

FRENCH TOURISM DESTINATIONS WELCOME MORE VISITORS BUT REVENUE WENT DOWN



More tourists, but less money in the hands of the industry's professionals. While the 2017 season looks promising for French tourism, it is masking structural difficulties.

After a difficult season in 2016, marked by the terrorist threat, 2017's spring season was very encouraging for French tourism.

"The industry's professionals are optimistic," a spokesperson for the "Tourism Offices of France" said. **Foreign tourists are coming back and we are expecting the number of French tourists to remain at the same level as before.** Some destinations such as Paris and the French Riviera are expecting an increase in tourism numbers. Now we need to observe the evolution of the "last minute" segment of visitors, a trend which is gathering more momentum every year".

The Return of Americans and Japanese to Paris

These predictions did not escape the attention of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jean-Yves Le Drian, who has been in charge of this particular file since one of his predecessors, Laurent Fabius, repatriated it to the "Quai d'Orsay".

"According to our forecasts, the number of foreign tourists visiting France in 2017 could reach 88 to 89 million [a record number], equivalent to a 5 to 6% increase relative to 2016, the minister announce on Monday during a trip to "Giverny (Eure)". In the first half of this year, we returned to a level of visitation similar to what we had in 2015", the year of the previous record.

The most striking changes of French tourism have occurred with respect to air travel. The number of tourists from Germany and Spain "is up by more than 3%". The numbers of clients from other countries, "which were declining sharply, such as Japan, Russia, and Brazil, have increased by almost 30%. The number of Indian tourists is also on the rise (+20%) and tourists from the United States are coming to France in record numbers (+16%)", the minister specified.

This data has been confirmed by a national survey which was published at the beginning of July. "In Paris, Americans occupy the first place, followed by the British and Chinese who have dethroned the Germans. France's capital city is also witnessing the return of Japanese visitors", noted "Atout France" which oversaw the study.

In Nice, the Tourism Office Is Heavily Frequented

In the provinces, the eyes of the industry's professionals are turned towards Nice and the French Riviera, which were hit hard by the 14th of July attacks on the "Promenade des Anglais". But, here again, tourism is taking off once more.

"The forecasts to date seem rather favorable, with a much higher number of foreign tourists visiting our welcome centers this past week. The nationalities most representative of these tourists are German and Scandinavian," a source at the "Nice Tourism Office" revealed. According to the city's "Union of Hoteliers", the return of tourists has been confirmed "by the first reservations being made for July and August".

Nevertheless, it is undeniable that the events of 2016 made a lasting impact on people. This is especially true of the French clientele. "For French tourists, there is a tendency towards safe haven destinations, in the hinterland, in the countryside, far away from large cities. For example, last year "Saint-Étienne" did very well. They successfully communicated the attractiveness of their destination as being the "Cité du Design", an experienced observer of the tourism sector remarked. People from Lyon gave preference to mountain lakes, places a little closer to home and different from conventional destinations".

According to Weekendesk, an online booking server, the number of weekend getaways booked by French travelers increased by 32%. The most popular regions for them are "Provence-Alpes Côte d'Azur", "Normandy", "Rhône-Alpes", "Centre" and "Brittany".

Structural Weaknesses

However, these positive trends should not be allowed to mask the very real weaknesses which are affecting the French tourism economy. While France's visitation numbers are soaring and breaking records, they are somewhat over-flattering.

"What is not being said is that **45% of tourist do not spend more than three days in the country**. For example, those travelers who are simply transiting through France on their way to Spain or Italy are being taken into account in this estimate, Didier Arino, Director of "Protourisme" said. To this estimate are also being added those tourists who live a double life, such as those English citizens who visit their house in "Périgord" ten times a year", and who are being counted as ten different tourists for the purposes of the yearly estimate.

"The real goal is to develop revenue. According to figures from the "Bank of France", tourism had an economic weight of 43 billion euros in 2014, which dropped to 39 billion in 2016, Didier Arino indicated. "Foreign tourist spending continues to decline. It is simply not possible to have so many tourists spending so little".

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