

SECURITY PROBLEMS: ALGERIA FACES DROP IN TOURISM NUMBERS



Saturday June 1st saw the beginnings of increased security at tourist destinations along the coast of Algeria, in time for the summer beach season

2013's security plans include increased patrols on 256 beaches where bathing is allowed, and 156 surveillance points are being set up by the National Gendarmerie to protect both the beaches and the areas surrounding them to provide vacationers with reassurance of their safety.

These latest security measures are in response to the downturn in tourism brought about by the feelings of insecurity in the Sahel. They are an attempt to encourage tourists to return.

Mid-January's horrendous attack by terrorists on the Tiguentourine gas plant has further hampered tourism.

A mid-April conference held in Algiers saw tourism professionals and Algerian officials designing a new strategy to boost the economy through tourism.

Mohamed Benmeradi, Tourism Minister, was quick to reassure operators of desert tours that development of tourism within the southern part of Algeria would continue, and that the attack near In Amenas would not cause any cancellation of developmental projects. He went on with vehemence to state that the Sahara is Algeria's entire tourism industry driving force.

Despite Benmeradi's statement concerns have been raised by tourism officials and industry insiders alike pointing out the dwindling number of tourists visiting the desert. Visitors to Tamanrasset in 2012 numbered less than half that of 2011 as reported by Abdelmalek Moulay, Tourism Director for Tamanrasset Province.

During the April 15th to 16th Algiers National Tourism Conference, the tone was set when President Abdelaziz Bouteflika stated that a broader strategy was required if Algeria was to see an increase in tourism, as the natural assets of the country were not enough to achieve this alone.

Conference participants were told by Benmeradi that he believed if medium and long-term goals were to be met. All those working in the tourism industry should enthusiastically adopt the slogan "Tourism Is the Business of Us All".

He pointed out that with 1.9 million tourists currently vacationing abroad, the first goal of the sector would be to build domestic tourism, and the second goal would be to attract more foreign visitors to Algeria.

Visitors to Algeria from Europe in 2012 numbered around 250,000, but Benmeradi admitted that **there is a serious problem with the level of accommodation, both in quality and capacity, and that creating a new infrastructure that included quality services would be needed to attract more visitors.**

A strategy by tourism professionals is being implemented to achieve these goals, and is set to continue through until 2025. Conference participants ended the two day discussions by designing a strategy to improve tourism that included quality improvements, modernization methods for the infrastructure, support for training efforts and regulation of the industry.

Dali Menouar, Bechar cultural organization president, confirmed that the Sahel situation had had a devastating effect on tourism workers, with many tour operators going under, and seasonal workers had been without work this year. With such low tourist numbers this year there was very little hope for the near future.

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