

CLOTHING IN FRANCE

For their day-to-day activities, the French, both in the countryside and the cities, wear modern Western-style clothing. Perhaps the most typical item of clothing associated with the French is the black beret. It is still worn by some men, particularly in rural areas. The French are renowned for fashion design. Coco Chanel, Yves Saint-Laurent, Christian Dior, and Jean-Paul Gautier are all French fashion design houses whose creations are worn by people around the world.

Traditional regional costumes are still worn at festivals and celebrations. In Alsace,



women may be seen in white, lace-trimmed blouses and aprons decorated with colorful flowers. Women's costumes in Normandy include white, flared bonnets and dresses with wide, elbow-length sleeves.

A traditional symbol of the region, the famous Alsatian headdress was abandoned after 1945. Today, this can only be admired during certain cultural and tourist events.

Varying widely from one part of Alsace to another, the traditional costumes reflected the social standing and faith of their wearers.

Consequently, Protestant women in the North would wear the colors of their



choosing; where as Catholics from Kochersberg (to the northwest of Strasbourg) wore only ruby red. Some women would decorate the hems of their skirts with velvet ribbons. Others, particularly in the south, would wear printed cotton clothing, often made of silk for special occasions with paisley patterned designs. The aprons, worn everywhere throughout Alsace, were plain white. However, on Sundays it was not

uncommon to see silk or satin aprons decorated with embroidery, and worn over skirts or dresses. Headdresses were extremely diverse, with an increasing trend towards the use of ribbons from 1840 onwards. Always black for Protestants, the headdresses were often colorful and decorated with patterns for the Catholics. These features may come as a surprise, as illustrators often portrayed an inaccurate image of traditional Alsatian costumes. When Alsace once again became part of France, the "illustrator's costume" was adopted by the whole region, replacing the vast variety of traditional clothing which once existed.



Bretons (from the Brittany region) wear modern Western-style clothing like that worn by people elsewhere in France and western Europe.

However, their distinctive traditional costumes are still seen at *pardons* (festivals) and other

special occasions. The men's costumes



coiffe

include broad-brimmed hats, embroidered waistcoats (vests), and short jackets. Women wear dresses and elaborately decorated aprons. The most distinctive feature of the women's costume is the elaborate lace headgear, which is generally called a *coiffe* (kwaff).