



FRANCE IS THE #1 DESTINATION  
FOR CANADIANS TRAVELLING  
TO EUROPE

# Introduction

Paris is widely regarded as one of the most romantic cities in the world, making France a must-visit travel destination on many Canadians' travel bucket lists. From world-famous landmarks, such as the Eiffel Tower, to quaint bistros and wineries, historical sites and year-round tourist attractions, it's no wonder France is the top country visited by Canadians in Europe.

The following outlines why outbound travel from Canada to Europe is on the rise, why France is the number one European destination for Canadians, how travel in France compares to travel in other European countries, why Canadians are travelling to France, top tourist destinations, travel tips and the importance of travel insurance for France vacations.



# OUTBOUND TRAVEL TO EUROPE IS ON THE RISE



Even though fewer Canadians plan to travel during the summer in 2015, those who are travelling plan to travel outside the country. “Half of Canadians planning to take a trip this summer, who have selected their destination, intend to travel outside the country,” states the Conference Board of Canada.<sup>1</sup>

This builds on the current trend of Canadian travellers increasingly vacationing outside Canada. Since 2011, there has been a steady increase in the number of intended outbound vacations by Canadians:

- 2011: 33%
- 2012: 36%
- 2013: 41%
- 2014: 39%
- 2015: 49%

Although the number of intended outbound trips decreased slightly in 2014, it rose greatly in 2015, with a sharp 10% increase.<sup>2</sup> Naturally, this trend is at the expense of intended domestic trips, as fewer Canadians are planning trips within the country, and the number of domestic trips has been declining steadily, from 60% in 2011 to an expected 51% this year.<sup>3</sup>

Approximately 20% of travellers intend to visit Europe, the same number as in 2014,<sup>4</sup> with France continuing to lead the way as the most visited European country by Canadians each year since 2010.



# FRANCE IS THE #1 DESTINATION FOR CANADIANS TRAVELLING TO EUROPE

More than half a million Canadians have visited France each year since 2010, 2012 being the only year with a slight drop in the number of Canadian visitors:<sup>5</sup>

- 2010: 539,592
- 2011: 575,217
- 2012: 566,678
- 2013: 598,695
- 2014: 739,608
- 2015: 772,089 (projected)

Over this period, France saw a 19.1% increase in Canadian travellers from 2013 to 2014, and an 8.2% increase from 2010 to 2014.<sup>6</sup>

The spike in 2014, and more visitors than expected, is attributed to the events surrounding the 70th anniversary of D-Day.

Compared to other countries, France is the most visited country in Europe by Canadian travellers. In 2014, trips to France accounted for almost one-quarter of the total Canadian trips to Europe.

Here is how France stacks up against other popular European countries (2014 visits):<sup>7</sup>

- France: 739,608
- Italy: 481,650
- United Kingdom: 469,000
- Germany: 187,926
- Spain: 157,300
- Turkey: 144,424
- Greece: 125,327
- Ireland: 114,668
- Portugal: 103,370
- Holland: 92,476

## PARIS NAMED WORLD'S TOP TOURIST DESTINATION

Canadian travellers are not the only ones flocking to France for vacation. "Paris has once again scooped the top spot as the most popular tourist destination in the world. Some 32.3 million people visited France's City of Light in 2013, with the Eiffel Tower, the Louvre, and Notre-Dame Cathedral all huge draws," says the Daily Mail Online.<sup>8</sup>

The Daily Mail Online continues: "The findings, based on holiday occupancy, showed foreign visitors at 'the highest level in 10 years' at 15.5 million - an 8.2 per cent increase from 2012. The largest number (2.1 million) came from Britain, followed by the Americans, Germans, Italians and Chinese."

France is also at the top of the world tourism rankings by the United Nations World Tourism Organization, bringing in more tourists than any other country in the world. Of the more than 1 billion tourist arrivals in 2013, 84.7 million visited France, a 2% increase from 2013 (83 million tourist arrivals).<sup>9</sup>

In terms of international tourism receipts, France ranks number 3 worldwide, below Spain and the United States. In total, the country generated \$56.1 billion in tourism receipts in 2013, a 4.8% increase from 2012 (\$53.6 billion).<sup>10</sup>



# WHY CANADIANS ARE TRAVELLING TO FRANCE

There are five key factors that contribute to France being the number one outbound travel destination for Canadian travellers:

