

The Foreigners

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France is the UK's top tourist destination, with 12 million British visitors each year, while the UK is the second most popular spot for French tourists with over three million visits a year. The air route from Paris to London is the busiest in the world, carrying some 3.3 million passengers a year... then there's the Channel Tunnel.

Such statistics might fool a person into thinking the British and the French actually like each other. But even though it is over 100 years since the Entente Cordiale was signed, pledging Britain and France to a lasting political friendship, relations on many fronts are decidedly frosty.

And the age-old French stereotypes appear to show no signs of disappearing in the UK. Seventy-two percent of Britons questioned in a recent survey believed the French deserved their negative stereotype, while only 19% of French believe the Brits deserved their "Rosbifs" nametag.

While French folk might not appeal to the British, the way they live their lives does.

Last year's French census revealed the number of Britons living across the Channel had increased by almost half in the past five years, to 100,000. That's not counting the 47,000 who have second homes in France, according to the Office for National Statistics.

The flow in the opposite direction is even more pronounced. There are an estimated 270,000 French people registered as living in Britain, according to the French Embassy. The real figure is higher as not all French register when they come over.

"You come to us to retire and we come to you for work," says Roudaut, author of a book on Anglo-French relations. "I don't mean to be rude but the French people living in the UK are not here for the weather or food. There are many things I love about Britain - like the sense of humour of the people and their politeness - but for most French people here it is an economic decision, not a lifestyle one."