



European Consumer Centre France

Young consumers travelling in France: what you should know about hotels and campsites.

Hotels

Tourism tax

- ◆ During their stay in France, visitors are usually asked to pay a tourism tax which is **fixed by the local authority, and varies from 0.15 % to 1.07 % per person per day, according to the quality and standard of the accommodation.**
- ◆ Where the tourism tax is not a flat rate, children less than 4 years are exempt, and children under 10 only charged at half the rate.
- ◆ This tax is **collected by the owner of the accommodation**, and will be **included in your hotel bill, rent**, etc.

Hotel booking

- ◆ French hotels are approved and checked by official authorities, and **classified into six categories**: no star, 1 to 4 stars and 4*Luxe (Luxury). All must display their rates (VAT included) outside the hotel and in each room.
- ◆ You can ask Tourist Information Offices or a booking agent to book your room, if you do not wish to look for a hotel by yourself.
- ◆ It is advisable to make an advance booking for travel during the high tourist season i.e. beginning of July to the end of August.

Before leaving home

- ◆ When you book a stay in a hotel, **the hotelkeeper is entitled to ask you for the payment of a deposit, called in French either "acompte" or "arrhes"**.
- ◆ Definition:

"Arrhes": a guest who needs to cancel his reservation will not be able to get the deposit back, except in case of force majeure (i.e. circumstances beyond anyone's control).

(for your information: According to the French State Council following the opinion of the Court of Justice of the European Communities, those "arrhes" should be considered as a compensation and not as a hotel service. Therefore this amount is exempt of VAT.)

On the other hand, if the hotel has to cancel the booking, it should pay double the deposit back to the client.

"Acompte" (the most common form of a deposit in France): a guest who has to cancel can be obliged to pay the hotel double the deposit. On the other hand, if the hotel cancels the reservation, the guest is entitled to ask for damages.

◆ **It is customary in France to confirm the booking two weeks before the predicted arrival date** to be sure that the booking was properly recorded, and that the room has not been let to another person.

◆ However, **if you ever have to cancel your stay, the hotel must be informed at the latest 24 hours prior to the date of arrival.** Otherwise the hotel will be entitled to charge you for an overnight stay.

If you made your booking with a travel agency, the agent has to give you a document describing the place you have booked. The type of accommodation, as well as all the information concerning the building, the insurance cover and the administrative and environmental health formalities, must be clearly set out.

◆ Generally, the normal time of arrival at a hotel is around 7 pm, or 8 pm for short stays, but this can vary from one hotel to the other. The best approach would be to ask the hotelkeeper directly, or to refer to the general conditions of the contract. However, except with the agreement of the hotelkeeper, you cannot insist on occupying the room before 5 pm.

◆ **If the booking is made with payment of a deposit (arrhes),** the hotelkeeper has to wait until 11 am or noon the next day before letting the room to someone else (although he can keep the deposit in lieu of the cost of a night's stay).

◆ As a general rule, check out should be done by the end of the morning, unless agreed otherwise with the hotel.

What if on arrival the hotel does not live up to expectations?

◆ If the hotelkeeper supplied you with all the information (e.g. from a web site, brochures etc.) it is **possible to ask for compensation** (maybe for a reduction of the price to be paid, for example) **on the basis of misleading advertising.**

◆ **If you made your booking via the Internet, you are entitled to complain to the Web site which offered you the service.** Under the terms of the law dated June 21, 2001, every person selling goods or services on the Internet is responsible to the consumer for the proper execution of the obligations resulting from the contract - even when those obligations are carried out by another person.

◆ An Internet site cannot exclude its liability by alleging that it only publishes descriptions supplied by someone else. The only defences are that the problem is the fault of the consumer, or a case of "force majeure".

◆ **If you booked through a travel agency,** the responsibility of the agent is defined by the law of July 13, 1992. This entitles you to compensation, or to stay in a new place which corresponds to the type that you have booked.

◆ Please note: the responsibility of a travel agency (Law of July 13, 1992) only applies if the booking concerns includes at least two elements, such as transport and residence or / and another tourist service.

I am a victim of a theft in the hotel or its surroundings, what can I do?

