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CIR's Corner

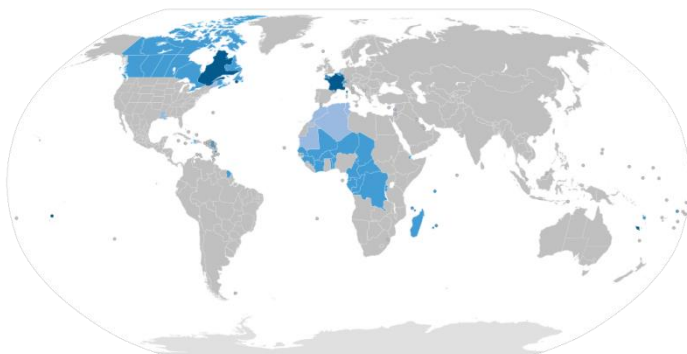
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Hello everyone! "CIR's Corner" is my monthly article about international exchange and cultures around the world. I will introduce a variety of interesting international topics.

This Month's Topic: France

Last December, I participated in a chocolate tasting held by the Gresham-area gourmet chocolate company, Chocolat-e. I introduced the company in the [January issue of CIR's Corner](#). There are five founders of this company, four of which are French. During the chocolate tasting, I met one of the French founders, Mr. Jeanyves Verdu. Although I studied French for four years in school, unfortunately I had forgotten what I had learned, and was unable to speak to Jeanyves in French. I've decided that next time I meet him, I want to be able to speak French with him, and so I have recently restarted my French studies. Therefore, in this month's issue, I'm going to talk about France.



French-speaking countries colored in various shades of blue.

France is located in Western Europe. It is larger than Japan, but has a smaller population. Unsurprisingly, the official language is French. However, did you know that French is the second most geographically widespread language in the world after English? It is the official language of 28

countries, including Switzerland, Belgium, Canada, and many former territories of France and Belgium. It is also an official language of the United Nations, and "UN French Language Day" is observed on March 20 every year.

Have you ever been to France? I haven't, but ever since I saw Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* as a child, I've been longing to go. There are numerous famous sightseeing spots, such as the Eiffel Tower and the Louvre. In fact, France boasts the highest number of international tourists in the world. Below are three places that I'd like to visit.

The Palace of Versailles



The Palace of Versailles started out as a humble hunting lodge built by Louis XIII, but Louis XIV is the one who turned it into a palace fit for a king. In 1682, he moved the seat of the court and government to the palace and reigned over France from there. Louis XV and Louis XVI also lived at the palace part-time.

The Palace of Versailles is located 22 kilometers southwest of Paris, and it takes about one hour to

get there by train. It is famous for its opulent Baroque architecture and expansive gardens. It was registered as a World Heritage Site in 1979, and is visited by 15 million tourists every year. It is one of the most visited tourist attractions in the world!



By the way, I first learned about Louis XIV not from history class, but from the Leonardo DiCaprio film, *The Man in the Iron Mask*. Based on the French legend of the same name, it tells the fictional story of Louis XIV and his secret twin brother, Philippe.

Louis, afraid to lose his throne to his brother, forces Philippe to wear an iron mask, and locks him away for life. However, the Three Musketeers, fed up with the king's rule, devise a plan to replace the cruel Louis with the kind-hearted Philippe. DiCaprio played both Louis and Philippe in this film. Seeing two Leos on screen together was like a dream for me as a teenage Leo fan!

Nice



When I first started studying French in middle school, I had to give a presentation about a French city. I didn't know anything about French cities at that time, so I flipped through the pages of my French textbook looking for clues. Just then, a photo of Nice caught my eye. I had only seen France depicted as a rural place in movies like *Beauty and the Beast* and *The Man in the Iron Mask*, so I didn't know it had beach resorts. I was so intrigued that I decided to talk about Nice for my presentation.

Nice is located in southeastern France along the Mediterranean Sea. Since it's only 30 km from the Italian border, you can see Italy's influence on the architecture, food, and culture. The dry and sunny summers attract tourists from cool, rainy places such as northern France and the UK. Winters are comparatively warm, so it's a popular destination all year.

I read in my French textbook that French people take about 5 weeks of vacation during the month of August. Parisians close their cafés and restaurants during the summer and head for the beach. Since the beaches of Nice are packed, and many places in Paris are shut down, it might not be a good idea to visit France in August!

Lavender Fields



I've spent a lot of time looking at the above image as my desktop on Windows 7. It is a lavender field in the Provence region of southern France. I came to love the scent and color of lavender through my French teacher, who often kept lavender in the classroom. I visit the lavender fields in Furano, and I even created a "lavender field" in the game *Animal Crossing* so I can relax there any time I like. However, I would love to experience the lavender fields of Provence someday.★



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