

Part 2: More Tips on Etiquette/Norms in France



Respecting the Distinction of Tarif “Comptoir” vs “Salle”:

Thinking about buying something at the café counter and then taking it to a table? Mais non! In traditional French cafés the official price list (*tarifs des consommations*) dictates that prices for the **same item** are different, depending on whether you choose to stand at the bar (*prix comptoir*), sit at an inside table (*prix salle*) or on the terrace/patio. It is not acceptable, therefore, to purchase an item at the bar/counter price, and then take it to a table.

Toning It Down in Public: In public transportation and pretty much everywhere where you mix with others, it's considered polite and respectful to refrain from having loud discourse. Simply put, the cultural norm in France and most of Europe is *to tone down noise levels, when in public*.



Knowing Where Not to Put Your Feet: Putting your feet (shod or bare) up on the seats in the trains or métro is a big no-no. In fact, on the SNCF in France, you can be fined 45 euros for this faux-pas. Click [here](#) for an article entitled, *La SNCF compte lancer un plan de lutte contre les incivilités, 'qui empoisonnent la vie des voyageurs et des cheminots'*.

Knowing How to Get Attention: When in restaurants, refrain from calling out, “garçon” or “mademoiselle” to get a server’s attention. Instead, simply say, “s’il vous plaît.” When asking for the bill, it is ok to do ‘air-writing.’ For a wickedly humorous look at service in France, click [here](#) for Stephen Clarke’s article; he is the author of the best-seller, *A Year in the Merde*.

Other Tips from the Alliance’s Native-French Teachers

- 1) Be aware that, in much of Europe, whistling often equates to jeering (disapproval) rather than approval. To avoid miscommunication, avoid it.
- 2) Do remember to weigh your own produce before going to the cashier in most grocery stores, and to bag all your items yourself, after you’ve paid up.
- 3) don’t request free coffee refills. If you want another café, the expectation is that you’ll buy another one.