

LIBYA IS MORE THAN MUAMMAR GADDAFI



Libya is going to diversify its economy. This African country known mainly for its charismatic leader Muammar Abu Minyar al-Gaddafi and its connection to terrorism wants to attract more tourists. The country's economy depends mainly on the oil industry but Libyans want to change it. One of Gadhafi's sons announced a plan to promote ecotourism in the pine and olive-tree filled Green Mountains in northeastern Libya. There are also other changes going on in this desert country. An example is the national airline, Afriqiyah Airways, which is buying new Airbus planes.

UN sanctions kept tourists from visiting this North African country for more than a decade and therefore local tourism infrastructure is rather underdeveloped. The decor of many hotels is straight out of the 1970s and there is also lack of ATMs in Libya. Another obstacle for tourists is the Libyan bureaucracy. Especially Americans have problems with obtaining visa. They cannot apply for a tourist visa in the U.S. and must send their application to a Libyan embassy elsewhere like Canada. The fact is that even if the paperwork is all right U.S. citizens are often blocked without warning. Visa regulations are less strict for Europeans, but like Americans, they are usually required to travel as part of a group with a government-approved agency. Another important thing is that Libya also won't issue a visa to anyone whose passport bears a stamp showing travel to Israel.

However, with respect to the beauties of the country it is definitely worth visiting. There are numerous places that are attractive for tourists. There is for example the city of Leptis Magna, once one of the most significant cities of the Roman Empire and one of five UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Libya. Another place is Cyrene, an ancient Greek city founded in 631 B.C. It offers vast ruins including temples, forums and theaters.

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