

TOURISM IN ZIMBABWE INCREASES 15% SINCE ROBERT MUGABE'S EXIT



Tourism in Zimbabwe has increased 15% since the departure of its former president Robert Mugabe, who led the country for 37 years.

According to official data, the number of tourists visiting the country increased to 554,417 in the first quarter of the year.

In the first three months of this year, **the number of foreigners visiting the Victoria Falls, one of the country's top tourist attractions, increased by 48% compared to the same period of 2017.**

This improved numbers was welcomed with relief by those who provide safaris and cruises, businesses hit by the economic crisis and the usual climate of political violence that stained Mugabe's era.

"We've been isolated for a long time, but we can be ourselves again," said the Minister of Tourism in Zimbabwe, Prisca Mupfumira, in an interview.

For several years, tourists stayed away from Zimbabwe, fearing the repressive regime, the corruption in police forces, poor infrastructure and a shortage of fuel, but the prospects for the future seem to have changed after Robert Mugabe's removal in November 2017.

"The tourism industry has good prospects," said Prisca Mupfumira, on the eve of the elections of 30 July, adding that tourism "is a backbone" of Zimbabwe's economy.

The authorities are relying on the reemergence of the tourist industry, which accounts for 10% of the country's GDP, but forecasts are hard to achieve.

"Zimbabwe is not a cheap destination. The prices spiked in recent months due to the uncertainty that prevails in the country," pointed out the manager of a restaurant in Victoria Falls, Ilan Wiesenbacher, nevertheless "the number of visitors has been increasing steadily".

Lloyd Machaka, owner of a helicopter airline, did not hide his ambition when facing positive forecasts. "If everything goes well, we will have more investors, bigger hotels and better flight connections," he said.

To boost the tourism in Zimbabwe, the Government decided to facilitate the entry into the country, and one can now apply for a visa when already in Zimbabwean territory.

The police's roadblocks, where drivers were forced to pay bribes or subjected to lengthy interrogations, have also been canceled.

"Those roadblocks were a disaster, a real issue," said the minister of tourism.

The authorities have launched a campaign to "show the world that Zimbabwe's doors are open" and that "it's a safe tourist destination," declared Mupfumira.

Zimbabwe holds its presidential, parliamentary and local elections on 30 July, following a military coup that forced the Zimbabwe African National Union - Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) to depose Robert Mugabe, coopting the vice president Emmerson Mnangagwa, who took office as head of state on 24 November 2017.

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