

# AFRICA'S IMMENSE TOURISM POTENTIAL UNDERMINED BY TERRORISM

Nigeria, Egypt, Ivory Coast, Cameroon, Tunisia, Burkina Faso, Benin... In recent years, many African countries have been affected by terrorist attacks of varying magnitude. As the continent makes new investments in tourism, Africa's still unstable security climate is jeopardizing the future of a growing sector and the tourism potential.

## **Continent Attracting More and More Visitors...**

Although it accounts for only a marginal share of world tourism, Africa is attracting more and more visitors: 67 million in 2018. According to statistics, this is the second region in the world where the number of tourists increased the most last year, after Asia.

While the continent's most popular destinations remain heavyweights of the African economy such as Morocco, Egypt or South Africa, other countries such as Rwanda, Benin or Tanzania have begun to develop genuine tourism policies. These policies have increased the share of tourism in the economies of the continent's countries.

In its report "Travel & Tourism Economic Impact 2017, Sub Saharan Africa", the World Travel and Tourism Council indicated that the total contribution of tourism to the continent's GDP, estimated at USD 108.0 billion (7.1% of GDP) in 2016, will reach USD 178.5 billion in 2027 (or 7.3% of GDP).

These figures reflect the growing importance of the tourism sector for the African continent. However, while the infrastructure deficit has long been the main problem of the African tourism potential, insecurity is now the main challenge for countries wanting to make the industry a pillar of their economy.

## **Tourism and Terrorism...**

With the rise of jihadist activities on the African continent, several countries have been prone to attacks by terrorist groups. Depending on the importance of tourism in their economic activities, this sector has been affected differently. In 2015, international tourist arrivals in Africa fell by 3%, while they were constantly increasing, quadrupling between 1990 and 2014.

The decline recorded in Africa in 2015 is largely related to that of some countries in the Maghreb region (Tunisia, Egypt and Morocco among others), which experienced terrorist attacks during the same year.

## **The Case of Maghreb: Tunisia and Egypt**

According to the rating agency Moody's, a terrorist attack causes a country to lose between 0.5% and

0.8% growth. This impact may be even more pronounced in countries where a substantial share of the economy is represented by tourism revenues. In Tunisia, for example, tourism accounts for nearly 7% of gross domestic product (GDP) and employs several hundred thousand people.

According to Le Monde, attacks by the Islamic State (EI), which killed 21 people in the Bardo Museum in Tunis in March and 31 tourists, mostly British, on a beach in Sousse three months later, led to a decrease in tourist numbers by nearly 30% in 2015 compared to 2014. According to the International Tourism Organization (ILO), they decreased from 7.2 million international tourists in 2014 to 5.4 million in 2015, reaching their lowest level in decades. In the first half of 2016, the tourist numbers in the Maghreb region fell by 21.5% compared to the previous year.

According to the figures from the Tunisian National Tourism Office, the country's tourism receipts have dropped from a record high of more than 3.6 million Tunisian dinars in 2014 to 2.4 million dinars in 2015. This situation had an impact on growth, which dropped from 3% in 2014 to 1.2% in 2015 and 1.1% in 2016, according to the IMF.

In Egypt, the IS attack on 31 October 2015 against a plane of tourists leaving Sharm El-Sheikh, the flagship of Egyptian tourism, has once again put a stop to foreign traffic, already slowed by the events of the Arab Spring. This event, which killed 224 people, led to a suspension of flights from Russia and Great Britain, two of the pharaohs' country's main tourist suppliers. As a result, tourist arrivals in the country fell to 5 million visitors in 2016 from nearly 15 million in 2011 and 9 million in 2015.

### **East Africa: The Case of Kenya**

In recent years, the Kenyan authorities have put in place a strategy to develop tourism potential through major investments. Unfortunately, terrorism and insecurity, in general, have been largely responsible for the sector's poor performance over the past decade.

According to the newspaper "The Conversation", between 2011 and 2017, the country has experienced an average of 60 attacks each year by different groups, each of varying magnitude. These crimes had a huge impact on tourist attendance.

