

[Ils sont] comme le pain et le beurre..

Let's not forget about *la joie de vivre française*, where *le temps sacré pour le déjeuner* is cheerfully devoted to queuing for one of the 30.000 boulangeries, for the 44,896 restaurants in Paris (almost 30 times as much as in Amsterdam!) or the butcher, the neighborhood's street market, where they are still 3500 from in and around Paris. It is a time-consuming lifestyle, dealing with the waiting line (*faire la queue ou file d'attente*) and surprisingly the only thing I haven't heard a French person complain about!

Has the importance of independent local food shops in France something to do with their *mode de vie* (way of life), where exclusivity is prioritized over accessibility? After all, offering the highest quality in form of nutritious instead of sugar coated waiters, is what France is globally known for. Also, doing groceries in France can be quite a time-consuming exercise. Hypermarkets like Carrefour were groundbreaking concepts in the 1960, and only meant for disloyal (American-influenced) inhabitants, because it put the local economy under threat by selling a variety of products at a substantially lower price. Well, I can admit that *Les Français* are still way more resistant to wait in line for their daily groceries, while I enjoy the more efficient way of exiting the supermarket by "self-scanning" like in the Netherlands, or shops that have a food as well as a non-food section (Hema!). So on, the Dutch might see doing groceries and food more as survival and something that shouldn't disturb your day, whereas the French see food consumption clearly more as a way of enjoying themselves or to escape from the reality for a moment. For example, if you take all of the French travel destinations into account, locals spent 1.105 billion nights away from home in 2016, of which 887 million were in continental France. <sup>1</sup> This is almost 80% of the nights spent in their own country, no doubt that they are slightly frightened of missing out on their own cuisine, selection of wines and late dinners. The lifestyle of taking time for food, with warm crispy white baguettes and the use of local products, *ca ne mange pas du pain* (that doesn't do any harm).

Nevertheless, the charm, depth and self-sufficiency of the French culture does do harm to one thing: their own imago. If you cannot take in account the interests of the vegetarian market or of the non-dairy industries, it is susceptible to disappoint foreigners, who struggle with the French ignorance towards new trends. A dish without the use of any butter? Well, good luck with finding that in France!

What can we say? Most cultivated and visited country of the world, yes, but *savoir-vivre* à la France does involve a bit of arrogance, some pleasure and a lot of patience. Enfin: *trop bon, trop con*. So, don't ask too many questions, accept what France does have to offer (but line up for it), and you will get way better off!

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.worldcitiescultureforum.com/data/number-of-restaurants>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.businessinsider.com.auchina-tourism-visitors-france-2018-11>