

Tourism: despite the attacks, France remains the first destination

France still seduces as much. That is the conclusion drawn by Jean-Marc Ayrault, who announced on February 10, that for the year 2016, the country retained its position as world's top tourist destination. This is despite a decline in attendance recorded in connection with the Paris attacks of November 2015 and Nice in July 2016. Thus, between 82.5 and 83 million foreign tourists traveled to France in 2016, according to the first official estimates provided by the Government. This represents a decrease of 2.3 to 2.9% compared to the year 2015 (85 million foreign tourists).

The Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs said that "2016 will remain a year apart, due to attacks, bad weather and social movements", but, despite this particular context, France remained the world's first destination, and ahead of the United States and Spain. Jean-Marc Ayrault also reaffirmed the government's target of 100 million foreign tourists by 2020. A figure that was decided in June 2014, before the wave of attacks that hit France and more particularly Europe.

The return of the empire of the rising sun

Among the reasons for these good results, the head of the diplomacy evoked a "clear rebound at the end of 2016" in terms of recorded overnight stays. Trends for the beginning of 2017 following the same trajectory with a 10.4% increase in air bookings to Paris in the first half. The general director of Atout France, the tourism promotion agency in the hexagon, confirmed that France "has really started to recover from September / October," and that the end of 2016 had been "better than expected".

Jean-Marc Ayrault also welcomed the "massive" return of the Japanese clientele who had shunned France by the end of 2015. Many tourists canceled their visit to France after the Paris attacks and later in Nice. According to Le Monde, Jean-Marc Ayrault welcomed "the 60% increase in airline bookings to Paris for the first quarter of 2017" concerning the only Japanese clientele. The government announced in November 2016 that it was releasing an envelope of about 40 million euros to support the French tourism sector. As security was a priority for France, about 15 million euros had been allocated specifically to the safety of foreign tourists.

The Parisian recovery

If the recovery is strengthening in January and February, it is most noticeable in the capital. The Parisian hotel industry suffered greatly from the disaffection of tourists, more than the provincial cities. The Quai d'Orsay recalled that the sector, for the overnight stays, had declined by 5.7%. "2016 was a difficult year for our companies, especially in Paris and on the French Riviera," confirmed Roland Héguy, president of the main hotel organization, the Umih. While the decline in attendance in France after the Paris and Nice attacks was expected, he said that it had been "contained".