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## France, tourism

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France is the fifth largest economy in the world, stretching 1,000 km (600 mi) from north to south and from east to west. Its several overseas territories are located in all five oceans of the world. France is the second largest country in ► [Europe](#) after ► [Russia](#). The country has a strategic geographical position in the middle of Western Europe, sharing borders with six neighboring countries and located at the heart of the European Union, between the northern and southern European countries (Figure 1). Furthermore, the French coastline provides not only access by sea to Northern Europe, America, and ► [Africa](#) but also a wide variety of beaches and sea views onto the North Sea, the Atlantic Ocean, and the Mediterranean Sea.

France is the world's most popular ► [destination](#) receiving 83 million inbound tourists annually (UNWTO 2014), ahead of the ► [United States](#) (67 million) and ► [Spain](#) (57 million), attracted by its varied sceneries (landscapes, mountains, and beaches), its rich cultural heritage (historic monuments and museums), its famous gastronomy, and its geographical position. France welcomes more than 12 million Germans and British tourists, ten million Belgians, and

eight million Italians. Tourists come also from the United States (three million) and ► [China](#) (1.4 million). Together they provide France with the third largest international receipts, after United States and Spain in 2013.

## A pioneer in tourism history

Tourism was born in the ► [United Kingdom](#) in the eighteenth century during the industrial revolution. France, and especially the French Mediterranean coast, quickly became an attraction for British aristocrats on the ► [Grand Tour](#). ► [Tourist](#) activities developed more intensively during the reign of Napoleon III, with the emergence of coastal and ► [beach tourism](#). Many seaside resorts, such as Deauville or Biarritz, were created in the second half of the nineteenth century. Spa bathing also increased in popularity with French bourgeoisie, and ski resorts, such as Chamonix, were built. During this period, tourism was a luxury product.

The face of tourism changed radically in the first half of the twentieth century. Railways and highways linked cities to the main French seaside and ski resorts. After 1936, social legislation provided guaranteed paid holidays and shorter working hours for employees. A post-World War II global economic boom coupled with the popularity of automobile ► [travel](#) and the onset of mass transport enabled development of ► [mass tourism](#). Air ► [transportation](#) was important for

**France, tourism,**  
**Figure 1** Map of France



tourism ► [development](#). All these changes enabled France quickly to become a world leader in tourism and to turn it to an industry.

### Key factor for the French economy

The French Tourism Satellite Account indicates that internal tourism consumption provided 7.3 % of GDP in 2012 (DGCIS 2013). Almost one million of full-time equivalent jobs, notably in traditional catering and ► [accommodation](#), were created by 273,000 tourism-related businesses. One third of these employees work in Paris and its surrounding regions. Another one quarter is located in the Rhône-Alpes and Mediterranean regions. Consumption by French tourists represents around two thirds of internal tourism consumption and reflects the importance of holidays

and ► [leisure](#) in the French society (National Tourism Board 2010).

France has a well-developed education and training infrastructure that meets the needs of the industry. The tourism ► [education](#) system offers a wide variety of options from vocational training (food service training) to higher education diploma, and master and doctorate degrees. There are more than 1,000 vocational baccalaurates and 160 tourism master programs. Nevertheless, many employees in traditional catering and accommodation have no specific training. There is a need to rectify this situation and the French strategy contains significant emphasis on improving training in order to upgrade skills in this industry.

## Remaining the leader

France has always faced the competition for tourists. For example, the first-rate southern French resorts on the Mediterranean coast have over time seen competition from new destinations that developed first in ► [Italy](#) and Spain, then in ► [Greece](#) and ► [Turkey](#), and most recently in North Africa. However, today France's leading position in the field of tourism is threatened. The number of international arrivals has increased less quickly in the last decade: 0.6 % annually on average between 2000 and 2012, while between 1990 and 2000 it grew an average of 3.9 %, and at 5.7 % annually during the 1980s. Development of tourism in many new destination countries has intensified competition. These countries are growing their tourism numbers because they are closer to emerging markets and also may have lower costs. Thus, in 2012 China was ranked at the third position in number of international inbound, while it was 18th in 1980. China is also the world's largest outbound tourist market. This trend will continue to grow. Between 2010 and 2030, arrivals in emerging destinations are expected to increase at double the pace of that in advanced economies.

In order to keep France's ► [leadership](#) in tourism, French authorities and economic actors must reinvigorate their offering. In this new situation, process innovations become essential for survival (Crouch and Ritchie 2003; OECD 2006). The restructuring of the industry has also become crucial. The French government has developed a participatory approach in order to identify new forms of governance to better involve

stakeholders. The future of the destination requires improving the quality of the tourism offer to enhance the attractiveness of France and to improve competitiveness. Thus, the French administration has introduced a tourism policy in favor of rehabilitation of tourist accommodation and implementation of a proactive policy of employment to fill 500,000 unfilled jobs in the tourism ► [industry](#).

France has also to think creatively and to innovate in order to rejuvenate itself at all levels. To modernize its tourism offer, topics of future research interest should not only include new technologies and new communications but also in terms of tourist receptions (facilities, communication) and cultural innovation.

**See also** ► [Destination competitiveness](#), ► [Europe](#), ► [grand tour](#), ► [history](#), ► [satellite account](#).

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