

How to celebrate your food and drink like the French



Say oui to cheese and wine, enjoyed over long conversations. (Getty Images)

According to UNESCO, the French truly understand how to enjoy a meal like no other culture.

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It was lunchtime on a hot Sunday in the peak of summer and the centre of [Dijon](#) – the capital of the French wine destination, [Burgundy](#) – was near silent.

Locals in the streets were scarce and most restaurants were shut. But those in the know were aware of an exception. It was one majestic food venue, [Les Halles Market](#), allowing a steady stream of event-goers to pass through its doors.

The Monday-to-Saturday marketplace had been transformed into a weekly, seasonal event, [Le brunch des Halles de Dijon](#). But this was no brunch as we Australians know it. According to [Danielle Juban](#), one of Dijon's deputy mayors, the event was a political priority and a multi-course dining ceremony of sorts, reflective of France's food culture.

“Normally in France, the shops are closed on Sunday,” says Juban, who is also vice president at [Dijon Metropole](#). “Now a few years ago, the mayor promised, to be elected, he would open something where people could go to eat together in Dijon on

a Sunday. So this event was created by the mayor ... It helps keeps the centre of the city alive.”

In the aisles next to closed produce stalls were hundreds of seats and decorated tables, occupied by 500 locals enjoying a four-course feast, cooked by a local chef (the chefs hosting the event and the menu changes every week). There was a bar selling local wine and spirits, and musicians playing live tunes.

“Dinner and lunch is not just about food – it’s a gathering,” Juban says, explaining how the brunch embodies the cultural priority that is gastronomy in France.

“People from abroad don’t often understand how lunch or dinner is not just 40 minutes. It’s two or three hours. First, you talk about life, family and the future. Then you take a glass of wine, then suddenly you talk about many other things.”

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This French-style of eating and drinking is so valued the world over that UNESCO placed "the gastronomic meal of the French" on [its Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity](#) in 2010.

According to the listing, the French meal is a social custom that goes well beyond fulfilling our primal need eat to food. ‘The gastronomic meal of the French’ describes the way locals celebrate life’s most important events like weddings, birthdays and get-togethers.

“The gastronomic meal emphasises togetherness, the pleasure of taste, and the balance between human beings and the products of nature,” the listing reads.

The French ritual, as per the UNESCO honour, also recognises the importance of shopping for food at a market, choosing a recipe, preparing ingredients, cooking together with family and friends, setting a beautiful table, and eating.

So if you want to enjoy a good meal just as the French do, it’s best you abide by the various elements recognised by the UNESCO listing. When eating and drinking, you should be with other people, celebrate all that goes into preparing your meal, engage in good conversation as you eat, and take a few hours to enjoy the occasion.

As was displayed in full force at the Dijon brunch event, a ‘gastronomic meal’ should also respect a fixed structure.

Start out with an apéritif (a drink before the meal) and end with a liqueur. In between, the gastronomic meal should contain at least four courses: a starter, fish and/or meat with vegetables, cheese and dessert. Coffee or a tisane, with an additional side sweet, is also encouraged.

Jean-Louis Bottigliero, owner of [Château Sainte Sabine in Burgundy](#), who hosted the brunch on the week of our visit – reminds us that to eat and drink with true French

spirit, you must also talk to your companions with passion as you appreciate each bite of your food.

“When you eat, taste your food,” Bottiglieri says. “Because we have such great producers here, when we taste our food, you can understand the work behind what you are eating.”

But don't get too lost in your food, he says, or you may end up neglecting your dining partners. Remember that social connection is just as important as nutrition and eating is always a celebration.

“Don't be only focused on your food. Food is not only to feed your body – it is to feed your spirit.

“So enjoy life. Eat. Drink. Talk to your lady, talk to your man. Talk about life. Talk about love.”

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