The government's 2030 target was to increase the number of tourist arrivals from 1.7 million in 2012 to 3 million in 2017. Finally, in 2017, the actual number of arrivals dropped to 1.45 million.

According to Dr. Steven Buigut, Professor of Economics at the American University of Dubai, "there is a reduction of about 2508 visitors per year for every death [related to terrorism, editor's note]" in Kenya. He added, "This translates into a loss of approximately 157.1 million Kenyan shillings (about US\$1.5 million) in tourism revenue per year for each death".

In a country where tourism accounts for more than 9% of GDP, these figures demonstrate the growing impact of terrorist attacks on the health of the economy. And the attack carried out last January by the

Shebabs jihadists, which killed at least 15 people in a hotel complex in Nairobi, could have further repercussions on the country's tourism activities.

### **Central Africa: Boko Haram and Cameroon...**

In Cameroon, the repeated incursions of the Boko–Haram group since 2013 in the far north of the country, the region most sought after by tourists, have led to poor performances and prospects for the Cameroonian tourism sector. According to Africa 24, tourist traffic in the country in 2015 has fallen by more than 50% compared to 2014. According to government statistics, the occupancy rate of some hotels in Cameroon dropped from 90% to 30% in 2014 following Boko Haram attacks.

"We have been forced to put more than half of the staff on technical leave because we are unable to keep all of them and pay them regularly as in the past," said a Cameroonian hotel developer, investing in Cameroon on a daily basis.

### **West Africa**

The West African region has also seen its tourism sector hit hard by attacks by terrorist groups, notably in Nigeria, Mali, Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire.

In 2015, WAEMU reported that tourism activity in the region fell by 6% compared to the previous year. According to several experts, this decline in the flow of tourists is linked to the security context after the various terrorist attacks. Over the same period, tourism revenues fell 3% to \$920 million.

Following the terrorist attacks in Burkina–Faso, "2900 room reservations, eleven international congresses, and festivals were cancelled", said Abdoulaye Sankara, president of Burkina Faso coordinating committee of the tourism development program in 2016.

This wave of terrorism has begun to spread further, as far as the countries of the Gulf of Guinea. On May 1, two French tourists were kidnapped from Pendjari Park in northern Benin, which had always been spared by terrorist groups up to that time. Even though the two hostages were later released, in Burkina Faso, the classification of Pendjari Park, the jewel of the country's tourism industry, as a "red zone" will have a major impact on Benin tourism.

### **States' Responses**

In some countries, the strengthening of security systems linked to tourist sites has been accompanied by sustained advertising campaigns.

In Tunisia, for example, the government went so far as to provide displays on the streets of Moscow for the 2018 World Cup in Russia. These different strategies have increased tourist arrivals to 8.3 million visitors, an increase of 17.7% compared to 2017. The return of French tourists (whose arrivals increased

by 37% in the same year), Russian and German tourists led the government to expect record arrivals of 9 million tourists in 2019. In Egypt, Côte d'Ivoire or Morocco, the trend is also on the rise. In sub-Saharan Africa, the resurgence of terrorist attacks has led to the creation of the G5 Sahel group, whose security, the economic and social strategy aims to exterminate the terrorist threat. Other less affected countries have deployed preventive strategies along their borders with hard-hit states. In Côte d'Ivoire, Benin and Ghana, patrols have been sent along the borders with Burkina Faso to counter the "terrorist threat".

**However, increased security, infrastructure construction and advertising campaigns alone seem ineffective in reducing the impact of terrorist attacks on African tourism.** For some observers, the high dependence of African tourism on foreign visitors exposes this sector to several risks. It is with this in mind that WAEMU wanted to focus on promoting tourism within its 'internal market'. This should enable the eight countries in the region to benefit from a potential market of more than 90 million inhabitants.

And with the integration process underway on the African continent, notably through the creation of a single market for air transport, Africans could become the main drivers of their continent's tourism industry.

Date: 2019-09-02

Article link:

<https://www.tourism-review.com/travel-tourism-magazine-tourism-potential-of-africa-affected-by-insecurity-article2724>