

GAMBIA TOURISM TO KICK START THE ECONOMY



After a difficult political alternation, preceded by several years of authoritarian governance, the new Gambian authorities aim to give new impetus to the country's economy, with the priority of making tourism an important lever of the country's economic development. A difficult, but achievable goal given Gambian tourism potential.

With some 150 000 tourists per year, far behind its neighbor Senegal, Gambia remains one of the most important tourism centers in West Africa. With its beaches of fine sand, beautiful landscapes and an interesting colonial history, this small country (11,300 km²) of around 1,991,000 inhabitants has everything it takes to seduce tourists. From "Serekunda" to "Kotu", "Bjilio", "Fajara", "Bakau", "Brufut", "l'île James"... a holiday spent in this country will always be full of pleasant surprises.

It is therefore not surprising that the new authorities are betting on Gambia tourism and on all of its associated services to boost their country's economy. It should be said that since the 1960s, Gambia has distinguished itself as an attractive tourist destination, especially for European tourists. In this regard, the country is somewhat of a bonanza, since it is situated within 3 hours flying time of some European capitals.

According to Guillaume Pepin, West Africa Director for the online travel platform "Jumia Travel", "With its current stability, Gambia is experiencing a significant return of European tourists who had somewhat deserted this destination. It has a new, more appealing face, and the Gambia tourism authorities who are hoping to make this sector a lever of economic growth, need to take advantage of this trend by accentuating the country's tourism assets. Also, Gambia has the advantage of being seen by some as an extension of Senegal, therefore the authorities should take advantage of this fact to attract tourists from Senegal in order to complete Gambia's tourism offer, since both of these countries have much in common".

According to the Gambia tourism ministry, the sector employs around 10 000 people - which represents over 15% of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) - a much higher rate than in several other African countries.

In order to attract more visitors and to raise tourism up to the level of becoming a motor for economic growth, a number of challenges must be met.

First of all, in terms of the country's image. **Despite its enormous potential and its colonial history, the country's image has been sullied by the sexual tourism which has developed in a number of Gambia tourism destinations - a major challenge to be overcome.** It is important for the authorities to take the necessary steps to provide Gambia with a glowing image, since the development of tourism is above all a matter of public perception.

There is also the challenge of infrastructure. Like many African countries which have gone through tumultuous times caused by dictatorships, everything has yet to be built. Gambia is considered to be one of the poorest countries in the continent, where many aspects of basic infrastructure are absent from the large urban centers. But impossible does not seem to be in the vocabulary of the new

Gambia tourism authorities.

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