

Lifestyle

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New nursery decor with style

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A man sells balloons on the banks of the Yalu River in the Chinese border town of Dandong opposite to the North Korean town of Sinuiju yesterday. — AFP

Some are wary after attacks, but Paris magic still enchants tourists

Some visitors may be steering clear of the world's top tourist destination after terror attacks in the French capital, but for lovers, shoppers and gourmands who dare to go, Paris will always be Paris. Quaint Parisian streets have been a little quieter and lines outside the Louvre museum or under the Eiffel Tower a little shorter since a November jihadist attack which killed 130 people.

Francois Navarro, head of the Paris region tourist board, said hotel reservations were down about 20 percent, with many cancellations from Japanese, Chinese and Russian tourists in the wake of the second devastating attack to hit the City of Light within a year.

He said it had taken the Paris region three months to recover from the January 2015 attacks on the Charlie Hebdo magazine and a Jewish supermarket. "There has been more of an impact" after gunmen and suicide bombers went on a killing spree at Paris nightspots in November, Navarro said. "But security has also never been as high in Paris. That reassures tourists," he said, adding that visitor figures were expected to pick up again in March.

'The magic of Paris took over'

The full impact of the terror attacks on 2015 tourism figures is not yet known, but while some backed out of their dream trip, the allure of Paris was too strong for others. "At first, I didn't want to come at all, because of the attacks. But I decided not to give into fear... Visiting Paris had always been one of my wishes," said Annika, a 23-year-old German on her first solo trip abroad. "I came to realize that I could just as easily be hit by a car anywhere in the world anytime and I wouldn't be able to do much about it either," she said. Her attitude reflects that of many who keep coming to Paris, said Navarro, adding that travellers today have "adapted to the fact that these tragic events can happen anywhere."

Annika said the presence of police and soldiers on the streets and bag checks at tourist sites "made me feel a little bit safe." "The magic of Paris totally took over," she said, adding



This file photo taken on February 07, 2014 shows tourists on the Trocadero, in front of the Eiffel tower, in Paris. — AFP

she was glad to visit the Place de la Republique, a square which has become a shrine to the victims of the attacks. Immortalized in song, movies and the hearts of romantics the world over, "there is something so particular about Paris," said Navarro, who is cheerily optimistic that tourist figures will recover.

The city is a magnet for museum lovers, with its rich history and architectural gems, foodies dreaming of buttery croissants and little bistros, and shoppers looking for Parisian glamour. The greater Paris region attracted some 19 million

foreign tourists in 2014, while France as a whole lured 83 million travellers from abroad, making it the world's top tourist destination.

Reassuring China, Japan

China, the fifth biggest contributor of tourists to France after Britain, the United States, Germany and Italy, is one of the biggest markets for growth and tourist authorities are keen to allay any nervousness among travellers there. Wang Yang, of the Liurenyou travel agency in Beijing, told AFP that

60 percent of their clients had cancelled trips to France after the November attack. "In the mind of many Chinese tourists, security in France is lacking," she said. In a bid to win over Chinese tourists, France has cut visa waiting times and Navarro said the city would welcome 55 Chinese tour operators at the end of February to "talk security and show them what the destination has to offer."

The operators would spend two hours visiting police headquarters on their trip to Paris. Chinese and Japanese tourists are some of the biggest spenders in France and a delegation of tourism officials will also visit Tokyo in June in a bid to reassure tourist agencies there. "We are seeing a certain impact from the attacks, with the number of tourists to France down compared to the past years," said Hidekazu Kihara, a spokesman for the Nippon Travel Agency in Japan. One Japanese official in Paris spoke of a "drastic" drop in visitor numbers to France.

'Part of our history'

To Navarro, the Paris attacks have "now become part of our history." "But Paris remains the capital of love, of gastronomy, of shopping." Joel Haywood, 34, and his girlfriend Yao, who live in Beijing, were walking through the unusually calm quaint streets of the Ile Saint Louis, a normally bustling island in the heart of Paris. "It is just like the Paris we always heard about," said Yao, adding they had been intrigued to come and see how Parisians were coping after the attacks, and found "everyone is happy."

Like many others, they shrugged off security concerns with the phrase: "It can happen anywhere." A short walk away, across the Seine, Mark Woods and Samantha Arnold from England were waiting in line under the gargoyles and bell towers of the Notre Dame cathedral. The glowing couple can attest to the fact that Paris is still very much the city of magic and romance. "He proposed to me on Friday, that just proves it," said Samantha. "Under the Eiffel tower," added Mark. — AFP



Revelers, their bodies painted with a mixture of cane sugar syrup and coal depicting the devil, perform during the 2016 National Carnival Parade yesterday in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. The name in Haitian creole of the carnival for this year is 'Ayiti Toutan' (Haiti Always). The launch of the carnival two days ago was postponed due to the political situation affecting Haiti. — AFP



Revelers in devil costumes dance during a street parade on the last day of Carnival celebrations in Panama City. — AP