

REMEMBRANCE TOURISM BENEFITS NORMANDY



Last week, June 6, France commemorated the 75th anniversary of the Allies landing on the beaches of Normandy in the presence of Donald Trump and Emmanuel Macron. About 160 Second World War veterans were announced for this ceremony, for which an impressive security detail has been deployed throughout the region and more than 12,000 people were expected in Colleville-sur-Mer, on the Omaha Beach American Cemetery, to attend the midday handshake between Emmanuel Macron and President Donald Trump.

By the evening of June 6, 1944, more than 150,000 Allies had landed on French soil, of which more than 10,000 were killed, wounded or disappeared, according to the figures of the Caen Memorial. Seventy-five years later, **Normandy is attracting a growing number of visitors on the theme of remembrance tourism.** With its 56 military sites and memorial sites in Normandy currently open, Normandy welcomes more than 5 million visitors each year. "And this figure is constantly increasing," says Dominique Saussey, D-Day specialist at the Normandy Regional Tourism Committee.

With more than 4.6 million visitors in 2017, the number of tourists to sites and places of memory increased by 2.2%. In anniversary years, this figure can even rise to 6 million. "Remembrance tourism is Normandy's number one tourist destination, with more than 30% of all visits to all Normandy sites," she says with satisfaction. Among the most popular sites in Normandy are the American military cemetery Omaha Beach, which has 1.3 million visitors, the Visitor Center of the American Cemetery with 428,814 visitors, and the Caen Memorial, which welcomed 371,752 visitors in 2017. And it is naturally Calvados that gathers, with 4.1 million visitors, nearly 90% of the total number of visits to these places of Memory, even if the Channel is progressing most with an increase of 17.1% in visitors between 2016 and 2017.

This impact of variable geometry is variously welcomed by tourism professionals. According to a study published in February 2019 by CSA Research on the future of remembrance tourism in Normandy, for 48% of the tourism stakeholders surveyed, the sector is perceived as more important for the development of the territory of Basse-Normandie, against 6% who believe that this theme is more important for the development of the territory of Upper-Normandie. "There is still a backdrop to trying to bring in all tourism professionals and no longer have this divide between the territories to pursue a coherent tourism policy," observes Stéphanie Laffargue, Director of Studies at CSA Research's Pôle Society. Out of a budget of €2.5 billion for the Normandy region, the attractiveness and influence of Normandy benefit from a budget of €81 million, which notably contributes to the financing of the 75th anniversary of the Normandy landings.

The share of overnight stays in the D-Day landing zone - out of the total Normandy overnight stays (579,884 in 2017) - is 7.4%, of which 13.7% are international hotel nights and 5.4% French hotel nights. On the Airbnb platform, there were four times more passenger arrivals in Caen on June 6, compared to an average Thursday, knowing that the number of announcements in the region is 191,000 active and that the number of passenger arrivals in Normandy is 773,000. Dominique Saussey points out that these events attract "all allied audiences, mainly French, English, American, Canadian, Belgian and Dutch" each year, adding that they are mainly family audiences.

Aware of the economic interest of remembrance tourism, which attracts around 20 million visitors to France every year, the State is taking several actions to structure the offer of memorial sites. In the 2016 FDP, the credits dedicated to remembrance tourism were thus consolidated at 1.65 million euros. According to the latest figures from the Ministry of Defense, which manages and promotes a number of places of memory, the total direct turnover generated by sites in the remembrance tourism sector is 45 million euros.

The question now arises of the future of remembrance tourism, which is reaching a turning point after the 75th-anniversary celebrations. "The challenge is to continue to create interest in memory tourism, especially among international visitors," said Atout France representative. "This will require maintaining a level of quality supply and service, better integrating the sector into the other attractive elements of its territory, such as the art of living or cultural activities". The main challenge will be to "renew the audiences of memory sites". According to CSA Research, 14% of Normandy's tourism professionals are very optimistic about the future of remembrance tourism in the region, compared to 27% who are quite pessimistic and 3% who are very pessimistic. It's about "grabbing this moment to rethink the way we talk about memory", says Stéphanie Laffargue. "We must not miss the boat by turning more towards youth and relying more on new technologies to spread it differently".

The Normandy region has already taken a step forward, by submitting in January 2018 the "Beaches of the D-Day Landings, Normandy 1944" for inscription on UNESCO's World Heritage List. A total of more than 10 million euros have been mobilized by the Region to support this bidding project. "The main objective of this bid is to set up site protection to ensure that the sites are properly transmitted to the younger generation and that certain buildings, such as the artificial port of Arromanches, are not damaged over the decades," explains expert.

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