◆ **Hotelkeepers are responsible for thefts and damage to the possessions of their customers, whether inside or in the car parks of the establishment** (articles 1952 and following of the French civil code): unless they can prove it is the

fault of the customer or "force majeure". In order to receive compensation, the consumer has to prove how the damage was caused and should also have evidence of the value of the stolen or damaged possessions.

- ◆ However, the compensation to be paid by the hotelkeeper is limited to 100 times the cost of a night's stay for a theft committed inside the hotel, and 50 times for a theft in a vehicle parked in the car park of the hotel.
- ◆ This limitation does not apply when the damage is the result of a fault committed by the business.
- ◆ "Exclusion notices" announcing that the hotelkeeper is not responsible in case of theft or damage, have no validity and cannot be used to argue against your claim.
- ◆ Tips: in case of theft, make a report to the management of the hotel, and ask for a certificate confirming the theft. Then, go to the nearest police station and lodge a complaint. Do not wait until you get back to your home country to do this!

Camping

Campsites

◆ France has more than 8,000 campsites, from rural farm sites to holiday villages, classified by 0 to 4 stars. An official guide to campsites is available in bookshops.

◆ **The campsite prices are free. The internal rules of the campsite must be displayed at the entrance to the site and in the reception area.**

The conditions governing the classification of French campsites are very strict. For hygienic and environmental reasons, all campsites have to be notified to the town hall or the Prefecture, and will be awarded stars after an inspection, according to their accommodation facilities. Examples of the matters considered include: total surface area of the site, quantity of amenities and equipment, Pitch size and number, and number of toilet facilities.

◆ However, the cleanliness of the site, or the ability of the staff to speak English, is not taken into account.

◆ Properties which are served with both water and electricity, and which are directly linked with the waste water evacuation system are called "confort caravane"; and those which are also connected to the mains drainage and sewerage network are called "grand confort caravane".

◆ **Furnished, permanently sited caravans and bungalows are subject to the rules governing holiday rentals** (see above). So there is, for example, an obligation to provide an inventory and état des lieux, etc.

Tourist and Leisure sites

◆ If more than half of the campsite pitches are intended for occupation during a short stay only (overnight, a week or a month), without the tenants having the option to stay for longer-term periods of residence, the campsite will be classified as "Tourisme".

- ◆ If more than 50% of the pitches are intended for occupation of a long stay (more than a month) or for residential camping in the form of mobile homes, etc. (but without becoming a permanent place of residence), the site will be classified "Loisirs".

Residential leisure parks

- ◆ On these sites, the owners of mobile homes or caravans either rent or buy a plot of land for a home on a more permanent basis.

Farm camping "camping à la ferme" and open-air camping

- ◆ A farmer can accommodate up to 6 tents or caravans or 20 campers on his ground, by making a simple declaration at the town hall. The minimum surface area of this site needs to be 300 square metres.

As above, the site must be classified by the Prefecture, either as classic classified ground (from 1 to 4 stars), or as a "nature zone" campsite: "aire naturelle de camping". In this case, the period of use can extend to six months in a year, continuous or not. However, its capacity can not exceed 25 places, or its surface 1 hectare.

- ◆ If the site is classified as "seasonal", the period of use is only 2 months a year, but the capacity is 120 pitches and 1,5 hectares.
- ◆ The site must display at the entrance: its prices, the site rules, accommodation facilities, the origin and quality of the water, its classification category, and the need for a security deposit.

Camping in the wild

- ◆ **Make sure that camping isn't forbidden** (e.g. in areas with a risk of fire) and that you have the agreement of the owner. Otherwise you can be fined! Generally, camping in wild places is forbidden on beaches, at the edge of roads or in nature protection and conservation areas.

Campsites and insurance

- ◆ **Only items locked into a hermetically closed container, or left under surveillance, can be guaranteed against theft.** At no time should the camper leave any valuables unprotected. Certain insurance contracts cover the disappearance of camping equipment, but they generally exclude the theft of luggage and other personal belongings left inside a tent.

If you, as a foreign consumer, are feeling mistreated by a French professional, the European Consumer Centres (ECCs) will be pleased to help you to find an amicable settlement of the dispute. You can find further information and a complete list of all ECCs under: http://europa.eu.int/comm/consumers/redress/ecc_network/index_en.htm

ECC France (French/English/German)
+49 7851/991 480 as well as 0820 200 999 for calls
from France for only 9 Cents per minute

