

1 OPENING A BANK ACCOUNT

BANKING AND MONEY

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Any foreigner spending more than three months in France can open a bank account. At the bank you will need your passport or other ID, your residence permit and proof of address. Often new visitors do not have the permit or a fixed address and this can create difficulties: a copy of the host organisation form can help, but is not always enough, so you are strongly advised to bring an international Visa Card to cover your initial expenses.

Many banks, however, have reservations about people staying less than three months.

Make enquiries at the Caisse d'Epargne savings bank or the Post Office, which can be more flexible.

Opening a bank account before arriving in France

The ideal situation is to have a bank account in France before you arrive, but this can be tricky without the right channels at your disposal. Fortunately the Alfred Kastler Foundation provides this service: consult its internet site www.cnrs.fr/fnak/. We also advise you to verify before setting off whether or not your usual bank has branches in France or an agreement with a French bank. This could help you in opening an account or choosing an agency in France.

The two main types of account are the cheque account, which earns no interest, and the savings account which makes your money work for you. Opening a savings account for a stay of under three months presents no problem at all.

Bank transfers from abroad

Some banks will allow you to open an account with foreign currency: a minimum sum in euros, Swiss francs or American dollars is required. This is useful for people drawing a salary in their home country. However, fluctuations in the exchange rate make this a worthwhile proposition only in the short term. Some banks take no commission on the transfer and conversion of salary cheques from abroad

Two vital documents for opening a bank account:

- ID (passport, visa, residence permit, etc)
- Proof of address (telephone or electricity bill, rent receipt, etc)

On the other hand, the bank card – valid for two years – costs from 15 to 40 euros, according to the bank and type of card: international or national, and direct or delayed debit.

You can also ask for a chequebook and bank card, which you will receive some ten days after opening the account. Chequebooks are usually free.

A bank overdraft can be very expensive: when your account goes into the red, the bank makes charges called "agios". When you open your account, the bank will stipulate an overdraft figure you must never exceed. If you do, you may face an "interdiction bancaire", which means loss of cheque and bank card facilities. In some cases you must also present your host organisation form and deposit a minimum amount of approximately 15 euros.

Euro

In January 2002, the euro became the sole currency in European Union countries, with the exceptions of the UK, Denmark and Sweden. This simplifies movement from one country to another and comparison of prices. .



2 THE BANKING SYSTEM

There are many different banks in France, but not all have branches throughout the country. Most often your banking operations will necessitate a visit to the bank or an AT machine. Remote banking is becoming more common, either via the Internet or by telephone.

OPENING HOURS

Banking hours vary from one establishment to another, but most are open Monday to Friday, from 8:00 or 9:00; they close for lunch between 12:00 and 13:30, then at 18:00 at the latest. Some are closed on Monday and most are closed on Saturday afternoon.

You can use your bank card in some public telephone booths: the cost of the call is debited directly from your bank account.

La Bourse



LOSS OR THEFT OF A CHEQUEBOOK OR BANK CARD

Should your cheque book be lost or stolen, you must warn the agency to stop any subsequent cheques. If you become aware of theft or loss outside of banking hours, call the lost and stolen cheque department at the Bank of France (08 36 68 32 08) and give them the number of your account so that the necessary measures can be taken.

Should your bank card be lost or stolen, warn your bank as quickly as possible or call the emergency number indicated on the contract you signed when applying for the card. You must then confirm to your bank by registered mail.

3 TAXATION

Cost of living: some examples (2003)

- *Rent: 400 – 600 euros for a one-room apartment.*
- *Average monthly cost of gas, electricity and telephone: 55 euros.*
- *Social Security coverage: minimum 168 euros per year.*
- *Public transport: 11.20 euros for a book of 10 metro/bus tickets*
- *Eating: Average monthly food budget is 180 – 250 euros. Lunch in a restaurant costs 10 – 12 euros, in a cafeteria 6 – 8 euros. A non-alcoholic drink in a café costs around 3 euros.*
- *Bread (baguette 250 grams): 0.70 euro.*
- *Going out: a cinema ticket costs around 7.50 euros, and babysitters ask an average of 5 euros an hour.*

If you live and work in France for more than 6 months, you are subject to the same obligations as French citizens and must pay income tax here. Each February you must declare your earnings for the previous year.

For your first tax return, ask for the appropriate form from the Taxation Office or your local Town Hall. For this first return, any tax due must be paid as a lump sum. From the second year on, the necessary forms will be sent to you at your home address.

Before leaving France, you must go to your local Tax Office and fill out a return requiring payment of any tax due. You will then be issued with a tax discharge certificate which you will be required to show at the border when leaving the country.

For all information on the relevant procedures,
contact the Lyon Taxation Office
165, rue Garibaldi, Lyon 3e
6, rue Charles Biennier, Lyon 2e



To obtain evidence of your retirement entitlement before leaving France, make enquiries at the Social Service Information and Coordination Centre (CICAS). You will be given a "statement of old-age pension periods".

CICAS Lyon

103, cours Gambetta, 69003 Lyon

Tel 33 (0)4 78 62 73 74

If your country of origin has a social security agreement with France, the above steps can be taken there on your return.

The following countries have agreements with France: Andorra, Algeria, Austria, Benin, Cameroon, Canada, Cap Verde, Congo, Ivory Coast, Gabon, Israel, Channel Islands, Madagascar, Mali, Morocco, Mauritania, Monaco, Niger, Norway, Poland, Quebec, Rumania, San Marino, Senegal, Sweden, Switzerland, Czechoslovakia, Togo, Tunisia, Turkey, USA, former Yugoslavia, together with all members of the European Union and the European Economic Area.

For further information consult:

www.sos-net.eu.org/etrangers/interne/retraite.htm#21

