

French Guiana



Overview

- Geography
- People
- History
- Language issues
- Politics/Economics

Geography



Geography

- Not an island
 - French people regularly forget this
- France's largest department by area
 - Home to France's (and Europe's) largest municipality by area, Maripasoula
- Covered mostly by Amazon rainforest
- Settlements principally in the *bande littoral* ('shoreline strip')
 - Saül and Maripasoula are main interior communities
 - Accessible only by airplane or riverboat

Climate

- Two seasons:
 - Dry: July-November
 - Rainy: November-June
 - *Le petit été de mars* – Dry period of March
- Mangroves pop up and disappear along shoreline every 10-15 years
 - Leads to signs like the following

People

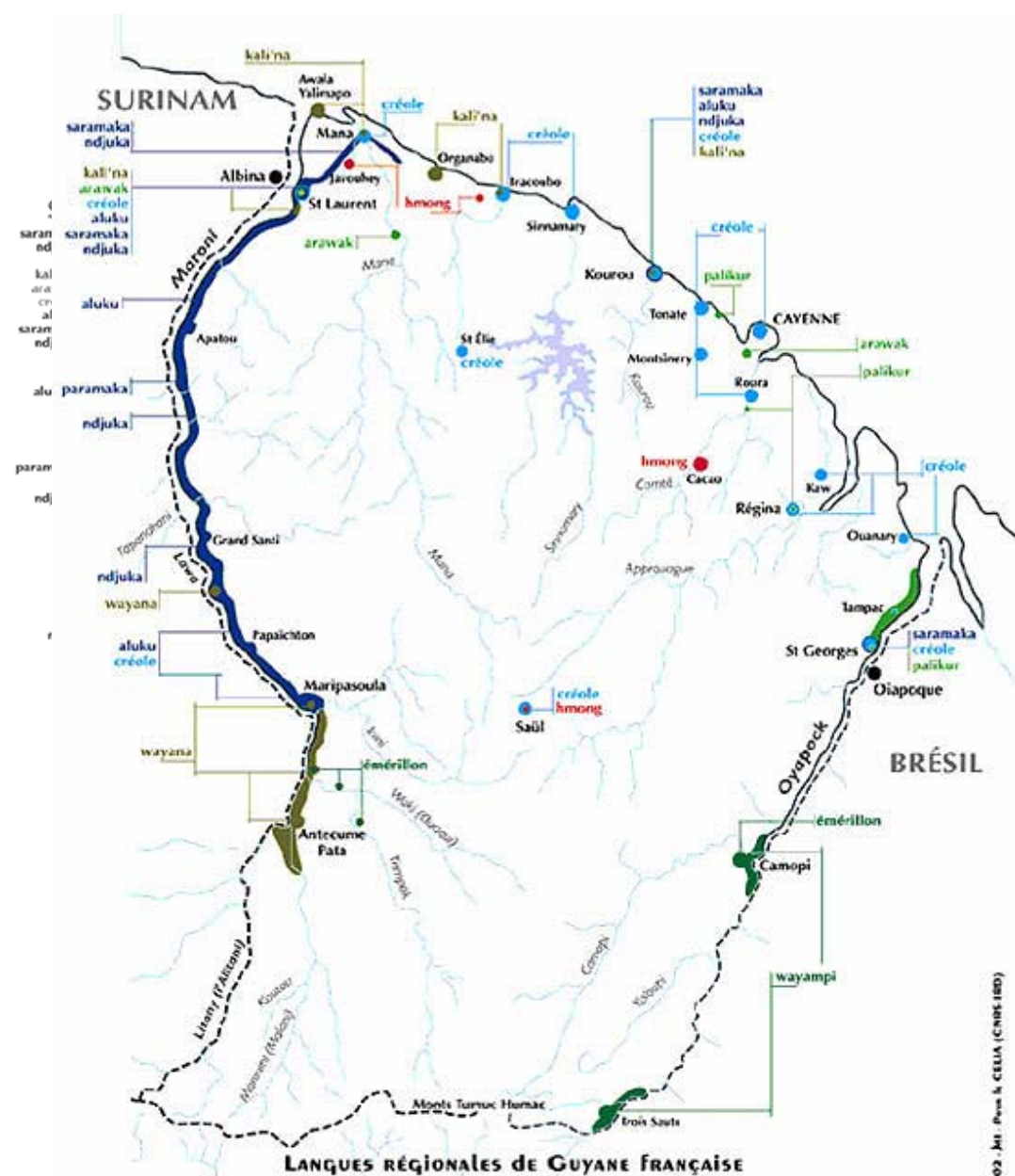
- Main groups
 - Creoles: descendants of Africans brought to the French New World colonies to be slaves
 - Largest ethnic group
 - Maroons (*bushi nengue*): descendants of slaves escaped from Surinamese plantations who survived in the Amazon jungle
 - Amerindians: indigenous tribes of the Amazon
 - Europeans: mainly French transplants and employees in European Space Center at Kourou
 - Hmong: Indochinese group allied with the French during the war there, brought over after loss
 - Immigrants: Chinese, Brazilian, Haitian, Colombian, Surinamese, Guyanese, Indonesian, Antillean
 - France's largest immigrant department: 29% (compared to Ile-de-France: 15.7%)
- Extensive racial mixture
- Racism, both perceived and real, a frequently cited problem

