



*Guest Travel Writer RJP, Buffalo NY:* Many friends who've visited Paris recently tell me French people there are rude. My answer is: rudeness also happens in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles and other big American cities and other busy cities, where visitors may also experience nasty citizens.

Hotel employees, waiters, cabbies and other service people must work long hours to make a living in highly competitive and crowded cities. Anger happens. However, in my travels throughout France, I've seen very few incidents of intentional rudeness from locals. My positive feelings about French hospitality are because I try to be more sensitive than the typical American tourist. I speak the language. I studied two years of high school French, and was considered such a good student I was chosen to escort a group of visiting French Navy officers around our city for a week.

I then discovered quickly that American schoolbook French was a laughably poor example of how the language is spoken by natives. After a few days with the officers, I was practicing total immersion.

We spoke French only, and I quickly picked up idiomatic phrases and pronunciations until I was conversing adequately in the language. If not speaking like a native, at least I was doing it without the irritatingly stilted American high school French jabber.

I continued French studies in college, and often visited French Canada to keep up conversation skills. Most senior American tourists can't have that extensive experience with the language.

However, if they plan to spend any time in France, they should attain at least a basic working knowledge of everyday spoken French.

There are many study courses available, and I'd recommend enrollment in a free or modestly-priced local night school or college course in basic French. Rather than try to learn only from books or websites, in a live classroom you'll be able to practice conversational language with a teacher and other students. Of course, the ever-growing online French language sites are good for quick translation references while traveling.

If you speak the language when in France or any other country, you'll find the native people friendlier. And just maybe more willing to negotiate for lower prices and better accommodations. Bon chance!