

CANADIAN TOURISM IS GETTING BACK ON ITS FEET



In 2015, 18 million foreign visitors stepped onto Canadian soil, the largest tourist destination in the last nine years, according to a report released by Statistique Canada. Far from a record, this is a return to normal for Canadian tourism.

The tourism industry has already done better. According to *Mégatendances canadiennes* (Canadian Megatrends): the evolution of Canadian Tourism, from 1946 to 2015, reveals that **Canada attracted some 20 million international tourists in 2002, its best performance since 1946.**

Bruno Sarrasin, a professor in the department of urban and tourism studies at the University of Quebec at Montreal, points out that the data for 2015, although on the increase compared to previous years, simply allow Canada to “get back on its feet” and return to a number of visitors similar to those between 1998 and 2002 (between 18.8 million and 20 million foreign tourists).

More Asians, Less Europeans

Like many countries around the world, Canada is becoming more and more popular with Asian tourists. In 2015, Asians represented 33.2% of foreign travelers from a country other than the United States, compared to 13.5% in 1972. On the other hand, Europeans were less likely to visit the country; while in 1972 they accounted for 70.4% of overseas visitors (excluding the United States), they accounted in 2015 for only 46.3%.

Of all the international tourists who visit Canada, the neighbors to the south still occupy the top spot. Some 12 million Americans crossed the border in 2015—an upward return after several difficult years for Canadian tourism.

According to Statistique Canada, there is obviously a strong correlation between the exchange rate and the number of tourists. Events such as the outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in 2003 also had an impact. At that time, many travelers shunned Canadian territory. From 20 million in 2002, the number of visitors decreased to 17 million a year later.

Top 10 Travel Destinations

With its most recent performance, Canada is unlikely to reach the top 10 most popular destinations in the world, according to Michel Archambault, professor emeritus at The University of Quebec at Montreal's department of urban and tourism studies.

“Beyond the data, Canadian tourism has lost several ranks in the world ranking since 2000. And 150 years is young, very young! Several new countries have been more successful.”

According to data from the World Tourism Organization, Canada ranked second in international tourist arrivals in 1970, rising to number eight in 2000. Since then, it has lost its place in the top ten.

According to the figures released by the WTO in 2014, France is leading with 83.7 million visitors, followed by the United States with 74.8 million.

Bruno Sarrasin emphasizes, however, that these figures should be interpreted with caution. For example, this data counts all travelers arriving in Paris, even those who pass through the City of Light without necessarily visiting it, but only to take a flight to another country. He explains that France is a hub, whereas Canada is not.

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