

DISCOVER EUROPE'S MOST VISITED TOURIST ATTRACTIONS



Europe is far from boring - its old-world charm still enchants even the most jaded Hollywood movie directors, such as Woody Allen who has created tributes to London, Barcelona, Paris, and Rome. Although these cities have undeniable allure, there is much more to Europe than its comfortingly familiar historical attractions.

Take Istanbul, for instance. Fifteen million people travel to the city for the Grand Bazaar every year, where shopkeepers interact with visitors - an adventure that takes them back to the Byzantine era, where they can glimpse bits and pieces of Istanbul's colorful history. Even the walkways are straight out of the 15th century, and this is not just for show. Local bargain hunters can be seen jostling alongside the tourists for the best prices they can find.

Turkey is the seventh most visited country in the world according to the World Tourism Organization, attracting 27 million tourists in 2010 and at least 30 million in 2011. More and more people want to experience this crossroads between the East and the West, and the U.S. dollar's strengthening against the Turkish lira did not hurt either - not to mention that the country is a convenient stopover before going on to Asia or Africa.

Besides Turkey, the other most visited countries in the world are also located in Europe. In fact, six of the countries in the top ten are European. Naturally, the major European cities garner the most traffic, but tourists cannot resist venturing out of these capitals to see less urban attractions, such as the Cologne Cathedral in Germany as well as the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Lourdes in France, with six million visitors each. Although both monuments were constructed in the 1800's, they have only grown more attractive with age as buildings and shrines spring up around them, complementing the beauty of their natural surroundings.

France and Italy have the biggest number of the top tourist attractions, as they offer destinations for various kinds of travelers. Disneyland Park, for example, which is not far from Paris, have 13.6 million vacationers every year. Despite the "cultural imperialism" imposed by this very American symbol, the theme park still maintains a distinct French character that it can call its own.

Meanwhile, London has been busy setting up blockbuster events this year, with the Queen's Jubilee and the Olympics generating a huge surge in tourism. The most popular museum of modern art in Europe, Tate Modern, will be unveiling the first phase of its expansion, altering the city's skyline. The changes do not end here, however, as London will be having even more of these cool new attractions in the near future.

Europe may be old, but there is always something new. Its rich history can be overwhelming, but the continent has remained exciting and vibrant well into the modern era. The landmarks will always be there, but the cities are constantly being updated so that travelers will never run out of things to explore and discover.

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