

Africa's Tourism Potential Is Largely Untapped

According to a recent World Bank report, the tourism sector in the African Sahara region is poised for better economic prospects. The industry is likely to be employing about 6.7 million people by the year 2021.

“The tourism sector is among the largest employers in Sub Saharan Africa. In 2011, one out of every 20 jobs directly or indirectly came from tourism. This sector also has the largest number of women working as employees as well as managers. The region is also among the fastest growing in all of Africa,” stated the authors of the ‘Tourism in Africa: Harnessing Tourism for Growth and Improved Livelihoods’ report.



The report analyzes the potential of Africa's tourism and suggests that 33 out of the 48 countries in the Sub Saharan region can benefit greatly. The governments however need to form strong political framework aimed at supporting the sector. This will not only develop the industry in general, but will also attract private funding and investment.

The report further puts forth success stories of Kenya, South Africa, Cape Verde, Tanzania, Mauritius, Rwanda, Namibia, and many others. They expanded the tourism sector by simplifying tourism guidelines, and freeing up air transportation. The countries also created a friendly environment for investors through the protection of the communities as well as the ecosystem.

“The private firms in Africa are the leaders when it comes to attracting investors both locally and also globally. This has led to Africa having one of the highest returns on investment,” said Makhtar Diop, Africa's Vice President for World Bank.

In order to remain sustainable and encourage growth, the private sector should work more closely with the government. The partnerships ought to work on addressing issues such as infrastructure, electricity, transport, as well as other crucial areas that hinder the growth of the sector.

Due to the high rate of return on investment being witnessed in the region, the tourism industry is increasingly attracting both regional as well as global investors. Chains of hotels that operate worldwide are among the main players taking advantage of this opportunity. The hotels have already invested millions of dollars by coming up with new developments. This is aimed at catering for the ever growing demand from the continent's middle class and also international tourists.



In 1990, 6.7 million tourists visited Africa. However, in 2012 the numbers rose to about 33.8 million visitors bringing in \$36 billion. This represents 2.8% of the GDP in the region. In 2011, the percentage share of global tourism in world GDP was 9.1%. Global tourism was 5.9% of exports and 4.5% of investment globally. The statistics clearly show that revenue from African tourism is increasing very fast and is also showing great potential.

Tourism remains quite essential in improving Africa's economy as well as job creation. The sector is also the most viable when it comes to creating job opportunities for the youth who form the largest number in the job sector. In order to achieve this and also improve infrastructure (road, rail, and airways), proper development and management of the tourism industry is necessary.

"The long-term growth and sustainability of the industry can be guaranteed by the formation of private and public partnerships that would result in wealth creation, equitable distribution of resources, and effective growth," said World Bank's Director of Financial and Private Sector Development, Mr. Gaiv Tata.

This is the foremost report to have ever gone into such details when examining tourism in Sub Saharan Africa. Other than just showing the true picture, it also goes ahead to offer recommendations that will help in job creation, transforming the economy, and eradicating poverty.



The tourism report was based on 24 case studies carried out all over the world. The report also offers invaluable information on how to come up with a feasible tourism strategy. African states can also use the approaches and policies showcased by the report so as to become competitive and consequently attract investors.

To quote Hannah Messerli, World Bank's Senior Private Sector Development Specialist for Africa and co-author of the report, "Despite the potential for tourism in Africa not being fully harnessed, it is still possible to reduce the gap if the right policy is applied ". She further states that Africa has huge potential considering its wealth in cultural resources, natural resources, and also business promise.

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