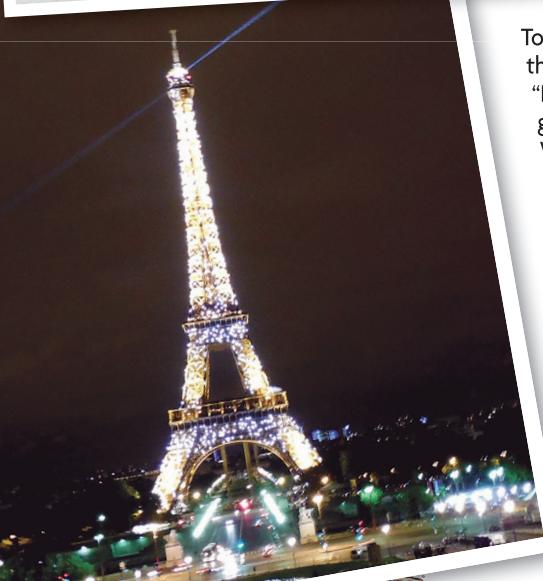


Britain enjoys increase in tourism, France and Belgium also trying to boost domestic tourism!



Story and pictures by
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LONDON: Great Britain, once a mighty and powerful empire with numerous colonies in many parts of the world, is gradually recovering from the decline brought about by the recession and uncertain economic conditions. Infrastructure is slowly crumbling, jobs are hard to find, racism seems to be on the increase and once the land of honey and plenty is struggling to find ways to turn things around.

The recent recession which hit most of Europe has not been kind to Britain. The savior of Great Britain is the fast growing tourism industry.

Tourism is a great and valuable source of foreign exchange for this country. It has become the country's highest export earner after chemicals and financial service.

International tourists and visitors spend around \$30.2 billion (Canadian) a year. And when combined with domestic tourism, this valuable industry is worth \$192,825,000 a year and employs 2.6 million people. This accounts for around nine per cent of the United Kingdom economy.

Tourism is now growing faster than other economic sectors. According to Donald Harris, who runs a tourist souvenir shop in London, tourism is an industry which Britain competes well internationally, "It is forecast tourism will be one of Britain's best performing sectors over the next decade," he said.

This simply means tourism is showing faster growth than recognized industries like manufacturing, utilities, retailing, transport and communications.

Britain's tourism policy, published a few years ago, has set the target of becoming one of the five most productive visitor economies in the world.

Today, international tourism has become the most fiercely competitive business. "Britain is trying to capture its share of global tourism growth," added Mary Walsh, a tour guide.

Tourism's contribution to the United Kingdom could grow by more than 60 per cent by 2020.

Britain is reputed to be the eighth biggest tourist destination in the world.

The number of jobs directly and indirectly linked to tourism could rise by 264,000 in that time.

Some recent events have greatly helped in attracting hordes of international tourists to Britain.

One big factor was the 2012 Olympics and Paralympics Games.

This prestigious international event gave Britain a tremendous opportunity to promote the country's attractiveness as a destination to the rest of the world. Also, celebrations to mark Queen Elizabeth's diamond jubilee provided a big boost to the country so did the fabled wedding of Prince William to Kate

Middleton and the birth of new royal. If figures prove right, Britain would have welcomed more than 2.89 million visitors by the end of 2013. Another thing that has helped boost tourism is simplifying the visa application process and also making it much easier for tourists from China to come to Britain.

Tourists from China now flock to Britain in increasing numbers.

Some of the most important attractions in Britain are enjoying a ride on the London Eye, changing of the guards ceremony outside the Buckingham Palace, visit to Madame Tussauds Wax Museum and, if you love the sport of cricket, the Lord's Cricket Ground is the place to visit. London is a vibrant city with lots to do and experience.

Talking about the weather is the time honoured way to start a conversation in Britain. It is always a good idea to be prepared for rain.

London is a wonderful place to visit and experience.

Meanwhile, neighbouring France attracted 83 million foreign visitors in 2012.

The figures for 2013 are expected to be much better.

Tourism is third in income from tourism due to briefer visits. France has nearly 40 sites inscribed in UNESCO's World Heritage List. Enchanting France is what European vacation dreams are made of.

Paris is soaked with culture and history. Paris with its iconic Eiffel Tower continues to be the main attraction in Paris. The country is best known for its beaches and seaside resorts and ski resorts and many head to France for green tourism. Tourism is accountable for six per cent of the country's income.

Paris, the capital, is the most visited in the world. It has some of the world's largest and renowned museums, including the Louvre, which is the most visited art museum in the world.

Eiffel Tower is the most visited paid monument in the world. The illumination tour of Paris is something to see and experience. The world famous painting of Mona Lisa by Leonardo da Vinci is also a big attraction which will leave you breathless.

Another big attraction is the magnificent Palace of Versailles. This was the residence of the kings of France from 1682 until 1790.

Tourism is also one of Belgium's important industries. The country's accessibility from elsewhere in Europe still makes it a popular tourist destination. Tourism generates 2.8 per cent of Belgium's gross domestic product and employs 3.3 per cent of the working population. About nine million tourists were expected to visit Belgium in 2013.

Most of the visitors are from nearby countries like France, the Netherlands, Germany and the United Kingdom.

One of the main attractions in Belgium is the adorable Manneken Pis Statue, the charming fountain of a little boy. This has become the symbol of Brussels.

Other attractions include the beautiful Grand Palace, the Town Hall and the municipal museum. Tourists also flock to the Atomium, a structure representing the concept of an iron molecule enlarged 165 billion times.

You cannot visit Belgium and not taste the mouth watering chocolates.

