

TOURISM IN EGYPT TO DIVERSIFY THE OFFER AFTER YEARS OF INSTABILITY



Egypt's economy is heavily dependent on tourism. After the uprising against the then president Mubarak in 2011, the subsequent political unrest, and Islamic terror attacks, the number of foreign guests decreased dramatically. However, the new minister of tourism in Egypt Rania al-Mashat wants to restart the industry with "diversified offers".

Before the revolution, the North African country had nearly 15 million visitors in 2010. They brought foreign currency into the country and generated many jobs. **With the uprising came a period of stagnation, with recovery signs being seen only during the past two years.**

According to various data, in 2016 there were between 4.5 and 6.8 million tourists. In 2017, according to foreign affair representatives in the Egyptian parliament, 8.4 million guests have returned to the country. The first quarter of 2017 indicates a further increase for tourism in Egypt. By the end of April four million tourists are expected in the land of the pyramids. Some optimistic predictions expect 19 million visitors in 2019.

Rania Al-Mashat, who took office last January, has ambitious plans. "We want to diversify the traditional source markets, make tourism more sustainable," she said in a recent interview in Cairo. After all, Egypt offers something for almost all segments.

"You can be a leisure tourist, a package tourist, a cultural tourist, a backpacker, there is something for everyone."

Now it is time to find new niches, says the former member of the International Monetary Fund and former deputy head of the Egyptian Central Bank. This could be areas such as wellness projects, health tourism or even previously unknown segments such as birdwatching or other unconventional ideas.

The energetic politician wants to open up new source markets for tourism in Egypt. "From China we had 100,000 visitors three years ago, in the previous year it was 300,000." There is still plenty of room for improvement. One goal, of course, must be to improve the lack of training of local tourism employees. "This applies to all areas: hospitality, service, organization, housekeeping, culinary. Maybe we can be a catalyst to improve the Egyptian education system in general."

Egypt currently has about 200,000 hotel rooms, according to the minister. But it needs much more. There are ambitious projects such as the mega construction project of El Alamein on the Mediterranean coast near Alexandria. The small coastal town is to be expanded to a million-metropolis to stimulate tourism in Egypt, agriculture, housing and industrial sector. Around 25,000 new hotel rooms are set to be built there.

Moreover, the realization of the project is expected to create 1.5 million new jobs. Egypt is currently looking for investors for other projects as well, especially in the capital Cairo, but also for the new Suez Canal development zone. The interest of investors, however, has so far been limited.

The project of the Grand Egyptian Museum near the pyramid of Cheops, which is due to open at the end of the year, should also become a real crowd-puller. The largest archaeological museum in the world will feature tens of thousands of exhibits of Egyptian culture. According to calculations, it will attract around 15,000 visitors a day.

The prerequisite for tourism in Egypt to keep buzzing, of course, is that the country conveys a sense of security. Foreign minister Sameh Shoukry knows that, too. The situation looks under control. For example, nothing has ever happened in the tourist hub of Sharm El Sheikh. “We will continue this fight. We have purchased many devices for greater security at Egyptian airports, but you can never guarantee that nothing will happen; we can guarantee that we will do our utmost.”

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