- 1. Lower Euro:** A weakening Euro and a stronger US dollar make travelling to France and other European countries more appealing and more affordable than in recent years. "This summer [2015], it will cost Canadians \$1.36 to purchase one Euro versus \$1.43 last summer," says the Conference Board of Canada.<sup>11</sup>
- 2. Increased seat capacity:** An increase in direct seat capacity from Canada to Europe provides travellers greater flexibility and more options. Since 2003, seat capacity has almost doubled, from 2.57 million seats to 4.25 million seats in 2015.<sup>12</sup> France is expected to see a 9.9% increase in seat capacity in 2015, with 777,724 seats, compared to 707,750 in 2014.<sup>13</sup> Only Great Britain has more seats available. However, many travellers fly to the UK and visit France as part of a European summer vacation.
- 3. Aging population:** "The aging population should bode well for short- and medium-term trip volumes. Those who are planning a trip to Europe are older than travellers to other regions. Forty-one per cent of Canadians planning a trip to Europe this summer are 55 or older," says the Conference Board of Canada.<sup>14</sup>

**4. Consumer confidence is up:** According to the Conference Board's index of consumer confidence, more Canadians felt it was a good time to make a major purchase in March 2015 compared to the same time in 2014. About 30% of Canadians have confidence in making a major purchase, up from 26% in 2014. Since 2012, consumer confidence ratings have increased from 89.8 to 108.5 in 2015.<sup>15</sup>

**5. Canadians are more willing to explore:** Now more than ever, Canadians are simply more open to travelling to new destinations and farther away from home. More Canadians are retiring and now have the time and disposable income to travel and see the world, and France is on top of the list of destinations for many Canadian travellers.



## TOP TOURIST DESTINATIONS IN FRANCE

Of the Canadians who will be visiting Europe in the summer of 2015, 63% plan to book activities and tours, up from 52% in 2013.<sup>16</sup> City and sightseeing tours are the most popular activities for travellers to Europe, including France. Thirty-two percent of travellers plan to take part in a city or sightseeing tour, and 26% plan to visit a cultural attraction or event, accounting for more than half of the activities that Canadian travellers plan during their trips.<sup>17</sup>

France offers Canadian travellers a plethora of world-class tourist destinations to visit. Whether you are going for the fashion, wine tours, history or sightseeing, there are countless destinations to visit year-round.

The top 10 most visited destinations in France include:<sup>18</sup>

1. Château de Fontainebleau and its gardens: 13 million visitors
2. Disneyland Paris: 12.6 million
3. Notre Dame de Paris cathedral: 12 million
4. Saint-Ouen flea market: 11 million
5. Château de Versailles gardens: 7 million
6. Georges Pompidou Centre: 5.9 million
7. Eiffel Tower: 5.72 million
8. Louvre Museum: 5.175 million
9. Sacré-Coeur: 5 million
10. Notre Dame de Lourdes: 5 million

Other popular tourist destinations include the WWI battlefield and D-Day sites, Châteaux de la Loire, Epernay for Champagne tasting, Arena of Nîmes, Provence and Chamonix Mont Blanc.



# TRAVEL TIPS FOR FRANCE

Booking travel plans well in advance of an anticipated departure date is important, especially for long-distance travel. However, 26% of Canadian travellers plan on booking their trip to Europe, including France, less than six weeks before their departure date.<sup>19</sup> This may in part be due to travellers seeking last-minute travel deals or being uncertain about where and when they want to travel.

Here are a number of important travel considerations for vacations to France:

- **Confirm travel document requirements:** Canadian travellers must have a valid passport to enter the country, although a travel visa is not necessary for visits of up to 90 days. Since France is part of the Schengen Area, a group of 26 countries that share visa rules, you can travel to various other countries in Europe without additional travel documentation.
- **Book your trip for spring or fall:** Spring (April to June) and fall (September to November) are the best times for travel to France. During the summer, you can expect large crowds and booked accommodations; July and August are the busiest months of the year. The rainy season is October to December. "September is gorgeous, with temperate weather, saner airfares, and cultural events scheduled specifically for the return from summer vacation. Another good time to visit is in late spring, just before the masses arrive, when the sun sets after 9 pm and cafés are abuzz," says Fodor's Travel.<sup>20</sup>
- **Brush up on your French:** To make communication and interaction with the locals easier, consider brushing up on your conversational French, even though English is spoken in many tourist areas.
- **Stay in smaller towns:** If you want to avoid the crowds and save some money on accommodations, consider staying in smaller French hotels or bed and breakfasts.
- **Visit multiple regions:** France has many regions that are worthwhile including on your travel itinerary. Rather than staying in one location for seven to 10 days, break up your trip into a number of two- or three-day adventures. Consider visiting the Châteaux de la Loire, Bordeaux wine country, Arles and Provence, French Riviera, Paris and Versailles.
- **Travel by rail:** The most efficient way to travel in France is by train. Travellers can purchase a France Rail Pass for up to nine days of unlimited travel by train. If you want to see remote areas of the French countryside, a rental car is your best option.
- **Visit popular tourist attractions early in the day:** If you plan on visiting a major tourist attraction, it is recommended that you arrive before it opens to beat the rush and avoid long lineups. Some attractions stay open late, which may be a good time to visit if you want to avoid the crowds.
- **Make reservations at restaurants:** Restaurants book up quickly, especially in larger cities and major tourist areas. Make sure you are aware of the dress code. Also, be aware there are two kinds of restaurants: *service compris* (tip included) and *service non-compris* (tip not included).
- **Check travel advisories before departing:** When booking your trip and before departing for your trip to France, it's important to check the Government of Canada website to see if there are travel advisories. Travel advisories provide information about travel risks, weather warnings, security information and other important information you need to know before you travel.



