Apéro Dînatoire, á la façon Niçoise

Inspired by the French tradition of apéritif gatherings, a Provençal Apéro Dînatoire in Nice, France, is a unique and charming way to entertain friends and family. This casual, yet elegant, evening event combines the best of French hospitality with the region's renowned culinary delights.

Setting: A picturesque villa or apartment in Nice, with a lush garden or a charming balcony overlooking the Mediterranean Sea, provides the perfect backdrop for this relaxed gathering.

Note: Keep the dînatoire simple and homey. The following suggestions are possible choices but in no way would a host present even half of what is listed here. An Apéro Dînatoire invokes the idea of a French farmhouse, informal and spontaneous meal for friends or even workers. But you can be sure the host may spend hours planning and organizing a presentation that, by intention, looks simple.

Food

The apéro dînatoire features a selection of bite-sized, Provençal-inspired dishes, including the following. Depending on the number served, a large selection is not needed, just enough to satisfy everyone and a variety to present the flavor of Provence.

Charcuterie

Charcuterie or cured meats, such as saucisson sec and jambon de Bayonne, accompanied by olives, and French gherkin

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Local Nice Specialties

- Pissaladière is a dish of flatbread with toppings from the region of Provence and the French city of Nice
- Socca or *Farinata* (Italian: [fari'na:ta]), socca (Occitan: [su'ka]), farinata di ceci, torta di ceci, fainé, fainá, cecìna or cade is a type of thin, unleavened pancake or crêpe made from chickpea flour.
- Neapolitan pizza, also known as pizza napoletana, is a traditional Italian pizza originating from Naples, Campania. It is characterized by a soft, thin dough with high edges, typically baked in a wood-fired oven for 60 to 90 seconds at a temperature of around 485°C. Pizza napoletana is readily available in Nice.
- Tourte de blettes (torta de blea in Niçois) is a pie made with Swiss chard, which can be served as a main course or as a sweet dessert. It is a culinary specialty of the city of Nice.

- Fougasse (bread) In French cuisine, fougasse (Occitan: fogaça) is a type of bread typically associated with Provence but found (with variations) in other regions. Some versions are sculpted or slashed into a pattern resembling a head of wheat.

Olives

- Table Olives from the South of France

Our Favorite Olives

- Kalamata olives, While not grown in France, Kalamata olives are quite tasty, Kalamata are a type of black olive grown in Greece, specifically in the region around Kalamata on the Peloponnese peninsula. These olives are dark purple, almost black, and have an almond shape with a smooth, meaty texture.
- Picholine olives, Picholine olives are a type of green olive that is native to France and are also grown in Morocco and parts of Italy. They are known for their torpedo shape and are often used as cocktail olives.
- Lucques olives, Lucques olives are a cultivar of olives primarily grown in Languedoc, France. They are known for their distinctive crescent shape and are mainly used as green table olives.

French Cheeses

A variety of Artisanal French Cheeses For example,

- Comté cheese (AOP, Franche-Comté region): A firm, golden-hued cheese with a nutty, slightly sweet flavor, Comté is a popular choice for French cheese plates. Its rich, complex taste is perfect for pairing with fruit, nuts, and crackers.
- Chevre frais, Chevre frais, which translates to fresh goat cheese, is a type of cheese made from goat's milk. It is typically soft and creamy, offering a fresh and tangy flavor characteristic of goat cheese.
- Roquefort cheese is a raw sheep's milk blue cheese made in the Roquefort-sur-Soulzon region of France. It is distinguished by its signature blue marbling, which is produced by the Penicillium roqueforti fungus added during the cheesemaking process. Roquefort has a moist, crumbly texture and a sharp, tangy, and salty flavor, with notes of butter, caramel, and smoke. The cheese does not have a rind and is best consumed between April and October, though it is available year-round.
- Epoisses cheese, Epoisses cheese is a soft, pungent cow's milk cheese from the Burgundy region of France. It is known for its distinctive soft red-orange rind, which is washed with Marc de Bourgogne, a local pomace brandy, giving it a strong, spicy flavor. The cheese is made either from raw or pasteurized milk and has a creamy, runny texture when ripe. It typically matures for at least six weeks, developing a complex flavor and aroma. Epoisses is often served as a

dessert cheese after dinner and is traditionally enjoyed with a glass of Pinot Noir.

