



# HOW TO READ A FRENCH VENUE QUOTE

FOR AMERICAN AND BRITISH COUPLES



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A LEMON & HAZEL GUIDE

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## Five questions, one audit table, and French pricing explained

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If you have started looking at venues in France, you have probably already seen a number that looked almost reasonable. A beautiful château, a price that fit your budget, and a small voice asking whether it is really this simple.

It usually isn't, and that is not a sales pitch. It is how French venue pricing works.



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THIS GUIDE IS A TOOL, NOT AN ARTICLE. IT WORKS FOR ANY FRENCH VENUE, IN ANY REGION. PRINT IT, TAKE IT TO EVERY VIEWING, AND FILL IN THE TABLE AS YOU GO.



## What location sèche means

Location sèche, literally "dry hire," is the most common way châteaux and estates price a wedding in France. What you are renting is a blank slate.

It means one thing: you are renting the building and the grounds. Nothing else. No catering. No furniture or linens beyond what is already in the rooms. No marquee if the weather turns or your guest count exceeds what the indoor rooms hold. No staff beyond whoever manages the property.



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## The three numbers behind every French quote

Every French venue quote resolves into three figures.

- The floor - the advertised venue price.
- The mandatory total - the floor plus every line the venue requires you to take. Usually: the caterer, a mobile kitchen if the venue has no professional one, tables and chairs, any compulsory meals for guests staying on site, and a liability insurance certificate.
- The real total - the mandatory total plus your own choices: the photographer, the flowers, the music, the transport, the welcome dinner. The marquee may sit here or in the mandatory column depending on your guest count and the venue.

Once you can see which number is which, these prices are not as scary as they look. They are a list of decisions, and most of them are yours to make.



# Your audit table

Fill this in for every venue you view. Use the same guest count for all of them, or the comparison means nothing.

Guest count used: \_\_\_\_\_ Season / month: \_\_\_\_\_ HT or TTC: \_\_\_\_\_

| LINE                                | MANDATORY<br>Y/N | YOUR VENUE |
|-------------------------------------|------------------|------------|
| 01 VENUE HIRE ADVERTISED            |                  |            |
| 02 NUMBER OF NIGHTS INCLUDED        |                  |            |
| 03 CATERER PER HEAD X GUESTS        |                  |            |
| 04 MOBILE KITCHEN                   |                  |            |
| 05 TABLES AND CHAIRS                |                  |            |
| 06 TABLEWARE, GLASS, CUTLERY, LINEN |                  |            |
| 07 BREAKFASTS FOR VENUE GUESTS      |                  |            |
| 08 LIABILITY INSURANCE CERTIFICATE  |                  |            |
| 09 SECURITY DEPOSIT                 |                  |            |
| 10 FINAL CLEANING AND BREAKDOWN     |                  |            |
| MANDATORY TOTAL                     |                  |            |
| 11 MARQUEE, INSTALLED, WITH OPTIONS |                  |            |
| 12 POWER: GENERATOR                 |                  |            |
| 13 FLORIST AND DECORATION           |                  |            |
| 14 BABYSITTING                      |                  |            |

| LINE                             | MANDATORY<br>Y/N | YOUR VENUE |
|----------------------------------|------------------|------------|
| 15 PHOTOGRAPHER                  |                  |            |
| 16 VIDEOGRAPHER                  |                  |            |
| 17 MUSIC, DJ OR LIVE             |                  |            |
| 18 HAIR AND MAKE-UP              |                  |            |
| 19 CELEBRANT                     |                  |            |
| 20 WINE AND DRINKS               |                  |            |
| 21 GUEST TRANSPORT AND SHUTTLES  |                  |            |
| 22 WELCOME DINNER                |                  |            |
| 23 DAY-AFTER BRUNCH              |                  |            |
| 24 CANCELLATION INSURANCE        |                  |            |
| 25 STATIONERY                    |                  |            |
| 26 WASTE REMOVAL                 |                  |            |
| 27 SUPPLIER TRAVEL TO THE REGION |                  |            |
| REAL TOTAL                       |                  |            |
| PER GUEST                        |                  |            |
|                                  |                  |            |

Leave a line blank rather than guessing at it. An empty line is a question you still need to ask. An invented number is a budget that moves later.



