

## Introduction

France has 96 *départements* (= districts). A well known district is Paris, district 75. That number can for instance be found on license plates of all Paris based cars, but also on French postage labels (#1). The six digit number on this Paris label starts with 75. This is the so called INSEE-code of the post office where the label was issued. INSEE stands for *Institut National de la Statistique et des Etudes Economiques* (= National Institute for Statistics and Economic Studies).



#1: district 75

However, French postage labels are not only used in France itself, but also in territories or old colonies elsewhere in the world. For these areas the numbers 97 and 98 are reserved.

In most of these territories the French Franc used to be the currency, but since 01-01-2002 people pay with the Euro in these distant places.

Looking up all these locations in the world atlas is interesting in itself. In the last couple of years I have found several new labels with district numbers 97 and 98. They not only enlarged my collection, but also widened my knowledge of some interesting topography. In the following article I invite you to join me on this philatelic world trip.

## Labels of overseas territories with district number 97

First we visit the Caribbean and South America. There we find:

- Guadeloupe (971)
- Martinique (972)
- Guyana (973)



## ■ Guadeloupe (971)

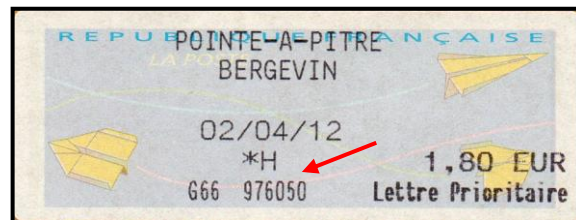
The capital of Guadeloupe is Basse-Terre. The largest town however is POINTE-A-PITRE (#2). Interesting is the spelling on the label dated 26 04 88 as POINT A PITRE, possibly an English variety (#3). On these two labels the INSEE-code 97120 is in the rectangle to the right, while the postal codes 97159 and 97110 of these post offices are on the left. These different codes led to misunderstandings, so since the introduction of the labels with three paper airplanes in 2000 only the INSEE-code is printed (#4).



#2: POINTE-A-PITRE



#3: POINT A PITRE



#4: only one code

## ■ Martinique (972)

Martinique has been a part of France since 1816. Its capital is Fort de France = French Fortress in English (#5).



#5: FORT DE FRANCE

The label with the bold text SCHOELCHER TRVIL AP (#6) comes from a machine in the city hall of this small town. The normal post office in such a small town has been closed, because it was not profitable anymore. The year is printed as 2007, 2008, 2009, etc. (not 07, 08, 09, etc. as on all other labels). Moreover, all other French labels have a comma in the amount (the European way), but this type has a dot. The letters AP stand for *Agence Postale* in French = Postal Agency (in English).



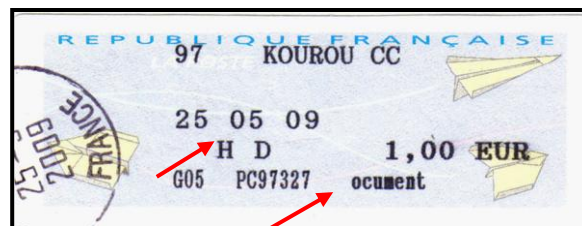
### ■ Guyana (973)

Cayenne is the capital of Guyana (#7). However, most postage labels I found are from Kourou. This town is known for its launching centre of the European Ariane rockets.

Note that the printed text on the label dated 25 05 09 is a bit irregular (#8). The H (for *Heure* = Hour) has shifted to the left. The H has been replaced by the D, which belongs at the bottom to form the word Document.



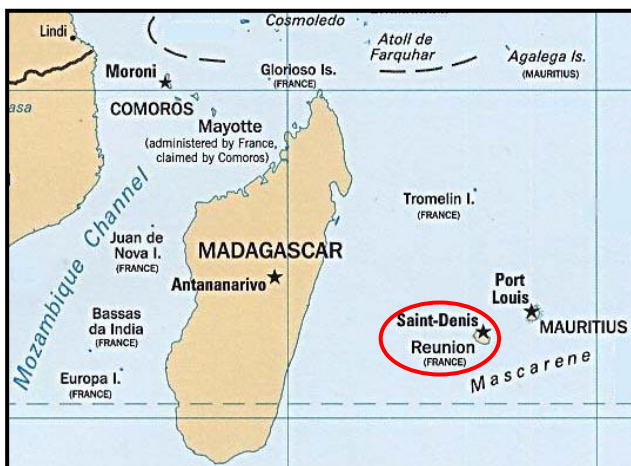
#7: CAYENNE



#8: KOUROU

After having found the origins of the labels starting with 971, 972 and 973, we have to cross the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean to find labels starting with 974. We arrive at the island of:

