

RIVER TOURISM IN FRANCE DRAWS ITS OWN PATH



River tourism in France has been gradually resuming its activity since 29 May. Recent figures for the sector demonstrate its growth attracting more and more travelers. In some regions however the story is different.

With nearly 11.3 million passengers transported (+2.1% compared to 2018 and +16.2% compared to 2016), river tourism in France recorded very positive results in 2019. **Nearly two thirds of the customers (65%) came from abroad last year.**

Overall, the 5 branches of the sector generate 1.4 billion euros in economic spin-offs, including 845 million directly for the territories each year (according to a study published by VNF last February).

In the current context of the health crisis linked to Covid-19, river tourism appears to be a holiday mode adapted to the needs of the summer, thanks to its diversified offer: rental of habitable boats, private boating and river activities, in particular.

In 2019, river tourism recorded 15.4 million passenger-days, which represents a growth of +10.8% since 2016 (i.e. an average growth of more than 3% per year). 42% of these passenger-days are carried out outside the major cities.

In 2019, the growth was mainly driven by two sectors: Pleasure boats, which show a growth of +5.7% compared to 2018 (+29.2% since 2016) in Paris with nearly 8 million passengers and remain very attractive in the provinces with nearly 3 million people transported. And hotel barges, up +10.3% (in number of passenger-days) and a strong contributor in terms of economic spin-offs. Indeed, although this branch represents a marginal share of river tourism (1%), due to its premium nature, it generated 62.4 million euros in 2019 for the benefit of the territories.

Some regions however complain about the lack of customers. The river cruises on the Seine are one of them. "The season hasn't started yet," says Gilles Delahaie, the boss of the Normandy Experience agency in Vernon, whereas in normal times, around twenty boats sail on the river.

"A real disaster for the local actors," he continues, "the tour guides, the coach operators, the bike rental companies". Cruise passengers represent 80% of the clientele in the region - Germans, Americans, Australians - but these cruise passengers are not here yet.

The companies and river cruise operators hope to see at least the tourists from the Schengen area coming to France.

To date, Gilles Delahaie has lost all his bookings, so he plans with his agency Normandy Experience to deal with the French clientele for the 2020 season. "We are considering new products, new services, new visits," he explains.

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