

FRENCH TOURISM HAS REGAINED ITS VITALITY



Sunshine, a rediscovered morale, foreign tourists coming back after the impact of the terrorist attacks has faded, and the zest of the “Macron effect”: this is the cocktail of success that the French tourism sector experienced this spring season.

“We had a very, very, very good month of April,” said Xavier Bailly, administrator of the Abbey of Mont Saint Michel, one of the most visited cultural sites in France. Its visitation rate had suffered after the November 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris and the July 2016 attacks in Nice. **It has increased by nearly 7% since the beginning of the year.**

“Futuroscope's” technology based theme park, near Poitiers, which is celebrating its 30th anniversary, broke a record “which had been held since the year 2000” by crossing the symbolic threshold of 20 000 visitors in one day, on Friday following the Ascension Day.

“The weather is very favorable for French tourism,” Dominique Hummel - the park's President - pointed out; the park recorded an increase of “around 10% over the four weeks of the April school holidays”. At the “Galeries Lafayette” in Paris, we can see that “the foreign tourists - namely Chinese, Russian and Japanese - has come back”.

Visa Requests up by 32%

For Christian Mantei, CEO of “Atout France”, the country's tourism development agency, “France is going through a very healthy period” after a very difficult 2016. “We started to see an improvement in November-December, and then there was an acceleration throughout the first quarter,” he said. “For the second quarter, it looks like we will be returning to the rate we had in 2015, or 2014, in terms of overall attendance,” basically a return to the level of performance before the attacks. He also reiterated the fact that the requests for tourist visas increased by 32% between January and March.

French hoteliers are smiling again. “The French Riviera fills up during the Ascension Day long weekend, with an occupancy rate of 90%; Paris was also very popular, with a rate of 80%,” explained Laurent Duc, President of the hotel industry within the professional organization “Umih”. “Things are going better,” but tourist activity is constantly “going up and down,” cautioned Philippe Leboeuf, Director General of the “Mandarin Oriental”, a Parisian palace which has “not recovered to pre-November 2015 levels”.

Long Weekends, a Real Success

Recovery also logically affects rentals. “Long weekends have been a real success this year. It is a very good sign for the summer season and for French tourism, when we have such a healthy beginning to the season,” explained Timothée de Roux, Director General for “Abritel-HomeAway” in France. “The tourism industry's results were very positive for the first quarter and the good news is that the trend seems to be continuing”, commented Emmanuel Marill, Director General for “Airbnb” in France.

For Didier Arino, Director of the “Protourisme” research firm, in addition the effect caused by good weather, there has been an ongoing “catch-up effect”: there are French people who “are going away on vacation this year whereas they did not go anywhere last year”, due to a slight increase in their purchasing power and an improved morale. As for the increase in the number of foreign visitors, it has been favored, according to Didier Arino, by “a generalized sense of fatalism” concerning the risk of terrorist attacks, but also by the “Macron effect”. The French President, Emmanuel Macron, “does not have any particular tourism policy, but he has a good image abroad – which may be even better than having a policy, but it would probably be better to have both”, he joked.

The Macron Effect

The expert is delighted by the “extraordinary images” the President of the Republic has conveyed since his election on the 7th of May. “Macron in front of the Louvre, or receiving Putin at Versailles, these are images of a glorified France”, he underscored, pointing out the contrast with images taken during the same period the previous year: rain and floods, strikes and protests against the labor law.

The CEO of “Voyageurs du monde”, Jean-François Rial, sees “a very clear” “Macron effect”. **“Ever since Macron won, French tourism has picked up even stronger than before,** as if a very strong wave of optimism was washing over the people,” he said. “You just need to look at the international press, it is as if France has regained its luster”.

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