

The evolving role of transportation in attracting British Tourism to the South of France: a tourism and cultural regional case study

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Abstract

The article discusses the evolving role of transportation, and more especially air transport enabling tourism access to regions in the South of France. Historically, British citizens visited France by train, coach or car as the cost of air travel was restrictive and routes were only established in larger cities.

With the advent of the English tunnel and Low Cost Carriers (LCCs) in Europe, British tourism increased within numerous destinations in France. These new means of transportation have filled the gap by providing easy access to smaller towns and allowing British tourists the French quality of life in the countryside. There is a shift in visitation numbers from the north of France to the south due to the increased choice of transportation. The South of France is becoming more attractive to British tourism because of the comparatively inexpensive cost of housing, the historical links between the two countries, and the cultural heritage of tradition. Other attractions include landscapes, the Mediterranean climate, restored medieval castles and villages, and the abundance of traditional French cuisine with regional wines.

Due to the availability of LCCs some British tourists have chosen to settle and enjoy the historical links that are famous between the two countries. Many are now able to enjoy the tourist life for extended periods in the South of France with the purchase of a second home. It's also now possible to keep working in England as the LCCs make it affordable and possible to commute between their intercontinental homes.

Through a review of issues and literature, the article will discuss the evolving air transportation heritage related to British tourism in the South of France.

Keywords: *British heritage tourism, South West of France, air travel, regional heritage tourism, transportation.*

Introduction

In Great Britain and France, travel and tourism play a significant role in the economy. On the one hand, Great Britain remains in the top 10 in terms of number of international tourist arrivals, which means its inbound tourism is well-developed. However this country is also known for its outbound tourism. On the other hand, France is definitely considered as a major tourism destination and the South of France is also known for attracting British tourists.

Last century, railway extension had strongly contributed to the development of British tourism on the French Riviera with the first French beach resorts right where the steep foothills of the Alps meet the azure waters of the Mediterranean and Atlantic Coast (Biarritz) together with the French Alps (Chamonix Mont Blanc).

Steamships [Dewailly, 1990], steam trains, cars and coaches were mainly frequented by British Aristocrats as far back as the 1950s. A religious man named Thomas Cook after attending a temperance meeting, submitted to the secretary of the Midland Railway Company, the idea to carry the temperance supporters of Leicester to a meeting in Loughborough. A few weeks later, about 500 passengers were conveyed 12 miles and back in open carriages for a shilling. Since the beginning of Thomas Cook international travel company in 1841, millions of travel agencies have opened [Fraser Rae, 1891], offering short and long-haul packages (railways, coaches or plane, accommodation, transfers by bus or taxi, boat, restaurants and, leisure activities). Soon after, in the second part of the 20th century, wide-body jets contributed to democratized tourism for the middle classes, and extended tourism to new French regions from Périgord to Luberon.

Access to each French region has clearly improved to the benefit of both residents and tourism. One of the key engines which generated the extension of the territory is the use of evolved transportation – infrastructure and means –. Technology has always looked for solutions in a perpetual conquest of speed and comfort. Tourism and transport are inextricably linked.

The complex interplay between transport actors and tourism activities is central to the efficiency in connecting heritage tourism. From skiers to surfers, from walkers to motorcyclists, from adventure-seeking visitors, sun, sea and sand tourism to natural and authentic cultural heritage tourism, the British have always enjoyed France.

1. Tourism & transportation in France

Despite being the top touristic destination, French authorities remained for a long time insensitive to LCCs potential benefits. Several reasons account for this apparent inertia.

Firstly, French flagship carrier Air France has dominated for years both domestic and medium-haul flight operations. More often than not, the reason behind this is attributed to French national authorities' protectionist measures. However insiders claim the following reason to be more influential which involves high geographic density within airports. As a result, inbound traffic expands whereas outbound traffic contracts. Such a situation has led to a low competitive environment that has discouraged any potential entrants. Secondly, the French domestic air transport network was primarily designed to provide seasonal needs based on the habits of French travelers rather than frequency preferences of international tourists'.

Thirdly, the French national road and railway network is quite developed and represents an efficient alternative to air transportation [INSEE, 2014].