History

- 1604: founded as French slave colony
 - Failed to yield profit
- 1800s: Gold rush
 - Large influx of immigrants from East & Southeast Asia, as well as Caribbean
- Penal colony on Devil's Island
- 1946: Departmentalization

Language issues

- Official language: French
- 11 regional languages:
 - Guianese French Creole (!)
 - English-based creoles: Saramaccan, Aluku, Ndyuka, Paramaka
 - Amerindian languages: Kali'na, Wayana, Palikur, Wayampi, Emerillon
 - Hmong
- All French Caribbean Creoles (Haitian, Guadeloupean, Martinican, St. Lucian)
- Immigrant languages: Mandarin, Brazilian Portuguese, Javanese



LANGUES RÉGIONALES DE GUYANE FRANÇAISE

- | | | | |
|----|------------------------|---|-------------------|
| A | Amérindiennes : | Créoles : <i>base lexicale anglaise</i> | Asiatique : hmong |
| fa | famille caribe : | aluku | |
| | kali'na | ndjuka | |
| fa | wayana | paramaka | |
| | famille tupi-guarani : | saramaka | |
| fa | wayampi | <i>base lexicale française</i> | |
| | émérillon (teko) | créole guyanais | |
| | famille arawak : | | |
| | palikur | | |
| | arawak ilokono! | | |

Habitat épars

Regional French

- *bois d'Inde* – 'allspice' (France: *piment de la Jamaïque*)
- *lézard* – iguana (Fr: *iguane*)
- *lagratiche* – lizard
- *grenouille* – toad
- *crapaud* – frog
- *Prenez ça non* – (polite way to end a command)
- *la 973* – French Guiana (from the ZIP code)
- *maypouri* – tapir
- *marinade* – fritter (Fr: *beignet*)
- *bacove* – banana
- *banane* – plantain
- *dégrad* – jetty; market (Fr. *débarcadère*)
- *coui* – bowl made of half a calabasse
- *wassaï* – açai (Fr. *pinot*)
- *boulin bouline* – duck duck goose (Fr: *chandelle, facteur*)

Multilingualism

- High premium placed on knowing several languages
- Immigrant languages as valued as regional languages
- Widespread educational failure
 - Partly due to low exposure to French as children and low need for French in everyday life
 - Some support for Amerindian and Maroon languages
 - None for Creoles
 - University campus of Antilles university

Politics

- French overseas department
 - Full representation in French legislature
 - French military, social benefits
 - French passport
 - Currency: euro
- Differences between French Guiana and other departments
 - Both a region and a department
 - Not counted in France's unemployment figures
 - Different immigration laws
 - Surtaxes on goods for being overseas
 - French political parties largely absent
 - French & American companies consider it “not France”

Points of contention with France

- French government employees 40% pay increase to work in FG
 - Young, inexperienced employees learning on the job
 - Majority of teachers (region's largest profession) come from outside FG
- Goods must be imported from EU
 - Brazilian coffee costs less in Paris than in Cayenne
 - Highest gas prices in the EU; around \$10/gal
- Increased reliance of French safety net since departmentalization
 - High rates of poverty
- French land ownership
 - Govt owns 95% of land
 - Squatters negotiate with government to get unclaimed land

- European Space Center in Kourou
 - Money doesn't necessarily stimulate FG economy
 - Increased pollution, no local disaster safety plan
- French appropriation of resources
 - France paid Marshall Plan debt with FG gold
 - France resists investing in infrastructure to connect geographically dispersed towns
- Difficulty in getting permits to start new businesses
- Lack of recognition of real differences
 - Children read *Nos ancêtres les Gaulois*, even though their ancestors were African and they are nowhere near Gaul
 - Children expected to know about foreign concepts such as 'winter'
 - Multilingualism valued

Economy

- French government largest employer
- Gold-mining
 - Caused many people to immigrate in 1800s
 - Lots of illegal mining operations, esp. by Brazilians
- Little agriculture
 - Poor soil caused failure of FG as slave colony
 - Pineapple industry is big
 - Hmong manage to be profitable with agriculture
- Elevated prices of goods and rent despite widespread poverty
- Less tourism than other overseas departments