### ■ Réunion (974)



Réunion is a volcanic island, located about 750 km east of Madagascar in the Indian Ocean. After its discovery in 1513 it has become a melting pot of nationalities and cultures. Since 1642 it belongs to France.

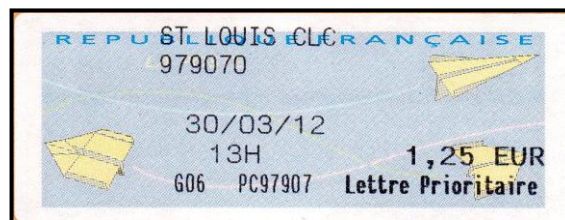
The international airport of Réunion is called Roland Garros Aéroport. There is a small post office (#9). The name comes from Eugène Adrien Roland Georges Garros, who was born in Saint-Denis on Réunion on 6 October 1888. In the beginning of the 20th century he was an aviator and war hero. He perished during an air raid in the French Ardennes, not even 30 years old. When in 1927 a new tennis stadium was built in Paris, a friend and fellow student of his urged it to be called Roland Garros. The name lasts until this day.





#9: Airport Roland Garros

The INSEE-code on all Réunion labels in my collection starts with 974, except St. Louis. The first three digits on that label are 979 (#9a).

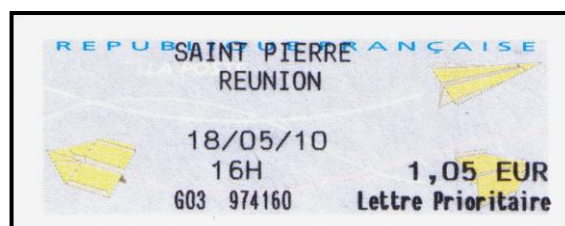


#9a: code 97907

The label from St. Pierre is interesting (#10). St. Pierre is such a common town name in France, that it appears with different district INSEE-codes. Only because of the INSEE-code 97416 it is clear that the label dated 30 04 90 originated in St. Pierre in Réunion. Almost 20 years later REUNION was added on the label with the same INSEE-code 974160 (the zero is extra) (#11).



#10: ST PIERRE



#11: SAINT PIERRE / REUNION

The name SAINT PIERRE again came to my attention on a label dated 20/03/13. I almost overlooked that the first three digits were not 974 (as on Saint Pierre / Réunion), but 975 (#12).



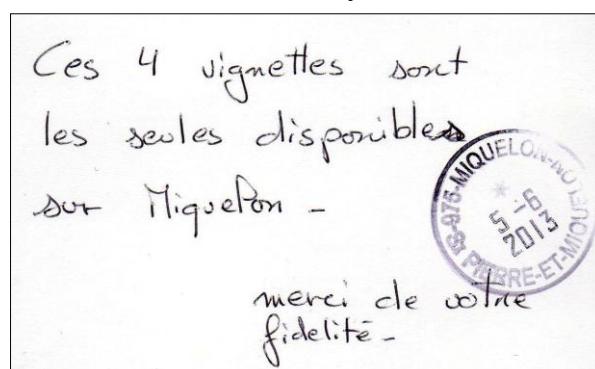
#12: SAINT PIERRE

This led to another trip halfway around the world, which ended off the coast of Newfoundland (Canada). There two small islands are situated, called:

#### ■ Saint Pierre et Miquelon (975)



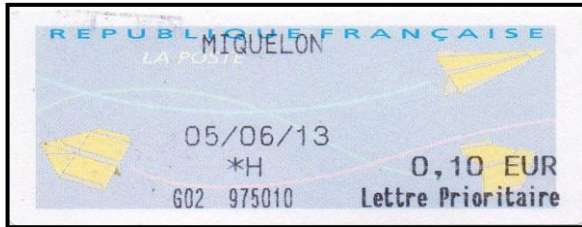
Now that I had a label of the island Saint Pierre in my collection, I also wanted one of the other island, Miquelon. So I wrote a letter to the postmaster, included a €2.00 coin and asked him to send me some low value labels. In his reply on 5 June 2013 the postmaster included four different labels with a handwritten note in French saying: “These four labels are the only ones available on Miquelon” (#13).



