

MOZAMBIQUE: MOST REGIONS ARE SAFE FOR TOURISTS



In recent years, Mozambique has been enjoying a fruitful tourism industry in the shadow of its Civil War, with just over two million visitors coming to the shoreline from South Africa and beyond and the revenue making up 6% of the economy in 2012. Unfortunately, recent attacks by Renamo forces – an old opposition party and anti-communist group – and subsequent news reports on the threat to tourist safety have led some travelers to either postpone or completely reconsider their plans. There is sense that Mozambique is now unsafe and tourists are being scared away from the country as a whole, but is this viewpoint accurate?

Some news reports create an alarming view of the situation in Mozambique that is sure to fan these flames. Naturally, these reports of tourist threats and a poor season have made the news. However, some stories are keener to highlight the sense of danger than the effect on tourism. There are detailed reports about tourists being ambushed and shot, two passenger buses being set on fire, and a series of kidnappings that have apparently “left locals and expatriates anxious about their safety”. As a result many potential tourists are reconsidering their trip to the country.

The locals however are unhappy with these exaggerated reports and misinterpretations. Many supporters of the country are quick to condemn the exaggerated news for the way they appear to have skewed the reports to make Mozambique seem much worse than it really is. There are some positive sentiments that tourists can take away from the articles but they are buried in tales of crime and attempted murder. Examples of this are the idea that analysts “downplay the likelihood of a return to full-scale conflict”, the fact that most of the fourteen kidnapping victims were wealthy Mozambican businessmen rather than foreign and the fact **the most tourist spots are away from the main conflict zone, which is said to be a 60 mile stretch of highway.**

Critics that wish to defend the region are not denying the fact that there are problems, but they are keen to point out that these conflicts are restricted to the Sofala Province in Central Mozambique and that the vast majority of the nation is enjoying life as normal with no threat to tourists at all. Additionally, there are questions over why so much emphasis is being placed on a month of isolated incidents and links to the Civil War when the country has been so peaceful for fourteen years.

There may be a tourism threat, but it is not necessarily as bad as some potential travelers assume. Like most stories, there is more than one side to this tale of fearful tourists and the state of Mozambique, and travelers should see it from all angles. Currently, the British Foreign Office warns tourists that “the situation in Sofala Province remains tense” and that they should “take extra care when travelling by road outside urban areas in the affected provinces”, which suggests that while caution is advised, things may not be quite as bad as some papers would have us believe.

According to one of the locals there are only problems in the Sofala Province in Central Mozambique:

On the EN1, the National north-south Highway, Between Muxungwe and the Bailey Bridge on the Rupembe River (a 50km stretch of road) where there is a military convoy escorting vehicles both to the north and south. This was one of the focal points of violence during the old Civil War days in Mozambique. The area around the small town of Muxungwe which used to be a Renamo Rebel

stronghold during the same Civil War mentioned above. Around Gorengoza where the same Renamo Rebels used to have a big military base also during the old Civil War. Most recently an isolated attack up north near Nacala where reportedly a member of the Alfonso Dhlakama's personal body guard from Nacala trying to evade capture shot at civilians.

"In the rest of the country there is peace, there are no Bandit problems, people are free to move without restriction of any form at all. From the beaches of Ponta do Ouro in the south to Pemba in the north along over 2000 km. of coastline, we are just facing the normal day to day trials and tribulations of living in Africa."

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