

Ghana to Attract More Tourists in Cultural and Business Travel Sectors

A new plan for tourism development introduced last year by the Ghana government is aiming at boosting the tourism industry and tapping into its vast potential for growth. The 15-year National Tourism Development Plan (NTDP) that was introduced in 2013 is supporting a number of high-end hotel developments in a bid to draw a wider spectrum of tourists to the country.



Some of the major new high-end developments in the country's hotel industry include the Protea in Takoradi, Accra's Golden Tulip, and the Best Western Atlantic Hotel which has already opened its doors in Takoradi.

A number of new five- and four-star hotels are also being built to accommodate more travelers to Accra. Capitalizing on the boom, the city's hotels were able to charge tariffs of more than \$250 a night in 2013. Average occupancy rates for the year also hit a high 80 percent, according to the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index compiled by the World Economic Forum for that year.

Takoradi is also expected to see a new wave of hotels, to meet rising demands in the city at the center of the new oil industry.

The Potential of the Tourism Sector

While the major players in Ghana's economy are the hydrocarbons, agriculture and mining industry as well as commodity export, with the NTDP it is also looking at the labor-intensive travel and tourism sector as another important driver of the economy. The government focuses more on developing niche markets such as eco-tourism and cultural tourism as well as attracting business travelers.

Though Ghana's tourism industry is still in early stages, it has plenty of potential for growth. According to the Economic Impact 2013 report published by the World Tourism and Travel Council (WTTC), Ghana's tourism industry could directly contribute as much as 9.7 percent in 2014, as compared to the 6.7 percent estimation for 2013. This figure is also well above the forecast of an overall 6.1 percent economic growth, made by the IMF. The report also added that the tourism sector has the potential to grow at least 4.5 percent in the next ten years up to 2024.



The government's efforts to diversify the tourism sector will also include efforts to draw new investments, especially via public-private-partnerships (PPP) that can help to fill up the existing gaps in infrastructure. With regard to growth in capital investment in the country's tourism and travel industry, the WTTC report predicted a 5.2 percent increase in 2013, slated to increase by 2.8 percent over the next 10 years until 2023.

According to the minister for tourism, culture and creative art, international visitors to Ghana are expected to reach 4.3 million per year by 2027. In 2012, the officially recorded number of international tourists to the country was 1.26 million. The government also expects the annual contribution of tourism to the economy to be \$8.3 billion by 2027.

The Hopes for Business Tourism

There is great hope in the country for its business tourism, which was strong in 2013 despite overall economic growth slowing slightly. 2007's discover of oil saw a great influx of business travelers, leading to a sharp rise in inbound capital and significant growth.

Hotel investors in the country say that investment in the industry is going strong, particularly in Accra and Takoradi, despite the uncertain economic situation caused by the 2012 elections and a third quarter fall in growth in 2013.



Ghana also hopes to play host to major international conferences, a hope that is being boosted by the UNTWO's choice to hold a forum of African tourism ministers there in late 2014.

Diversifying Tourism

The government will also market the many cultural, historical and natural attractions in the country to a wider audience. Most of the focus will be on the attractions around Accra but the aim is not only to attract tourists but encourage longer stays by business travelers. Begro, a prehistoric city and art and

crafts sites like the National Cultural Center in the Ashanti capital of Kumasi will be the starting points for these efforts.

Besides looking to attract new markets outside of US and EU, Ghana also plans to encourage domestic tourism. The 'Explore Ghana' national campaign was designed with the hopes of raising the profiles of important sites in the country and offers nationals more information about their country's history and culture. The campaign is also expected to create sources of income for locals in the hospitality, art and crafts and other sectors. Attracting investors will be key for the government, to enable the tourism sector to meet its potential.

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