

AL-QAEDA BRANCH HARMING TOURISM IN TIMBUKTU



Timbuktu in Mali is a luring tourism destination but there is a question whether the rising Al-Qaeda activity in the region will not harm the tourism industry.

A number of third world countries rely on tourism as a very important source of revenue for their economies. Nevertheless, these regions tend to be rather politically unstable which inevitably affects the tourism industry. **There is for example the famous city of Timbuktu, which lures tourists from all over the world.** This Malian city was inscribed in the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1988. The city played an important role for the Islam propagation in 15th and 16th century. Today, there is the famous Koranic Sankore University as well as other madrasses.

These interesting sights may however be not enough to bring tourists to the African city. The problem is the violence that occurs in the Africa's Sahara belt. Government and rebels who belong to the Al-Qaeda of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) fight in the region. The regional chief of Malian intelligence was gunned down in the city. The AQIM was also responsible for kidnapping four European tourists and two Canadian diplomats. The militants later executed one of the tourists. Many of the terrorist who operate in the Sahara belt countries are veterans of the Algerian civil war but they are recruiting new members. The AQIM gains money from ransoms rot the kidnapped tourists and also from smuggling.

This development naturally scares off tourists as well as investors. Nevertheless, people in Timbuktu claim they have not see any decline in tourism arrivals. They even claim that problems are limited to other parts of Mali. To lure tourists the city's tourism related businesses offer various discounts. To ensure security local authorities and even some guides employ guards in plain clothes. Naturally, they want the tourists to feel everything is all right, which would be a bit difficult with a bunch of tough guys in uniforms.

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