Your First 30 Days in France

The arrival checklist: validate the visa, get a phone, open the bank account, and survive the famous proof-of-address loop.

You landed. Congratulations, sincerely. Now you meet French bureaucracy's favorite puzzle: the bank wants proof of address, the landlord wants a bank account, and the phone company wants both. Everyone survives this loop. The trick is knowing the right order and doing the boring things early. Here is your first month, week by week.

01 Week 1: make yourself official-ish

- [ ] **Validate your long-stay visa online.** If you have a VLS-TS visa, validate it on the ANEF website (administration-etrangers-en-france.interieur.gouv.fr). You have 3 months, but do it now while the passport and address details are top of mind. Budget around €200 for the tax stamp, paid online.
- [ ] **Get a French SIM or eSIM.** Orange, Free, and Bouygues all sell prepaid plans with just a passport. A French number opens every other door. Half of French life arrives by SMS code.
- [ ] **Collect proof-of-address documents.** A lease, a utility bill, or an attestation d'hébergement (a signed letter from whoever is housing you, with their ID and a utility bill). This one document loop causes more expat tears than any other. Start assembling it day one.
- [ ] **Learn your local pharmacy and grocery store.** Not paperwork, still essential infrastructure.
- [ ] **If you are in Paris, get a Navigo card for the metro and buses.** Weekly and monthly loading beats buying tickets like a tourist.

Pro tip: The pharmacist can handle half of what you would call a doctor for in the US. Start there and skip the wait.

02 Week 2: money and a working home

- [ ] **Open a French bank account.** Bring your passport, visa, and proof of address. Traditional banks want an appointment. Online banks are faster to open, but some landlords and agencies still prefer a traditional RIB. Get the RIB, the bank details document. France runs on it.
- [ ] **Put the utilities in your name.** Electricity contracts move by phone or online. Have your address, the meter number (on the meter or a previous bill), and your new RIB ready.
- [ ] **Order internet.** Fiber install appointments can run 2 to 3 weeks out, so order early. (Orange fiber with the Livebox has been solid for us at the farm, once the appointment gods smiled.)
- [ ] **Get home insurance.** Assurance habitation is legally required for renters and expected of owners. Landlords and utility companies will ask for the attestation. It can be arranged online in an afternoon.
- [ ] **Keep every confirmation email and PDF.** Today's receipt is next month's proof-of-address document. The loop rewards hoarders.

03 Weeks 3 and 4: the longer games

- [ ] **Start your healthcare file.** After 3 months of residence you can apply to CPAM for state health coverage. You cannot apply yet, but gather the file now: birth certificate with sworn translation, visa, proof of address, bank RIB. Future you says thank you.
- [ ] **Research a mutuelle.** The state system covers most of a bill. A mutuelle (top-up insurance) covers the rest. Price them now so you are ready when your number comes through.
- [ ] **Make a Doctolib account.** It is how France books doctors, dentists, and specialists. Having it set up before you need it is the move.

- [ ] **Take your pet to a French vet for an EU pet passport and I-CAD registration.** Small errand, permanent upgrade.
- [ ] **Check your driver's license situation.** Some US states have exchange agreements with France and some do not, and you generally have 1 year of residence to act. Look up your state now. The answer changes what you do this year.
- [ ] **Register for your commune's life.** Rural or village France runs on the mairie. Introduce yourself. It pays off in ways no website can explain.

THE GOLDEN RULE

Every French document begets another French document. Make three copies of everything, keep PDFs of everything, and never mail an original you cannot afford to lose. The loop is beatable, and the prepared beat it faster.

WHAT WE LEARNED

- **One decision we would keep:** validating the visa in week 1 instead of week 11. Every later step assumes it is done.
- **One change we would make:** ordering internet the day we had an address instead of waiting until we needed it. The install queue does not care about your deadlines.
- **One tip for speed:** when an office asks for a document you do not have, ask exactly which document satisfies them and whether an alternative works. The second question solves it surprisingly often.

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Administrative details current as of July 2026. Official sources: service-public.fr and your préfecture.