- Camembert cheese, Camembert cheese is a soft, creamy, surface-ripened cow's milk cheese that originated in the late 18th century in Camembert, Normandy, France. It is known for its ivory-colored exterior and creamy, buttery center, and it has a strong, pungent, earthy taste with notes of truffles and even cabbage. Traditionally, Camembert is made from unpasteurized milk, and the AOC variety “Camembert de Normandie” must be made with unpasteurized milk, although many modern cheesemakers outside of Normandy use pasteurized milk for safety and convenience.

How to cut French Cheese without starting a rousing debate or even a war.

Accompaniments

- Tapenade, A spread of Provençal origin consisting of capers, black olives, and anchovies puréed with olive oil
- Hummus, a thick spread made from mashed chickpeas, tahini, lemon juice and garlic; used especially as a dip for pita; originated in the Middle East
- Aioli, A rich sauce of crushed garlic, egg yolks, lemon juice, and olive oil.
- **Fresh vegetables, roasted to perfection**, and served with a dollop of creamy aioli.
- **Mini quiches Lorraine and tartines** topped with caramelized onions and goat cheese.
- **Fresh fruit and nuts**, including figs, apples, dried apricots, almonds and pistachios, for a sweet and crunchy finish.
- Crêpes might be served at the end of the buffet, particularly around February 2nd, Chandeleur when crêpes are traditional.

Bread

For an **apéritif dînatoire** on the French Riviera, you’ll want to serve a selection of breads that complement the local Mediterranean flavors and pair well with the dishes typically served. Here are some excellent choices:

1. Baguettes

- ***Tradition***, A classic French baguette is essential. Look for the “tradition” version, which is made without additives and has a crusty exterior with a soft, airy interior. Slice it into rounds for easy serving.
- ***Baguette de Seigle***, A rye flour baguette. Rye and wheat flours are often used to produce a rye bread with a lighter texture, color and flavor than pumpernickel.

2. Pain de Campagne This rustic country bread has a hearty, slightly tangy flavor and a dense texture, making it perfect for pairing with tapenades, pâtés, and cheese.

3. Fougasse A regional specialty of Provence, fougasse is a flatbread often flavored with ingredients like olives, herbs (e.g., rosemary or thyme), or even anchovies. It's decorative, flavorful, and ideal for an apéro.

4. Pain aux Céréales A multigrain bread with seeds and nuts provides a nutty flavor and crunchy texture. It pairs beautifully with creamy cheeses or smoked salmon.

5. Pain aux Olives Olive bread is another local favorite, infused with the flavors of ripe black or green olives. It's a quintessential Mediterranean choice.

6. Breadsticks or Grissini Thin, crunchy breadsticks are perfect for dipping into spreads like hummus or aioli, and they're easy for guests to eat without a plate.

7. Mini Brioche or Pain au Lait These slightly sweet, soft breads are a nice balance to savory flavors, and they pair well with foie gras or jams.

8. Cake Salé A Cake Salé is a quick bread much like a banana bread but using no sugar or sweet ingredients. Instead, add savory taste bites like olives, onions, cheese, meat chunks like ham, sausage or poultry, with savory herbs. A Cake Salé is glorified by toasting it or grilling a slice on an olive oil pan.

Tips for Serving Bread

- **Keep it Simple**: There is absolutely no need to have more than a couple different types of bread. We suggest a *baguette tradition* and a *pain aux olives* along with bread sticks: Grissini…or a few of your choices.
- **Presentation**: Arrange the bread slices or pieces in a basket or on a rustic wooden board for a charming Provençal touch.
- **Accompaniments**: Serve with a variety of spreads, such as black olive tapenade, anchoïade (anchovy dip), or fresh tomato and basil bruschetta.
- **Warm Bread**: If possible, warm the bread slightly before serving to enhance its aroma and texture.

These breads will perfectly complement the flavors of the French Riviera and delight your guests. Bon appétit!

Beverages

Aperitifs and Cocktails

are an integral part of the evening, featuring:

- **Pastis is the quintessential drink of southern France, originating in Marseille Pastis**, the quintessential drink of southern France originating in Marseille.

