

FRANCE ATTRACTS MEMORIAL TOURISTS WITH 100TH ANNIVERSARY OF WWI



The year of 1914 will always be remembered across the world for the outbreak of the First World War and this year's anniversary, as well as the 70th anniversary of the D-Day landings at Normandy, means that many locals and international visitors will be looking to take a trip to the battlefields and monuments of France.

It is said that **48 million Euros are being invested in France in projects for the coming anniversary** - notably the renovation of the Museum of the Battle of Fromelles and the creation of "memory trails" on hiking sites in Vosges and Haut-Rhin - and this will help to accommodate the millions of memorial tourists that come to France every year.

An enhanced focus on remembrance in 2014 will be welcomed by the millions of local visitors who flock to these sites of interest and will surely do so in even larger numbers this year. In 2012, local tourists made up 55% of the memorial tourists, as was reported by Atout France and the Ministry of Defense, which works out at 3.5 million people.

According to the director of the French Tourism Development Agency, French visitors have a greater appreciation for the full meaning and main objectives of memorial tourism - perhaps out of a need to preserve their own heritage and a deeper, personal connection to the site of interest - and while others may simply appreciate the monuments and the events of the past, native tourists go further and can appreciate the full perspective of the event or site, its impact on future generations and the importance of continuing to preserve and develop these areas.

The remaining 45 percent of these "memorial tourists" come from international visitors and 70% of these 2.7 million travelled from just five nations: Great Britain, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands and the US.

It is believed that while the French embrace the spirit and objectives of this style of tourism, the visitors from other nations do so primarily to pay their respects. The future of the regions and the greater picture may be lost on some foreign visitors but they are still keen to see key areas of interest for themselves, with sites like Omaha Beach and Chemin des Dames, commemorative areas like the Notre-Dame-de-Lorette Necropolis and the Hartmannswillerkopf Memorial in Alsace and museums like that of the Great War in Meaux being among the many battlefields, memorials and sites of interest on foreign itineraries.

With 2014 being such a landmark year and so many additional plans in action, France is sure to see these numbers rise over the next year - both in terms of French nationals and those UK and US enthusiasts who simply wish to pay their respects - and it should help enhance the position of this niche industry.

Restorative efforts like the museum renovation and the creation of the memory trails are not just for the benefit of the 100th anniversary, they can also lead to greater preservation and further remembrance through memorial tourism for many years to come.

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