



Napoleon's study of the Chateau of Malmaison near Saint-Germain-en-Laye

The natural way to learn FRENCH



From the centre of Paris, just 25 minutes by train, you arrive at the foot of the great chateau of Saint-Germain-en-Laye, a rather lovely town with a stupendously rich past and surrounded by a plethora of fabulous sites, from the island of the impressionists where Renoir played and painted, the chateau of Malmaison, home to Napoleon Bonaparte and wife Josephine, and the Chateau of Monte Cristo – home to the great writer Alexandre Dumas.

It's also where entrepreneur and language expert Carl Adkins bases his French immersion courses, and with French coach

Hebret Maasho, introduces clients to the area and its many attractions whilst imparting a host of historical facts alongside teaching French in a rather different way from normal.

Courses range from a single day experience to multi-day immersion, designed to help people become comfortable dealing with the basics - meeting and greeting, saying please and thank you, ordering in a restaurant etc. and are perfect for those who are beginning a tour and are not confident with speaking French. Immersions are focused on a specific aspect of history, Napoleon for instance, or the Impressionists, castles, food, culture. It's really about what suits the student, most of whom tend to be older, often solo, sometimes couples.

“When you learn French” says Carl, “And I learned this the hard way – you need to focus not on the grammar or the spelling, but just being comfortable hearing it, saying it, understanding it – like when you’re a child and you learn the natural way by experience. If you go straight into rules and regulations, you’re just making it hard for yourself. I really struggled with learning French” he admits.

But then he looked into how our brains work to see why he found it so hard. And the more

he studied natural language acquisition, a specific method of study, the more he realised that there was a better way to learn for those who want to specifically improve their communication and be able to converse. He designed a course and was his own first student. “I’d spent years trying to learn to speak French” he says, “and then I designed my own programme, and I was able to converse fully within months.”

He fine-tuned the programme, adding tips and tricks from his own experience, plus the latest scientific discoveries and freely available French resources, so that even in a day, it could make a difference.

“There’s a bit more to it than just doing a day with us” he says. “Beforehand we’ll send you some preparation work to get you used to hearing French, not focusing on grammar and spelling until you can communicate in French, instead for the first stage we focus on understanding French and feeling comfortable hearing it spoken. And we’ll give you practice work to speak French so that you’re used to forming the words and hearing yourself speak French out loud – it’s a big problem for many learners who use apps or learn online, they know the words, but they



Hebret and Carl with a client in Honfleur



Group outing to the Island of the impressionists by boat

can't converse as they've never practiced for real. And it works at all levels" he assures. "Whether you're a total novice, or you've been learning for years and just need to improve how you speak."

The course isn't just about learning French, it's an adventure, especially for solo travellers. And some students have a specific goal, they may want to buy a house, to move to France, or to study something specific - the themes can then be tailored to suit their needs. "A customized experience" is how Carl puts it. "We recently had a student from New Zealand" he says, she wanted to visit her grandfather's grave in the Somme - it was part guided tour/part learning French. It's got to be something that interests the student, we all learn better and easier when we're interested - it's fact. The more engaged you are, the more you remember. Neurons that fire together - wire together" he laughs. "I feel like we give students arm bands to get them swimming in French!"

Carl explains how it works: first, discover, then immerse - and grow. As you learn about French culture and the things that interest you, and practice your French, your confidence grows and that's a key part of how Experience France (XPF) works.

Combined with the learning you do before you arrive, and the learning after with recommended audio books, and the confidence to keep practicing - out loud especially, without pressure, and understanding it's ok not to be perfect - you get comfortable. "Learning a language is more like music than maths" says Carl, "once you lose the fear, you can enjoy it, and being at ease is important. We had a student who was a film producer and they wanted to focus on French film as their topic, so we tailored a visit catering to their interests and suggested reading and listening to support it. They were amazed at how quickly they progressed with this sort of 'warm up' approach and with lots of tips. We share resources online, a sort of tool kit to help with the learning.

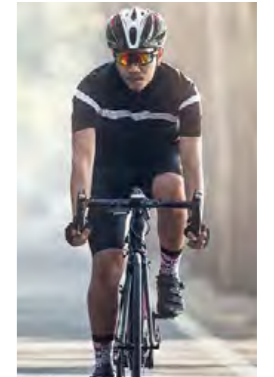
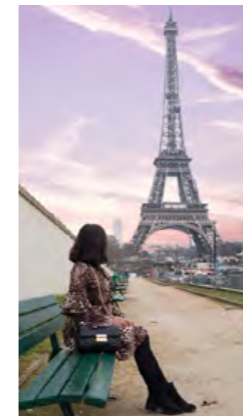
"Everyone has a different reason to learn, a lot of students book a week or two as a sort of "boot camp", they might be moving here or spending a long stay here and they want to know how it all works - Uber, the trains, the metro, how to buy tickets for things, how to order food if they have an allergy, all the things that make life easier, and we help them with that."

Find out more and book a course at: xpfrance.net

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