

FRANCE

One of the longest established independent nations in the Western world. France (officially *République Française*) is the second largest country in Europe with a land area of 549,970 sq km (210,026 square miles) (excluding its Caribbean and Indian Ocean dependencies).

France is situated between the Bay of Biscay (which gives way to the Atlantic Ocean) to the west, the English Channel (*La Manche*) to the northwest, Belgium and Luxembourg to the northeast, Germany and Switzerland to the east, with the Mediterranean Sea, Andorra, Spain and Italy to the south (the Principality of Monaco being sandwiched between France and Italy on the coast). In addition, the French territories France extends into the Caribbean (French Guiana, Guadeloupe, Martinique) and into the Indian Ocean via Réunion.

Paris is the political, commercial and cultural capital of the country with nearly 20% of the population living in the Île-de-France (Paris region) area and the surrounding towns. Apart from Paris, there are large urban areas around Lille to the northwest, Lyon in the Rhône valley the southeast, Bordeaux Nantes and Toulouse to the south west and the significant cities along the Mediterranean coast (Marseilles, Nice and Toulon). Nonetheless the rural aspects of French life play a significant part and agriculture is a major industry.

Communications within France are among the finest in the world with a first-class road rail network and a good internal airline service.

France has contributed enormously to Western Law by the establishment of the Civil Code (also known as the Napoleonic Code or *Code Napoleon*) and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen in 1789. The Civil Code has now been adopted by several other countries, as well as countries that were influenced by French colonial power. It is also having a major influence on the 'new' laws of China. The Declaration has now evolved into the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 and spawned the European Convention on Human Rights. Further the French contribution to the American Declaration of

Independence and the American Constitution cannot be underestimated.

Property rights are widely covered in the Civil Code (notably Livre II, arts. 515-710) and other Codes that affect property rights, leases, and urban and rural planning. French law has developed a sophisticated system for common ownership (*copropriété*)— basically a derivative of the **condominium**. **Community property** with the right to declare who owns what prior to marriage is primarily a French creation. The emphyteotic lease (*bail emphytéotique*) has been highly refined since its Roman origins. Most retail leases are covered by the law that govern the *bail commercial* (commercial leases) and residential leases may be one of a number of forms (e.g. *bail à loyer, bail d'habitation*).

Terms in **bold** are defined and explained in the Encyclopedia of Real Estate Terms (Third Edition hardcopy and ONLINE)

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