Table 1: Cross-channel passengers to France
Source : SOeS, INSEE 2014

	In thousand of passengers						
	2000	2001	2010	2011	2012	2 013	13/12 (en %)
Eurotunnel passengers	18 409	17 781	(r) 18 317	(r) 18 996	(r) 19 976	20 448	2,4
Eurostar Passagers	7 130	6 947	9 529	9 680	9 912	10 133	2,2
Shuttle tourism (1)	10 021	9 488	7 549	7 878	(r) 8 397	8 764	4,4
Freight car shuttles (1)	1 258	1 346	(r) 1 240	(r) 1 438	(r) 1 667	1 551	-7,0
Passengers by ferries (2)	20 647	19 961	16 635	(r) 16 269	15 252	15 973	4,7
<i>Including Calais (2)</i>	<i>15 064</i>	<i>14 366</i>	<i>10 236</i>	(r) 10 063	<i>9 345</i>	<i>10 372</i>	<i>11,0</i>
Passengers by air	2 915	2 698	(r) 6 016	6 649	6 786	6 980	2,9
Paris-London (3)	2 915	2 698	(r) 1 641	1 788	1 762	1 842	4,6
Districts- London	///	///	(r) 4 375	4 861	5 024	5 138	2,3
Total	41 972	40 441	(r) 40 968	(r) 41 914	42 013	43 401	3,3

(1): estimated by SOeS based from Eurotunnel data and let loading of cars rate.(2) : y c. commuting from Ireland and channel-ilsands (3) : Orly & Roissy - Charles de Gaulle airports. r : revised data. /// : no data available

As Table 1 shows in 2013, travelers by sea transport on the cross-channel regular lines returns to growth with 4.7% compared to – 5.9% in 2012. Rail transportation of cross-Channel passengers increased for the fourth consecutive year with 2.2% in 2013. That growth concerned Eurostar and shuttle tourism. For the first time, in 2013, Eurostar reached a record of 10 million passengers for the year. Passengers using shuttle tourism (cars, buses and coaches) grew by +4.4% but less than in 2012 (+6.6%). On the other hand, the passenger transport by shuttle freight (drivers of trucks) decreased drastically in 2013 with – 7% after two consecutive years of 2% growth. Air transport between Paris and London increased by 2.9% in 2013 and related to both Parisian and provincial airports.

2. British heritage tourism in France

Latest figures show that France has retained its title as the world's top tourist destination, with 83.7 million foreign visitors in 2014. France is one of the most popular destinations for British tourists. According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD, 2015], the UK was the number one market in terms of international arrivals in France in 2010 and number two in 2013 with 12.6 million after Germany which accounted for 13 million [ONS, 2016].

Even though Paris remains the most visited city in the world, the search for genuine, natural and uncongested areas of France has become the basis of the image of British tourism in France.

The 21st century British clientele travels more often, uses airline companies [ONS, 2016] to go to the ever bound prestigious sites such as Cannes, Biarritz, Sarlat, etc.... but also using any of the most convenient means of transport to reach what they call: the “other South of France” [Calder, 2009]. Mainly British or Irish low cost airlines now land in secondary airports such as Limoges, Bergerac, Carcassonne or Béziers and enjoy in a few hours' time another wide horizon with a distinct identity from Paris and and sharing old affinities with England.

The new routes of these LCCs have facilitated British people to commute between their home country and relatively unknown and unspoiled parts of south-western France, now also accessible by air.

British visitors to France are independent holiday makers [Napoli, 2003] who make their own accommodation arrangements. Another characteristic is the tendency to concentrate on relatively restricted geographical areas, such as small historical villages in the South West of France (*e.g.* Dordogne). As British tourists prefer renting self-catering accommodation including villas, cottages and *gîtes*, they have an immediate impact on the community especially since properties are nearly always owned by local people. This development

represents the beginning of a different era of British tourism to France, with notably varied and attractively developed parameters.

There are several reasons which explain why British tourism is closely linked to French tourism.

History has shown us that England and France have for a long time been tied in many ways: sometimes through wars (e.g. the Napoleonic Wars), sometimes through alliances (e.g. during World War I). In order to understand the arrival and development of British tourism in the South of France, it is first necessary to mention several key periods in the history of both countries.

