase is all it takes.

🇫🇷 SOUND LIKE A LOCAL

L'addition, s'il vous plaît.

The bill, please.

06

Tipping is optional.

Service is always included in France (*service compris*). Leaving a tip is a gesture of appreciation, not an obligation. Small coins left on the table are perfectly appropriate.

CULTURAL NOTE

Leaving 50 cents to 1 euro is generous and appreciated. Leaving nothing is completely normal. Never feel pressured — you've already paid for the service.





TIPS 07 - 08

07

Know your coffee.

Ordering "a coffee" in France means *un café* — a small, strong espresso. If you want something larger or milder, you need to be specific.

YOUR COFFEE VOCABULARY

Un café — espresso

Un café allongé — americano

Un café crème — with steamed milk

Un noisette — espresso + dash of cream

🇫🇷 SOUND LIKE A LOCAL

Un café, s'il vous plaît.

A coffee, please.

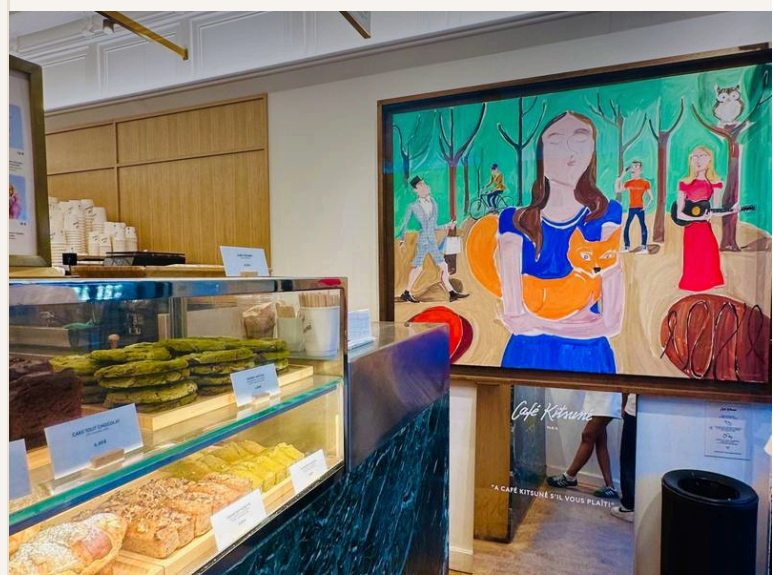
08

Respect the atmosphere.

French cafés have their own quiet code. Loud conversations, phones on speaker, or overly boisterous behaviour stand out immediately. Observe first, then adapt.

CULTURAL NOTE

Lower your voice slightly. The café is a shared, semi-private space — for thought and conversation at a human volume. You'll feel the mood instantly.





TIPS 09 — 10

09

Terrace or inside?

The *terrasse* is the quintessential Parisian experience — facing the street, watching the world go by. Inside is cozier and quieter.

SOUND LIKE A LOCAL

En terrasse, s'il vous plaît.

On the terrace, please.

10

Enjoy the moment.

The French café is never really about the coffee. It's about the pause. Sit, breathe, and let Paris come to you.

"On prend le temps."

The Parisian secret — we take our time.



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