



**78 Yvelines** is basically a Parisian suburb with high population density, situated to the south west of Paris. This once beautiful department, which is in the valley of the river Seine, was home to dense hunting forests, rich farmlands and humble villages. It is now densely populated by an expanding capital city.

The villages have become vast sleepy building estates as many of the people living here will be commuting to the capital city. The town of Versailles is now a local administrative centre and residential suburb of Paris. The palace serves as a tourist attraction and as a residence for visiting heads of state. The région lies in the centre of the Paris Basin and consists of limestone plains with a gently rolling relief. The principal rivers are the Seine and its tributaries—the Marne, Oise, and Aisne. The région's fertile loams support the cultivation of wheat, corn (maize), barley, sunflowers, rapeseed, legumes, and sugar beets. Fruit, vegetables, and flowers are also grown. In Val-d'Oise between Pontoise and Montmorency, mushrooms are grown on a large scale in limestone caves. Owing to the great urban sprawl of Paris, agriculture is concentrated in the outer areas of Île-de-France. In general, farm holdings are large, highly mechanized, and produce high yields, yet they employ only a very small percentage of the workforce. **Pithiviers** is a delicious almond cake that comes either in a puff pastry case or as a fondant cake. The latter, considered more traditional, is iced and decorated with candied fruit.

**Mentchikoff** is a white sweet made of praline chocolate with a thin coating of icing sugar and vanilla. The chocolate centre made from hazelnut praline, butter and cocoa is deservedly popular.

**Jambon-Beurre Sandwich** – the Parisienr is traditionally made from a piece of Parisian baguette split and buttered before slices of Jambon de Paris ham are added. There are variations to this, with lettuce, gherkins, cheese or chips sometimes added.

**The Croissant** is a true Parisian speciality, especially when made with butter. Traditionally, croissants are made of flour, yeast, milk, sugar, salt and a good proportion of butter. They can be eaten as they are, with jam, with chocolate or dipped in a nice bowl of hot chocolate.

**The Croque-Monsieur** is decidedly the king of Paris bistros. Variations on the original, such as the croque-madame, which has an egg on top, Hawaiian, with pineapple, sweet with a chocolate spread, or with a béchamel sauce. It is a sandwich, served hot, composed of a slice of Paris ham and slivers of Gruyère cheese between two buttered slices of bread. It is then toasted in the oven or in a frying pan.

**Gâtinais Honey** is popular for its smoothness and sweetness. Delicious on its own or spread on buttered bread and is ideal for sweetening tea, blending into yoghurt, baking gingerbread or making sweet-and-sour dishes.

**The Paris-Brest** is a choux pastry ring filled with praline cream. The circular shape of the cake was supposed to represent a bicycle wheel.

**Milly-la-Forêt Peppermint** is famed for its refreshing, slightly peppery fragrance. It has many health benefits, including helping with digestion, soothing stomach pains and nausea, and helping fight travel sickness. It is used in tea and essential oils.

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## **The Croque-Monsieur**

Preparation Time; 20 mins, Cooking Time; 30 mins, Serves 2

### **Ingredients**

#### **For the sandwich**

4 slices from a white sourdough or crusty white  
20g butter, melted  
1 tsp Dijon mustard  
100g grated gruyere  
4 thin slices of great smoked ha

#### **For the béchamel sauce**

125ml milk  
125ml cream  
1 garlic clove, crushed  
2 bay leaves  
1 small onion, chopped  
20g butter  
20g plain flour  
1 heaped tsp Dijon mustard  
fresh nutmeg, grated

#### **For the mustard mayo**

1 tsp Dijon mustard  
1 tbsp mayonnaise

### **Method**

First, make a perfect béchamel sauce.

Put the milk, cream, garlic, bay leaves and onion in a small pan over a medium heat and stir together.

Heat until nearly boiling, then turn the heat off and leave for 10 mins to infuse.

Pass the liquid through a sieve and discard the bay and onion.

Melt the butter with the flour in another pan and cook over a gentle heat until it smells biscuity. Gradually whisk in the warm milk and bring to a gentle boil, stirring regularly, then add the Dijon mustard, a little grating of fresh nutmeg and some seasoning.

It should be a lovely thick creamy sauce with a deep flavour.

Pre heat oven to 220C (fan 200C) gas 7.

Brush the slices of bread with melted butter.

Place them on a baking tray and toast one side under a grill, buttered-side up, until golden.

Turn the bread over and spread each slice with a thin layer of Dijon, followed by a layer of the béchamel.

Cover the sauce with grated gruyère, and then a slice of ham.

Form the slices into two sandwiches, spread a thin layer of the sauce over the top slice and sprinkle more gruyère on top.

Put the sandwiches in the oven and bake for 10-15 mins or until golden.

Mix the mustard and mayo together and serve alongside