In fact, the common history between France and Britain goes back a long way. Already in the Middle-Ages, several historical characters played an important role in the connection of the two countries. For instance, in the 12th century, Eleanor of Aquitaine was an emblematic figure and had a major impact on both countries becoming closer. Born the Duchess of Aquitaine, she married Louis VII, King of France, but divorced several years later. Shortly afterwards, she married Henry of Anjou, who would soon become King of England. Attached to her culture, Eleanor of Aquitaine spread the French culture to England during her marriage.

Later on, in the 18th century, the Grand Tour was known for being a turning point in the development of tourism in Europe, and more precisely between France and Britain. The Grand Tour was a rite of passage for young men of upper-middle class. The journey typically involved three or four years of travel around Europe, including cities considered as cradles of culture such as Paris [Rosenberg, 2016]. From there, tourists would continue their journey either across the Alps or take a boat on the Mediterranean Sea. Thus, this led to the development of French “provincial” regions.

In the late 18th century, the French Riviera became a trendy health resort for the British upper class. Several British writers and politicians enjoyed staying there. They started the promotion of the area by writing novels about it (mainly aimed at British people). In 1864, the first railway was completed, making the French Riviera [Boyer, 2002] accessible to visitors [Boyer, 2002] from all over Europe.

Another historical fact is the “Entente Cordiale” in the early 20th century. In 1904, Britain and France signed an agreement which established a diplomatic understanding and started a mutual interest in both cultures. This period is said to be the beginning of the introduction of French culture (food, wine etc.) in Britain [de Bast, 2012]. Since then, both countries have maintained a close relationship and in 2004, Queen Elisabeth II undertook a state visit to/in France to celebrate the centenary of the Entente Cordiale. She described [BBCNews, 2004] it

as an “affair of the heart” that must still be “cultivated” [BBC, 2004]. Another symbol of the link between the two countries was when Louis Blériot crossed the Channel in an aeroplane in 1909.

Furthermore, the development of annual leave in the 1960s has significantly contributed to the increasing number of British tourists in the South of France. The annual leave was implemented in order to improve the workers’ living conditions and to facilitate the access to tourism, travel and leisure.

Another factor which leads to the increasing number of British tourists in the South of France is the easy access to this part of France and the development of air transport, including that of Low Cost Carriers.

3. The evolution of heritage air transportation

During WWI, airplanes became a vital tool for victory, ushering in a brave new world of battle. Airplanes were the future of war, but they had yet to prove themselves as the future of peace.

After the war, Britain had a surplus of warplanes that would jumpstart its commercial air industry. But the early 1920s was a hard period for British aircraft companies. Unlike their counterparts in France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and the United States, very little government investment in British air travel occurred during peacetime.

Passengers can travel from Paris to London by airplane in just over an hour. Many airlines offer this trip, ranging from low-cost easy Jet to smaller airlines such as City Jet to large airlines including British Airways, Air France and Lufthansa. Airlines depart from Luton, London City Airport, Heathrow or Gatwick.

It was on February 8th 1919 that the first flight with passengers (12) connecting France and United Kingdom took place. It was carried out by Lucien Boussoutrot on an aircraft of La Société des Lignes Farman. It took-off in Toussus-le-Noble and landed in Kenley [Branchu, 2014] which became the first from Paris – London. The goal was to “put an end to the splendid isolation of the United Kingdom” [Branchu, 2014]. However, because of the ban to fly to the UK, dating from 1914, no flights would be launched. It was only, on May 1st 1919 that law was repealed, as a first British company Aircraft Transport and Travel, opened a regular line between Hounslow (then Croydon) and Le Bourget on 25 August of the same year. These trips weren’t affordable for all, that’s why the clientele was composed of affluent people (artists, politician, businessman...).

Faced with the opening sky and having to deal with competition, airlines were created on each side of the Channel. For example in the UK, Imperial Airways [Farley, 2015] was born from the merger of Instone Air Line Company, British Marine Air Navigation and Daimler Airway following recommendations given by the Government Commission Hambling¹. On France's side, Air Union was created.

Since its inception, Air France, the future French national company, positioned itself in the cross-Channel link market. It would use their best aircrafts while reducing the flight duration from 2h37 to 1h05. By operating five round trips daily, the company became the most popular for this line.