## HT or TTC: the question to ask on every quote

French quotes come either hors taxes, excluding VAT, or toutes taxes comprises, including it.

At the standard rate of 20%, this is the difference between a €50,000 budget and a €60,000 one.

Brochures do not always say which basis they use. Ask on every quote, every time, and write the answer on the quote itself. If you are comparing two venues and one is HT and the other TTC, you are not comparing anything.

Convert before you compare:

- HT to TTC: multiply by 1.20
- TTC to HT: divide by 1.20





## **A per-head price describes a scope, not a meal**

This is the most expensive misunderstanding in a French wedding budget.

Three caterers can quote almost the same price per head and be quoting three completely different events.

One might be a single plated course that happens to include the vin d'honneur and the cake. Another a full three-course dinner with a cheese board. A third might exclude drinks entirely and put the aperitif on a separate quote, which means its real cost cannot be calculated at all.

Matched onto the same scope, those three numbers can separate by sixty euros a head. On eighty guests, that is nearly €5,000, and it is invisible until someone rewrites all three quotes onto the same basis.





## **A per-head price describes a scope, not a meal**

So when you receive a per-head price, it tells you almost nothing until you know:

- How many courses, and whether a starter is included
- Whether the aperitif and its canapés are inside the price or outside
- Whether wine, water and soft drinks are included or quoted separately
- How many hours of service, and whether that matches your venue's hire hours
- How many staff
- Whether the cake is included or extra

Write those six answers next to every per-head price before you compare any of them.



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## Five questions to ask any French venue

If a venue cannot answer these clearly and in writing, that is information too.

### **1. What exactly is included in the hire fee, in writing, and which lines are mandatory rather than recommended?**

Venues often present a preferred supplier list in a way that reads as compulsory when it is not. Ask for the distinction explicitly.

### **2. Are these this year's rates or next year's, and are they guaranteed for my date?**

Couples usually book seventeen to eighteen months ahead, so a price quoted today applies to a wedding two calendar years out. Many suppliers will tell you plainly that their prices are not guaranteed year to year.

### **3. What is the seated capacity of each room, as a number, in writing, and if my guest count exceeds it, what is the backup and who provides it?**

"Up to eighty" and "eighty" are different answers, and brochures use the first to mean the second. Ask whether a marquee is required or optional for your date and guest count, because it is a five-figure line.

### **4. Is there a professional kitchen on site, and who supplies power to the spaces I will actually use, including any lawn?**

A mobile kitchen is routinely a four-figure line that appears late. Generators, fuel and a technician are often priced by nobody: marquee suppliers frequently exclude both the power and the site survey.

### **5. What is the security deposit, under what conditions is it returned, and who is responsible for cleaning, breakdown and damage?**

Ask the last part twice, in writing. It is the question that most often produces two different answers from the same venue.

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## Other questions to ask

### Three more worth asking

1. Is furniture charged per event or per day? The same chair hire can nearly triple depending on the answer, and quotes often do not say.
2. If a marquee is used, how is it fixed, staked or ballasted? Many heritage sites, protected lawns and gravel courtyards do not permit stakes. Ballasting costs more and takes more space. Ask the venue and the marquee supplier the same question and compare the answers.
3. Do you require liability insurance from me, from my suppliers, or both, and what certificate do you need to see? Some suppliers will not confirm a booking without it.

### What this is really about

The number matters, but it is not the real fear. The real fear is not knowing. Committing to a venue, a caterer, a date, and then discovering three months later that something you trusted to be simple wasn't, with no one to ask before it is too late to change course.

A clear budget, built honestly from the start, removes most of that. It is the one thing you can start today, with or without a planner.



## If you would like a second pair of eyes

You do not need to work with a planner to use this guide. It is yours either way.

But if you are holding a venue quote right now and something about it does not quite add up, or you want someone who reads these contracts every week to tell you what is missing, I am always happy to look.

Get in touch at [lemonandhazel.fr](https://lemonandhazel.fr)

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This guide is a method, not a quote. Your total depends on your region, guest count, season and choices. For a fully worked example with real figures from a real château, read "What a French Château Wedding Actually Costs: A Real Budget Audit" at [lemonandhazel.fr](https://lemonandhazel.fr).

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