Pastis is an iconic, anise-flavored aperitif from Southern France (particularly Provence and Marseille) with a high alcohol content of 40–45% ABV. It is culturally revered as the “drink of the South,” often enjoyed diluted with water (5–7 parts water to 1 part pastis) and ice, which turns the clear liquid into its signature milky yellow color. Fix Me! Key aspects of its reputation and consumption include:

Cultural Status: It is as central to Southern French culture as whisky is to Scotland, commonly consumed during the apéro (pre-dinner drink) alongside games like pétanque. Top Brands: The market is dominated by Pernod Ricard, with Ricard and Pastis 51 being the most widely recognized brands, alongside artisanal options like Henri Bardouin. Naming Conventions: Locals often refer to it by nicknames such as “un jaune” (a yellow) or “pastaga”. To be labeled “Pastis de Marseille,” the spirit must contain 45% alcohol. Tasting Profile: It features a strong aniseed and licorice flavor, often complemented by other Mediterranean herbs like thyme and lemon verbena. It is traditionally served neat (as a spirit) or diluted, but never straight from the bottle due to its potency.

- It is rare that Pastis is not served at an Apéro Dînatoire or a simple gathering in the South of France. Pastis is traditionally enjoyed as an aperitif, typically diluted with water to achieve a cloudy, pale yellow color. To prepare it, pour one part pastis into a tall glass and add up to six parts of cold water. This mixture brings out the anise flavor and creates the characteristic cloudy appearance. Pastis is often sipped slowly, especially during the apéro hour or while playing pétanque on weekends. Pastis Henri Bardouin. It can also be used in cocktails like the Rourou, Tomate, or Perroquet, or as a substitute for absinthe in drinks such as the Sazerac.
- **French farmhouse-style apéritifs**, like L’Apéro les Trois Quince, served chilled and accompanied by a splash of sparkling water.
- **Local wines**, such as rosé from the Côtes de Provence or white wine from the Pays de Grasse. Note that wines follow seasons. That is, when the weather is hot, chilled rosé and white wines will be served. In winter months, red wine is often served to match a more hearty food menu.
- Champagne, although it is not local, there is always a place for champagne at the table enhancing, or creating a special celebration.

Water

- **Still Water**
- **Sparkling Water**

Serving an Apéro Dînatoire

- **An apéro dînatoire** is a French-style informal gathering where guests enjoy a series of small, bite-sized dishes and drinks over several hours. The food is typically served in a **buffet style**, allowing guests to help themselves throughout the evening. Unlike a traditional sit-down dinner, an apéro dinatoire is more casual and relaxed, with a variety of dishes presented in small portions that can be eaten with fingers or minimal utensils.
- **Dishes served** at an apéro dinatoire includes a range of appetizers and small plates, such as

Gougère, tapenade toasts, small lamb chops, Prosciutto with Mostarda, bite-size dried sausages, and a variety of cheese and charcuterie boards. These dishes are meant to be light and stimulating, not filling, and are often accompanied by dips, such as hummus, tzatziki, and tapenade.

- **Desserts** are also part of the apéro dinatoire, but they are served in small portions to complement the overall experience rather than as a main course.
- **Beverages** offered at an apéro dînatoire are usually light and refreshing, such as dry white wine, rosé, beer, or champagne. Non-alcoholic options like fresh juice and soda are also provided to cater to guests who prefer not to drink alcohol. The apéro dînatoire typically starts around 6pm or 8pm and can last until dinner is served or the guests leave for a restaurant.
- There are **no separate services** in an apéro dînatoire; all the food and drinks are served at once and available throughout the gathering. This setup allows guests to enjoy a variety of dishes and drinks at their own pace, making the apéro dînatoire a convivial and relaxed affair.

Ambiance

The evening unfolds with a relaxed, convivial atmosphere, reminiscent of a traditional *soirée française*. Guests mingle and socialize while enjoying the delicious food and drinks, surrounded by the warmth and beauty of the Provençal setting.

Be sure to consider and incorporate the Cultural Style of Provence and the Cote d'Azur into your celebration.

Tips and Variations

- To add an extra touch of elegance, consider hiring a local musician to play soft, acoustic tunes in the background.
- For a more substantial meal, consider adding a few heartier dishes, such as ratatouille or bouillabaisse, to the menu.
- To make the evening more interactive, set up a few stations for guests to assemble their own charcuterie plates or create their own apéritif cocktails.

In Nice, France, a Provençal Apéro Dinatoire is a unique and memorable way to experience the region’s warm hospitality and culinary delights. It’s an event that will leave your guests feeling like they’re part of a charming *soirée française*.

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