#13: postmaster reply

The first label is a Lettre Prioritaire (#14a), the second one is a Registered letter (hence the R) (#14b), the third one is a Registered letter with additional print AR = Avis de Reception (French) = Return Receipt (English) (#14c). The fourth label is a Lettre Verte (= Green Letter) (#14d). This means a lower rate, but a longer delivery time because of the use of environmentally friendly means of transportation (for instance no airplane, but a ship).





#14a: Lettre Prioritaire



#14b: R-letter



#14c: R-letter with return receipt

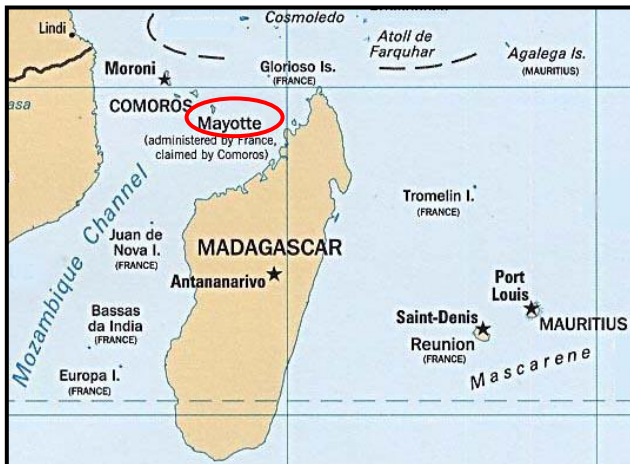


#14d: Lettre Verte

## Labels of overseas territories with district number 98

### ■ Mayotte (Comoros) (985)

Mayotte and three other small islands are part of an archipel called the Comoros northwest of Madagascar. In 1842 the King of Madagascar sold the Comoros to France. When the Comoros acquired independency in 1975, the people of Mayotte decided to stay with France. On 31 March 2011 Mayotte became the status of an overseas *département*. The capital is Mamoudzou (#15).



#15: MAMOUDZOU

The last overseas territories within the French hemisphere are:

■ **New Caledonia (1983)**

■ **French Polynesia (1985)**



■ **New Caledonia (1983)**

This group of islands lies in the Pacific Ocean, 1200 km east of Australia. In 1853 France acquired New Caledonia and between 1864 and 1897 it was used as a prison camp for 21,000 French convicted criminals. It is now an overseas territory with a special status. In the next few years the people of new Caledonia will have to decide whether or not to choose independency.

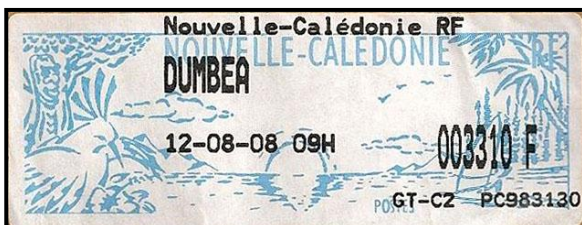
The labels in New Caledonia have their own design and the French name NOUVELLE CALEDONIE.

However, for a long time the text REPUBLIQUE FRANÇAISE was printed on them (#16). The currency is not the Euro, but the so called “Franc of CFP” (= Franc des Colonies Françaises du Pacifique = Franc for the Pacific French Colonies). It has a fixed rate against the Euro: 1 Euro is 120 CFP.