# TRAVEL INSURANCE FOR FRANCE VACATIONS

Approximately half of outbound travellers planning a trip this summer intend to purchase travel insurance for France that includes emergency medical coverage,<sup>21</sup> and this figure has been more or less consistent since 2012. International travel insurance is more affordable than many Canadians realize. A recent survey by the Conference Board of Canada found that the average premiums for individual trip policies among participating insurers were \$105.71 in 2013 versus \$108.04 in 2012.<sup>22</sup>

Vacation travel insurance can reduce the risk of Canadian travellers paying out of pocket for emergency medical care or making alternative travel plans due to trip delays or interruptions, and it can be a valuable source for travel assistance.

Without emergency medical insurance and other coverage options, you could also put your health at risk if you happen to need medical attention when travelling abroad. Paying a few hundred dollars for deluxe travel insurance can save you thousands of dollars if you are injured or require medical attention.

International travel insurance helps to improve personal safety during your trip by providing assistance and coverage for common travel risks, including:

- Medical emergencies
- Trip cancellation and interruption
- Emergency evacuation
- Lost or stolen baggage

With travel insurance, you also get 24/7 travel assistance, if you need it. Overall, travel insurance helps to reduce personal finance risks associated with travel issues and can give you the peace of mind in knowing you have help if you need it while you're in another country.

# Conclusion

France continues to be the most popular outbound tourist destination for Canadians who are planning a trip to Europe. It offers travellers world-class tourist destinations and travel experiences, and flexible and diverse travel options and accommodations, making it easy for Canadians to book a memorable travel experience that suits their needs and fits their travel budget.





<sup>1</sup> The Conference Board of Canada. *Outbound Canada. March 2015*. A monthly report on Canadian outbound travel. Page 3.

<sup>2</sup> The Conference Board of Canada. *Outlook for Outbound Leisure Travel. Summer 2015*. Page 1.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. Page 1.

<sup>4</sup> The Conference Board of Canada. *Outbound Canada. March 2015*. A monthly report on Canadian outbound travel. Page 3.

<sup>5</sup> The Conference Board of Canada. *Outlook for Outbound Leisure Travel. Summer 2015*. Page 11.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. Page 11.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. Page 11.

<sup>8</sup> Daily Mail Online. Move over London...Paris named as the world's top tourist destination. March 11, 2014. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/travel/article-2578198/Paris-named-tourist-destination-world.html> (accessed May 19, 2015).

<sup>9</sup> World Tourism Rankings. Wikipedia.org. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World\\_Tourism\\_rankings#cite\\_note-WTO2012Highlights-2](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Tourism_rankings#cite_note-WTO2012Highlights-2) (accessed May 19, 2015).

<sup>10</sup> World Tourism Organization. *UNWTO Tourism Highlights. 2014 Edition*. Page 6. <http://www.e-unwto.org/content/r13521/fulltext.pdf> (accessed May 19, 2015).

<sup>11</sup> The Conference Board of Canada. *Outlook for Outbound Leisure Travel. Summer 2015*. Page 2.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. Page 12.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. Page 12.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. Page 3.

<sup>15</sup> The Conference Board of Canada. *Outbound Canada. March 2015*. A monthly report on Canadian outbound travel. Page 11.

<sup>16</sup> The Conference Board of Canada. *Outlook for Outbound Leisure Travel. Summer 2015*. Page 7.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. Page 7.

<sup>18</sup> Bonjour La France. Most visited France tourist attractions and sites. <http://www.bonjourlafrance.com/france-tourist-attractions/france-tourist-attraction.htm> (accessed May 20, 2015).

<sup>19</sup> The Conference Board of Canada. *Outlook for Outbound Leisure Travel. Summer 2015*. Page 6.

<sup>20</sup> Fodor's Travel. *France Travel Guide*. When to go. <http://www.fodors.com/world/europe/france/travel-tips/when-to-go-2748266/> (accessed May 20, 2015).

<sup>21</sup> The Conference Board of Canada. *Outlook for Outbound Leisure Travel. Summer 2015*. Page 6.

<sup>22</sup> The Conference Board of Canada. *Canadian Travel Health Insurance Company Survey Results for 2013. May 2014*. Page 3.

© The Blue Cross and Ontario Blue Cross symbols are registered trademarks of the Canadian Association of Blue Cross Plans, used under licence by the Canassurance Hospital Service Association.