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The first incubator in the world specializing in tourism

It is the only initiative of its kind in the world: Paris is the first city to have opened an incubator for tourism-related start-ups. The idea makes sense, given that the French capital is the world's most popular tourist destination, with 32.3 million hotel arrivals in 2013. The number of foreign visitors, meanwhile, rose by 8.2% in twelve months, reaching 15.5 million in 2013. These figures alone justify the creation of Welcome City Lab.

Located in the heart of Paris, the 1000m² site includes an open-plan space for collaboration



and conference rooms for the thirty or so start-ups that have been selected. The organizations behind this initiative include the City of Paris, the Public Investment Bank (BPI), the Paris Convention and Visitors Bureau, and private companies such as Aéroports de Paris, Amadeus, Sodexo, Skyboard, Galeries Lafayette, Viparis and Air France. The start-ups also enjoy the use of an experimentation area and a monitoring unit. In addition, facilitated access to financing enables them to gather the funds required to expand. The incubator even has a press service to allow small and medium-sized businesses to publicize themselves.

The entrepreneurs housed by Welcome City Lab offer a wide variety of products and services. *Marins d'eau douce*, a hire company set up by two sailing enthusiasts, owns a fleet of 17 electric boats on which tourists can sail without a licence along the 40km of navigable waterways of the Bassin de la Villette, the Saint Martin canal and the Ourcq canal. The company *Evanela*, meanwhile, which already employs three people, organizes visits to prestigious workshops of jewellers, designers and couturiers that are usually closed to the public.



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Some companies in the incubator are more traditional tour operators. Examples include *Worldia*, which offers internet-users the opportunity to design a customized trip online, and *Family Twist*, which markets luxury family trips to Paris, London and the châteaux of the Loire.

The global success of smartphones has also encouraged certain Parisian entrepreneurs to launch applications for passing tourists. With *Mobilytrip*, visitors can create a travel journal by adding photos, videos and notes that can be shared day by day with their friends and family. *SmArtapps*, meanwhile, offers audioguides and interactive guides, including interactive maps, a 360° panorama and synchronized feeds for the capital's main museums and monuments. The developers of *Culture'Apps* are promoting the creation of the first web platform dedicated to designing applications for cultural sites. In the field of gastronomy, thanks to the application *Monrestoempoche*, it will soon be possible to order remotely from many Parisian restaurants to avoid long queues.

Welcome City Lab has also opened its doors to collaborative tourism specialists. *Bluenod*, for example, displays and organizes "communities" at connected events. This visual data representation service can be used to map the participants at a congress, conference or trade fair. For those seeking culinary authenticity, *Cookening* allows foreigners to be treated to a meal at someone's home. *Sejourning* is a more traditional platform on which property owners can rent out their home for short periods. Amateur film-makers inspired by the capital can post their films about Paris online via the platform *Crop the block*. "With the large number of enterprises in this incubator, we can share experiences and networks," says the founder of *Evanela*, Lucie Knappek. So long live Welcome City Lab!

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NB: The claims and opinions contained in this article, which aims to provide information on contemporary France, have no official value.