



MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

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A bright future for France's "green tourism" sector

France is the world's leading tourist destination, and its tourism industry generates close to 900,000 direct salaried jobs. To remain competitive, the country adapts to increasingly varied demand. One example is "green tourism": Sustainable development is gradually gaining ground in French tourism strategies.

A growing sector

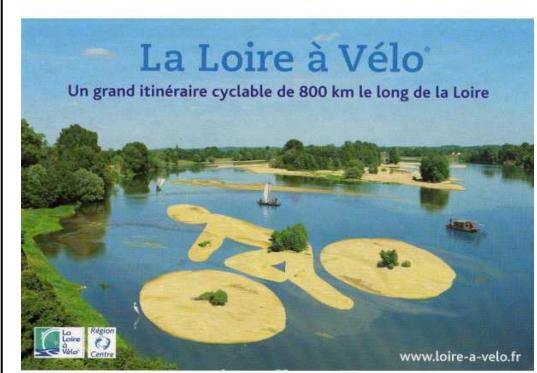
Green tourism, or ecotourism, is focuses on activities that respect the environment. Laetitia Santos, editor-in-chief of the sites *Babel Voyages* and *Voyages pour la planète*, says that "*France is very active in ecotourism, thanks to the great variety of its landscapes and its many labelled accommodation options and committed agencies. In recent years, the growth of the sector has been between 10 and 20% annually.*"

Green tourism attracts both foreign visitors and French travellers as, according to the World Tourism Organization (WTO), 56% are prepared to pay more for environmentally friendly holidays. The WTO also says that, of the 173 million annual stays in France, 50 million are in protected natural spaces (national parks and nature reserves).



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Eco-friendly transport



In concrete terms, "green holidays" start with transport. Tourist travel accounts for 6% of France's greenhouse gas emissions, or 30 million tonnes of CO₂ per year. The aim is therefore to prefer eco-friendly transport, such as cycle paths and greenways. The 800km *La Loire à Vélo* tour, for example, is one of the most remarkable cycle routes. It follows the valley of France's longest river, whose banks are an inexhaustible mine of natural and architectural treasures. More than 800,000 cyclists, a third from abroad, take the route each year.



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Eco-friendly accommodation

Labels also exist for accommodation, such as the *Hôtels au naturel* eco-label and *La Clé verte*. To be eligible for these labels, hospitality establishments must notably meet criteria for optimal water usage and strict pollution limits.

The *Accueil paysan* association attracts tourists who want to combine self-catering accommodation and farm visits. Hosts share their know-how and knowledge with holidaymakers, as well as seasonal local produce, because ecotourism is also a matter of food!

A great variety of offer

Thanks to the diversity of offer, “*in ecotourism, everyone can find holidays to their taste*”, says Laetitia Santos.

Firstly there are national and regional parks. In 2012, visits to these sites led to 12 million stays in France, totalling 86 million nights.

Tourists can also choose labelled sites, such as *Pavillon bleu* beaches, municipalities with the *Station verte* label, which promote nature tourism, and ski stations with a sustainable development charter.

In recent years, sustainable development industry actors have also proposed an offer whose success is undeniable: donkey-trekking, which is very popular amongst families with children.



Green tourism is therefore an innovative sector, involving local stakeholders and promoting the sustainable economic development of their territories. This is an absolutely necessary commitment, as Laetitia Santos says: “*in the current context, we need to find sustainable tourism solutions to preserve the territory. We have no choice!*”

Lucie de la Héronnière

Industry figures

- . 50 million stays per year**
- . 280 million nights in accommodation**
- . Annual growth of 10-20%**