Later, Air France, by "turning away" from this line in favor of Paris - New York, would leave British European Airways, soon to be British Airways, to position itself on this route.

With the increase in demand and supply improving, airports were now too small give way to newer platforms. Thus, Orly replaces Le Bourget and the London airports Heathrow and Gatwick replace that of Croydon.

Today, Air France operates 11 round-trips daily between Paris-CDG and London Heathrow and between Orly and City Airport. As for British Airways, it operates up to 10 round trips daily between Paris and London and up to 90 flights a week to French provinces.

Traffic UK- France

Cross-Channel traffic service has continued to grow despite the launch [Fodor, 1996] of Eurostar in 1994 [Fodor's 96]. However with the advent of low-cost airlines, capitals no longer occupy the same place and are also seeing a decrease [DGAC, 2008] while those between the French provinces -UK have increased. For example, between 1994 and 2007 the number of passengers decreased from 4,000,000 to 2,200,000 on the "Paris – London" route. Over the same period, on the other lines linking the two countries, traffic has increased by 2,6 [DGAC, 2008]. The shift from major airports to secondary airports has opened new destinations within distance to city centers.

In France, 30 airports are receiving flights from the United Kingdom including dozens of airports in south of France. Since Europe deregulated its airways in the 1990s, this set up the liberalization of the skies of the EU members for EU low cost carriers, LCCs have taken flight. The rise of LCCs in Europe made its mark on the worldwide airline industry after

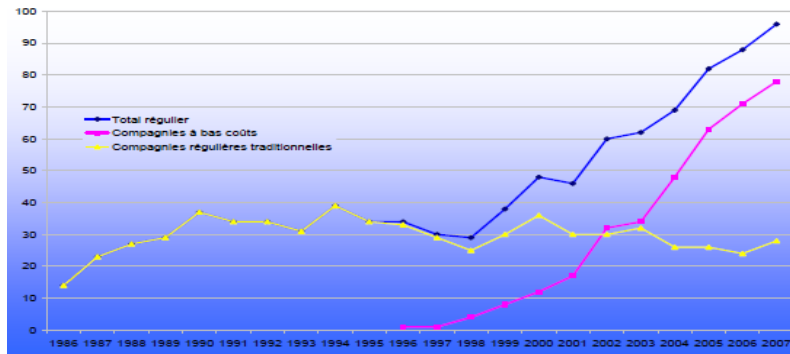
2000, especially in Europe with the development of Ryanair and Easyjet, two main European LCCs [Jorre, A,2013].

In 1996, only one year after its establishment, EasyJet decides to serve Nice, quickly followed by its competitor, Ryanair, opened flights from Dublin and Glasgow -Prestwick to Beauvais. In 1998, the Irish served its first destination in the South of France, Carcassonne. In the early 2000s, Ryanair created 18 lines to France from London Stansted. The low-cost transport network was developed initially in the south, on the French Riviera.

With a growing market in France, air traffic has become a major player in the low-cost transportation since many French airports have been designated as the base of the market leader (EasyJet: Mulhouse, CDG, and Ryanair: Marseille) [Ayoun, 2008].

Thanks to their business model oriented to the reduction of operational and marketing costs (quick turnaround of their aircrafts at airports, serving secondary airports, all services paid by customers for e.g.), nowadays LCCs play an important role in the airline industry especially in Europe where they took 26% of the market share in 2013 [World Tourism Organisation, 2013].

Figure 1: Air traffic between France (except Paris) and the UK
Source: DGAC



This chart *figure 1* regarding the air traffic between France and the United Kingdom shows that both traffic and links have increased substantially since 1996, even pushing traffic up and widening the gap from 2003 with traditional companies. (E.g. Number of connection in 2007. Traditional companies = 30 / Low Cost = 80).

Finally, according to *Atout France*, 72% of British travelers came to France by plane in 2013 against 65.5 by sea (including cruises) but rail has jumped by 5% with an increase in traffic seen through Eurostar.

Air France has focused only on the routes from and to the Parisian airports leaving a boulevard to others including the low-cost airlines enabling them to enjoy a constant growing market.

