

CANADIANS' FAVOURITE DESTINATION REPRODUCIBLE WORKSHEET 7.1

Name: _____ Date: _____

EUROPE'S FINEST HOUR

By Laszlo Buhasz

For most of us who have already been there—backpacking and hostelling in their youth, visiting on all-inclusive tours, or arriving as independent travellers—Europe is a storehouse of rich memories. For those yet to go, it remains a must-do-it destination.

About 1.5 million Canadians (making 2.2 million visits) crossed the Atlantic in 1999, spending upwards of \$7.5 billion on Italian food, English theatre, and French wine. This year, the number promises to grow even higher, as the Conference Board of Canada forecasts a 3.5-per-cent increase over those already-impressive figures.

Indeed, while the ease of visiting the United States makes it our number-one foreign destination (last year Canadians made 3.5 million trips south of the border in July and August alone), Europe, according to a Conference Board survey released last month, is the overseas destination Canadians desire to travel to most. In all, it found that 55 per cent of Canadians were “very interested” in visiting Europe over the next two years. By contrast, only 14 per cent picked the Caribbean. And just last month, Canadian travel agents reported that ticket sales to Europe are 18 per cent ahead of last year’s.

Canadians’ reasons for going are also changing. Even as recently as the late 1980s, according to the Conference Board, six out of 10 non-business-related trips to Europe were made to see European friends and relatives. Only 40 per cent went for the sheer fun of it. Today, the proportions have reversed: Nearly six in ten trips in 1999 were to experience the pleasures of Europe, plain and simple. ...

Because it is generally a pricier proposition than ... the US, Mexico, or the Caribbean, Europe has long been an especially

attractive destination to older and financially established travellers, [many of whom] have a keen interest in history and culture. But there is some change on that front as well. The Conference Board reports that so-called package-tour trips to Europe—similar to those long popular with Caribbean travellers, and which can be prepaid in Canadian dollars—are becoming increasingly popular.

And this year even more so. That’s because our dollar is actually worth a fair bit more now than it was in 1999: The loonie is up 35 per cent against the euro, which last year became the monetary standard in pretty much every Western European country except the UK. Peter Shackelford, regional director for Europe at the World Tourism Organization in Madrid, recalls that European tour operators and hotel owners once feared that a powerful euro would deflect tourists to cheaper destinations, like Turkey and Morocco. The present mix of weak euro, low European inflation, and a booming US and Canadian economy, he says, “is a tour operator’s dream.”

To be sure, not everyone in Europe is exulting. In Britain, which has not yet adopted the euro, the pound has gained in value, making that country more expensive for travellers from both North America and the Continent. This month the British Tourist Authority revised tourism growth estimates downward, from 5 per cent to 3 per cent. Britain risks losing visitors to France and Italy, it warned, where prices, measured in dollars, are as much as 20 per cent lower than a year ago. Even so, the country is expecting an increase in Canadian visitors in 2000—as tourists continue their longtime love affair with the countries across the pond.

Source: Excerpts from “Europe’s Finest Hour,” by Laszlo Buhasz
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Activities

1. How many Canadians visited Europe in 1999? How much money did they spend?
2. What is Canadian’s number-one travel destination? List the reasons why.
3. Where do Canadians “desire to travel the most”? Why?
4. What type of traveller does Europe attract? Describe.
5. How will the euro attract Canadians to Europe? Why is the UK concerned that the number of Canadian tourists might decrease?