

CAMEROON TOURISM HIT BY SAFETY CONCERNS



Cameroon tourism suffers the impact of the violence in the Far North, which is the most popular region for Western tourists in the country. The security concerns related to the presence of the Islamists of Boko Haram scare of many visitors. Cameroon has thus decided to switch targets and focusing rather on regional tourism.

Daniel Nganhoul, the Director of the Promotion of Tourism in Cameroon, commented on the safety situation: "Boko Haram only occurs in one out of ten regions of the country! The Far North region. **The rest of the country is safe and ready for visitors during any season.**"

To maintain the industry, the Cameroon tourism minister has coordinated with the country's security forces. "For organized groups, we reached an agreement with them that they are accompanied discreetly," reassures Daniel Nganhoul. "Similarly, the tourist sites and the hotels are monitored."

900,000 people visited Cameroon in 2015, of which the majority come from the subregion. Hunting and safari tourism, very popular with Western tourists, is in a tailspin. However, on the business side, the industry is doing well. "Cameroon has a growth of 6% and this attracts investors," says Benedict Kountchou, tour operator and director of the Benoît tourism travel agency, based in Paris.

Also of interest to the Minister of Tourism are the Cameroonians themselves who travel extensively within the country, especially in favor of certain traditions. Pierre Moifo manages the Sawa Hotel in Douala. Each weekend, he witnesses hundreds of families leaving the city to visit their loved ones.

"Every week, funerals are organized, for example, particularly in the Grassfields region in northwestern and western Cameroon," he explains. "It is actually commemorations for the dead. These funerals last several days, sometimes an entire week, and they include the family members, friends, acquaintances... There are even people who have come from overseas. This important travel throughout the year ensures that there is sustained tourist activity."

The Cameroon tourism minister hopes to attract 2 million visitors in 2016. Despite his efforts, this goal seems far away. Today, tourism accounts for less than 1% of Cameroon's gross domestic product.

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