

France in the News

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France: the world leader for tourism

France is still the most visited country in the world with almost 82 million foreign tourists. The importance of tourism chiefly lies in the great diversity of natural sites, the beauty of landscapes, the authenticity of villages and the wealth of French cultural heritage (museums and historical monuments). France also ranks third after the United States and Spain among countries with the biggest revenue from tourism.



According to official sources, with a record 81.4 million foreign visitors, France is well ahead of the United States (62.7 million), China (57.6 million), Spain (56.2 million) and Italy (46.1 million). As the French Tourism Minister told the Agence France-Presse (AFP) *“One can always do better, but what sector of activity was worth €77 billion in revenue in 2012, as against €75.4 billion in 2011 and €68.7 billion in 2010? We must mobilize to remain the leading world destination, be more competitive, more structured and improve the offer and quality of services.”*

In 2012, Paris posted a remarkable tourist performance (which grew more than 6%), thanks in particular to an increase in the numbers of visitors from the U.S., the U.K. and China. The most significant increase is that of tourists from the Middle East. Paris tourism officials say that this attraction is due to a very rich cultural offer. Shopping, haute couture and gastronomy are also key factors in the city’s attractiveness.

While Paris is top of French destinations, Provence and the French Riviera, the Loire Valley, the Atlantic seaboard and South-West France still appeal as much to foreign visitors for whom France has been a favourite destination since the 1990s. From the famous Châteaux of the Loire Valley to the wonderful *calanques* (creeks) of Marseille-Cassis or the Pilat Dune – the highest in Europe, tourist sites are hugely appealing. 38 of them are in fact inscribed on UNESCO’s World Heritage List, including the Mont-Saint-Michel and its Bay in Normandy, the Palace and Park of Versailles, Chartes Cathedral and the Historic Fortified City of Carcassonne.



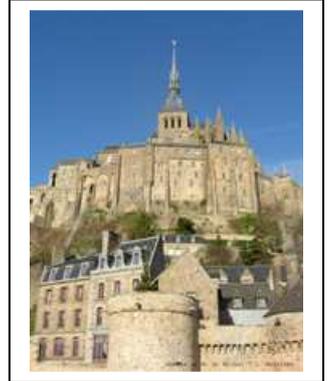
Official figures show that in 2012 hotel occupancy reached a record high in the Paris region with more than 68 million guest nights. The influx of a non-European clientele, especially from the U.S., the Middle East and Asia, was confirmed in hotels with guest nights rising 9.7% in 2012. It can in fact be seen that hotels which have opted for upmarket quality and to adopt new classification standards suited to the expectations of increasingly demanding clients enjoy higher occupancy rates than others.



MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Two million people are employed in tourism activities, which account for more than 7% of French GDP and generate around €44 billion in revenue. The most highly starred hotels are seeing the greatest gain in occupancy. It should be pointed out that the Dutch are still by far the leading foreign clientele of caravan sites.

A recent poll indicates that European tourists, in particular the Germans, Italians and Belgians, are attracted to France above all by the beauty of its landscapes, cultural heritage and authentic villages, as well as by the Breton crepe which is seen as the French regional specialty par excellence. Toulouse is among the top tourist cities in France, an achievement due mainly to business tourism, relating in particular to the aeronautical industry, and to the many conferences and seminars organized year-round by big businesses.



Russian tourists find Paris and Nice especially attractive. In their view, France is actually a must as a destination which they associate with romanticism, perfumes, and wine, and which you should visit at least once in a lifetime. In cultural and historical terms, it is even the most attractive destination among competing destinations in Europe. According to a survey by the *Atout France* tourism development agency, the Russian and Ukrainian tourism markets could account for 1.3 million visitors to France in 2014, i.e. almost double the 2011 numbers.

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Useful websites

www.atout-france.fr
www.parisinfo.com