4. Heritage transportation tourism and British tourism

The democratization of transportation has offered opportunities to discover many small towns which were unknown or difficult to reach before extensive public works were undertaken. The Languedoc is also appreciated by many Britons for its mild climate, warmer and sunnier than in the UK. There are also many other favourite places, such as Burgundy, Bordeaux as well as the in the Dordogne area which are famous for its quality of life, wine, gastronomy and natural diversity, thus adding to cultural heritage tourism.

The British do not only travel to the South of France, they also buy secondary residences there. But what are the reasons why British tourists are so fond of this part of France?

Table 2: Geographic settlement of foreign second home /residence
Source : FILICOM 2003 de la DGI

	Foreign owners	Share of the 4 main origins (%)				
		Numbers	Share	UK	Switzerland	Italy
Mediterranean	100 300	12.8 %	1.7 %	1.6 %	3.4 %	1.7 %
Center East	30 100	7.2 %	1.4 %	2.6 %	0.6 %	0.4 %
South West	26 400	7.3 %	2.7 %	0.2 %	£	0.9 %
West	24 600	5.2 %	3.2 %	0.2 %	£	0.7 %
Bassin	17 900	4.3 %	1.7 %	0.6 %	£	0.3 %
Paris. Ile de France	10 800	5.1 %	0.5 %	0.5 %	0.8 %	0.3 %
East	10 300	10.4 %	0.1 %	2.7 %	0.1 %	5.7 %
North	2 700	5.3 %	2.6 %	£	£	0.2 %
Metropolis	223 000	7.9 %	1.9 %	1.1 %	1.1 %	1.0 %

As Table 2 shows, the West and South West region of France are the two most popular regions of British population with respectively 3.2% and 2.7% of owners.

The British come to the South of France for landscapes, the mild climate which is natural and valuable resources that money can't buy. Tourists generally prefer travelling to regions with similar climates, but there is also a strong preference for travelling to warmer countries (Culiuc, 2014). Several cities which are located in this area of France recorded the highest sunshine rate in Europe, especially along the Mediterranean coast (from Perpignan to Nice).

This precious feature also leads to the fact that British tourists do not only go there in summer, but also in mid and low seasons.

Another reason why British are keen on going to the South of France is because of cultural heritage tourism. This term includes a lot of different features, such as:

- Heritage sites: Heritage sites: among the 39 UNESCO World Heritage sites in France, 11 are located in the South of France. Those sites are very authentic and can't be reproduced anywhere else, and if they could be, this wouldn't prevent people from wanting to see the real sites. "Cultural capital" plays a role in explaining tourism flows (Culiuc, 2014:14).
- Local gastronomy: in 2010, France was the first country to have its gastronomy recognized by UNESCO as "intangible cultural heritage"[France, 2010]. The different regions of France offer many various culinary specialties, including in the South of France. The southern French gastronomy is often very appreciated by the British.
- Fine wine: the imperious reputation of its excellent quality still attracts many British tourists to the South of France. This area offers wines which are renowned worldwide. For example, the region Languedoc-Roussillon offers the largest and oldest vineyard in the world.
- Landscapes diversity: in the South of France, British people enjoy the variety of coastlines (Mediterranean coast, Atlantic coast), of mountain ranges (Alps, Pyrenees) and the different climates.
- Geographical location: when coming to the South of France, British people can also easily reach two neighboring countries, i.e. Spain and Italy.

Due to increased technological advancement in the transport industry, tourism has been enhanced providing momentum for various forms of travel. The role of evolving heritage transportation is helping people to move faster and farther than ever before.

Conclusion

Tourism is a dynamic system in an evolving society with effects on the management of geographical space. The growth of international transportation is emphasized as a means of improving services to local communities and tourists.

Low Cost Carriers are playing a more important role in today's tourism industry than ever before. Thanks to lower costs, they have created and served a new demand, operated common routes, created new ones and become more and more popular regardless of criticism towards them. LCCs was originated in the UK and started to serve Mediterranean cities as

primary destinations. The LCCs have significantly contributed to reshape the market landscape and increased British tourism in France.

British tourist behaviour is very specific and this analysis highlights the cultural image and impression left in the British tourist's mind. A strong link between Britain and France exists and this paper shows that Britons have been able to create a close connection with the country at a personal, historical, and cultural level.

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