Tipping in France

Tipping practices in France are rooted in cultural norms and legal requirements. Here's a detailed guide to help you navigate tipping while traveling in France.

Key Concepts

1. **Service Charge** (VAT) is a required regulated tax that goes to the staff

2. **Tip** (*pourboire*) is an optional supplemental amount for good service that goes to the server

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1. Service Charge, VAT Tax (Service Compris)

By law, restaurants and cafes in France include on the bill, a service charge in the items listed on the menu. This is known as service compris, typically around 15% of the bill. It covers the wages of the staff, unlike in countries like the U.S. where tips supplement salaries.

Typical Amount of Service Charge

Exact VAT rates vary by goods and services from 20% to 0%, thus the estimate of around 15% of the bill. Exact VAT amount by item is listed by law.

The service charge is *not optional*, and it is listed as part of the VAT (Value Added Tax) on the restaurant ticket. *You can safely ignore the VAT, non–optional tax*, and focus on the total. You must pay it in any case.

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2. Supplemental Tip (Pourboire)

While the service charge means you are not obligated to tip, rounding up the bill or leaving a small amount at the table is a gesture of appreciation to the wait staff, is common.

Typical amounts for Tips

- For example, if the bill comes to €38.25, leave €40 in cash and say, “c'est bon” and the server will appreciate your large tip.
- For fine dining or exceptional service: 5–10% of the total bill is appropriate.

Isn't A Few Coins Too Small a Tip?

Don't worry about the low amount of tip (pourboire) because you typically estimate the tip amount based on your total meal on the receipt including the VAT tax. In fact, we are paying a tip onto the VAT tax the total of which we don't want to overpay.

Let's take our previous example €33.26 meal + €4.99 service = €38.25 + €1.75 = €40 -or- €40 / €33.26) = 20% service & tip just by rounding up. but don't do the math each time, just leave a few euros extra

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How to Pay a Bill

It is very common to pay in cash if the total bill and tip is not too much, say less than €50.

Cash for the Bill and Tip

Leave the cash for both Bill and Tip on the small tray with the Bill. However, if there is a crowd or you are seated near a walkway where someone might grab your cash, give the cash to the server directly or pass by the cash register with the entire amount and say, “c'est bon” which will signal that you paid both bill and tip.

How to Pay the Bill at a Restaurant with a Credit Card

Process Overview

In France, it is common to pay your restaurant bill at your table using a mobile card reader. These devices are convenient and widely used in restaurants and cafés.

Steps to Pay the Bill

1. **Ask for the Bill**:

- Politely request the bill by saying
- “L’addition, s’il vous plaît.” (The bill, please.)
- The server will bring the bill to your table.

2. **Inform the Server You’ll Pay by Card**

- Indicate that you’ll pay by credit card:
- “Je vais payer par carte, s’il vous plaît.” (I’ll pay by card, please.)

3. **Server Brings the Mobile Card Reader**

- The server will bring a handheld card reader to your table.
- You don’t need to go to the register unless instructed otherwise.

4. **Insert or Tap Your Card**

- If your card has a chip, insert it into the slot at the bottom of the reader.
- If your card has contactless payment enabled, tap it on the reader when prompted.

5. **Enter Your PIN or Confirm Payment**

- For chip cards, the reader may prompt you to enter your PIN on the keypad.
- For contactless payments, no PIN is usually required for amounts below a specific limit (e.g., €50). For higher amounts, a PIN may be needed.

6. **Wait for Confirmation**

- Once the payment is processed, the reader will display a confirmation. The server may offer you a receipt.

7. **Receipt Options**:

- If you’d like a receipt, say:
    - “Je voudrais un reçu, s’il vous plaît.” (I would like a receipt, please.)
        - If you don’t need a receipt, you can say:
        - “Non, merci.” (No, thank you.)

Rounding Up for a Tip

- Tipping is not mandatory in France, as service charges are typically included in the bill (“service compris”).
- However, it is customary to leave a small tip (around 5–10%) if the service was excellent. You can leave the tip in cash or let the server know to round up the total when paying by card:
- Example: If your bill is €47, you could say, “Faites €50, s’il vous plaît.” (Make it €50, please.)

Important Notes

- **Card Compatibility**: Most restaurants accept international credit cards (Visa, Mastercard, etc.), but some may not accept American Express or other specialized cards. Check the accepted payment methods before dining.
- **Currency**: Transactions will always be processed in euros. If your card is from another country, your bank may charge a foreign transaction fee.
- **Safety**: Mobile card readers are secure. Ensure the amount displayed on the screen matches your bill before confirming payment.

Common Issues

- **Card Declined**: If your card is declined, ask if they accept another type of card or if you can pay in cash.

- **Operator Error**“ (that's you) If you mistype your PIN code you must ask the server to try again. They will retype the total and give you the reader to try again.  Cards are limited to three failed tries after which your card is locked. You must then contact your bank to unlock your card.
- **Technical Problems**: Rarely, the mobile reader may not function your card may not be readable, ”*Mute*“. In such cases, the server may guide you to the register or suggest another payment method.

Paying with a credit card using a mobile card reader is fast, efficient, and secure, making it a seamless part of dining in France.

Whom to Tip (Beyond Restaurants)

Hotel Staff

- Housekeeping - €1–2 per day, left in the room.
- Doormen - €1–2 if they assist with luggage or hail a taxi.
- Concierge - €5–20 for significant help, such as booking hard-to-get reservations.

Taxis and Rideshares

Tipping is not expected, but rounding up the fare or adding €1–3 for good service is appreciated. You can say, “please add €3 for the tip.” For example, when someone takes a taxi to the airport at 6am (or before), the tarif is €36 including VAT. They ask to add €4 because of the early pickup. Adding a pourboire to a bill by card is much very common with a taxi driver

Guides and Tour Staff

For guided tours, tipping is common. €5–10 per person for half-day tours, or €10–20 for a full day.

Delivery Drivers (usually bicycle)

€1–3, depending on the size of the delivery. But tip more for bicycle delivery if it is raining. Even easier to do is use a service like Uber Eats where you can add a tip to the bill upon ordering online.

Hairdressers and Salons

5–10% of the service price if you’re particularly happy with the result.

When Tipping Is Not Necessary

- Self-service establishments
- Takeout-only places
- Fixed-price services, unless extra effort was provided.
- Casual bars and cafes if you order and consume a drink at the bar, it is not necessary to tip but the barman always appreciates €1 or €2.

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