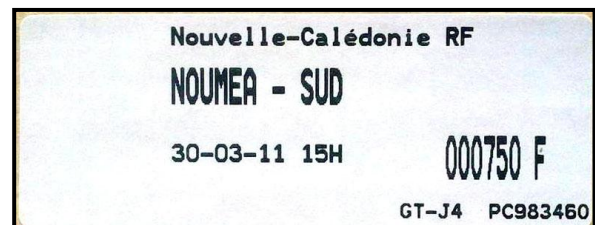


#16: REPUBLIQUE FRANÇAISE

In 2008 a new design with black print was used (#17) and since 2011 white paper with the same type black print (#18). The printed RF shows the connection with the motherland: RF means REPUBLIQUE FRANÇAISE. Notice that on all labels the INSEE-code starts with 983.



#17: new design

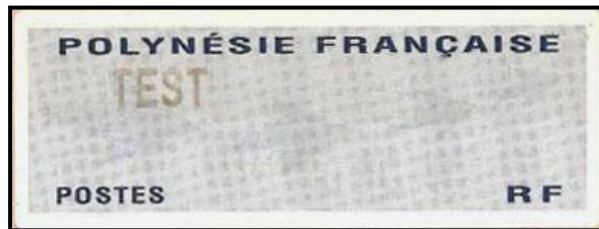


#18: white paper

■ **French Polynesia (1985)**

French Polynesia consists of about 130 islands, scattered in the Pacific over 2,500,000 square kilometers of ocean. The largest and most populated island is Tahiti. Like New Caledonia, French Polynesia uses labels with its own design with the French name POLYNESIE FRANÇAISE. The labels show the preprinted letters RF for REPUBLIQUE FRANÇAISE as on the TEST-label shown here (#19).





#19: TEST

Again the currency is the “Franc of CFP”, not the euro (#20).



#20: CFP-value

This tour of the world brings us back to France, where we need to pay attention to the position of:

■ Andorra (66)

■ Monaco (06)



■ Andorra (66)

Andorra is situated on the southern border of France in the Pyrenees Alps. Part of Andorra is Spanish, part is French. The Postal Service in French Andorra uses the same postage labels as France. Its labels have district number 66, which stands for the French *département* Pyrénées-Orientales (= Eastern Pyrenees). Note however that on the label #21a as well as on the unprinted label #21b the country name is not REPUBLIQUE FRANÇAISE, but PRINCIPAT D'ANDORRA. It is a kind of Principality, ruled with a co-presidency of the President of France. Also note that in this case the INSEE-code 66920 is printed twice on the label. Although not a member of the European Union, the currency in Andorra is the Euro.







#21a + b: PRINCIPAT D'ANDORRA

## ■ Monaco (06)

At first Monaco like Andorra used the French postage labels with the print PRINCIPAUTE DE MONACO (#22). It is remarkable that the labels from Monaco show the district number 98 to the left, as if it were a far away French colony, while at the same time the INSEE-code to the right starts with 06, the number of the French *département* 06 (= Alpes-Maritimes = Mediterranean Alps).



#22: French design

In 1995 Monaco introduced labels with its own design and the name PRINCIPAUTE DE MONACO (#23a + b). The Principality of Monaco is presently ruled by Prince Albert II. Monaco has no currency of its own. It has been using the French Franc and as of 2002 the Euro.

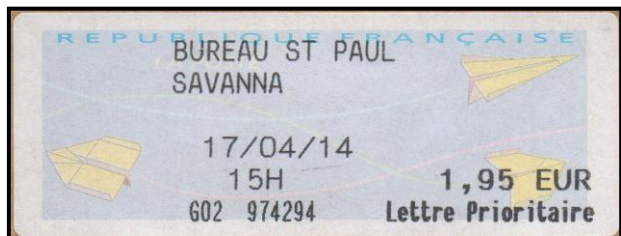


#23a + b: PRINCIPAUTE DE MONACO

With these labels I want to end the world tour of French regions. For an automation philatelist it is like a 21st century discovery expedition to find out about the postage labels with INSEE-codes of these distant places. I may still be able to find new items and the history behind them, which makes collecting them so interesting.

## EPILOGUE:

Since mid 2014 the names of the towns and streets are not printed on the French labels any more. The location of the post offices can only be determined by the INSEE-codes. An example is the label from Bureau St Paul / Savanna on Réunion dated 17/04/14 with INSEE-code 974294. The same code appears on the label from the same post office dated 12/09/17 (#25), but without the names of the town and street.



#25: INSEE 974294