

FRENCH NATURE PARKS PLAN TO BECOME DESTINATIONS IN THEIR OWN RIGHT



The Federation of Regional Nature Parks of France wishes to take advantage of the popularity of ecotourism destinations among holidaymakers seeking environmentally friendly holidays.

With the popularity of "green" holidays, France's 53 regional nature parks want to become ecotourism destinations in their own right and are preparing in particular for the launch of stays combining accommodation and activities in 2020.

These regional nature parks – of which two are overseas in Martinique and French Guiana – represent more than 15% of the French territory. They were created in 1967 by General de Gaulle, and are managed by mixed unions bringing together local authorities. Their mission is to protect landscapes and natural heritage, to contribute to spatial planning and to ensure that the public is welcomed and informed.

"Unlike national parks, with which we are often confused, regional nature parks are inhabited. And we are working for the development of these territories, as biodiversity is not opposed to human activity," says Mickaël Weber, President of the Federation of Regional Natural Parks of France. "We want to raise our profile, promote our environmental values and ensure that parks are identified as ecotourism destinations. We are ready to create a tourism offer," he says.

The Federation wishes to take advantage of the holidaymakers' enthusiasm for "green" and eco-friendly holidays. "Consumers ask themselves a lot of questions, for example about whether or not to take a plane. There is a quest for meaning, they don't just want to see beautiful landscapes. And we want to carry this project forward by proposing innovative tourism projects," adds Éric Brua, director of the federation.

He indicates that regional nature parks aim to offer, from 2020, "stays via an interface where accommodation and activities can be booked. We will start by putting in place what already exists, because some parks, such as Queyras, already offer tourist stays in hotels or cottages with hikes."

The federation will also rely on its registered trademark "Regional Natural Park Values", a label that promotes local food products (meat, vegetables, jams) as well as restaurants and accommodation, and which benefits some 2,000 companies operating in the parks.

"I would say that my territory is remarkable for its simplicity. With few inhabitants, there is a real rural character, as in many other parks. But we are also innovative: in June, the 1,340-kilometer long bicycle crossing of the Massif Central will be inaugurated, with every 40 kilometers of terminals to recharge

electric ATVs," said Philippe Connan, president of the Millevaches park in Limousin.

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