

CÔTE D'IVOIRE TOURISM SLOWS DOWN



Côte d'Ivoire tourism has been hit hard by the current pandemic. The capital of Abidjan, the tourist town of Grand-Bassam, as well as the second port city, San Pedro, are the areas most affected by the crisis.

Grand-Bassam, the former capital of Côte d'Ivoire, is a seaside resort and tourist town located 42 km from Abidjan and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. **Besides the craft industry, tourism, hotel and restaurant activities have almost all come to a halt.**

"We were left without work for 4 to 5 months. Everything was reduced to the bare minimum to deal with certain immediate contingencies," said Kablan Adrien, the director of the Group N'Sa Hotel.

N'Sa Hotel has 200 rooms and 150 employees. The hotel was planning to increase its turnover in 2020, but the pandemic has reduced its ambitions and halved its forecasts. Worse, it has imposed additional expenses of 2 to 3 million CFA francs for, among other things, the acquisition of hand-washing devices, says the group's boss.

Generally speaking, travel companies, whatever their size, have seen a drop in their turnover due to the coronavirus, said Ouattara Alhassan, president of the Hotel and Restaurant Association of Grand-Bassam, according to whom it is "a disaster for the Côte d'Ivoire tourism industry.

90% Damaged

The Ivorian government has certainly taken measures to curb the disease and ensure "a minimum service" in the affected structures, but "for a sector like tourism, which contributes 1,500 billion CFA francs per year to the Ivorian GDP, the efforts are not up to scratch," regrets Ouattara Alhassan. Côte d'Ivoire's nominal GDP was CFAF 34,298.9 billion in 2020, according to the Central Bank of West African States (BCEAO).

Beyond Grand-Bassam, the health crisis has also damaged the tourist industry on the outskirts of Abidjan and in the interior of the country. The Ivorian economic capital has been the epicenter of the pandemic, followed by San Pedro which, as of 15 January 2022, has 623 confirmed cases since the beginning of the disease. According to statistics from the Ministry of Health, Côte d'Ivoire has 80,176 confirmed cases of Covid-19.

In San Pedro, the country's second economic hub thanks to its port, owners of restaurants, bars, maquis, hotels and other nightclubs were forced to suspend their activities after the government ordered them to close.

The period between April and June 2020 was marked by cash flow difficulties for companies, which led to a number of workers being laid off. The exact figures have yet to be determined.

According to a study by the Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs, titled "Evaluation of the impact of Covid-19 on the activity of businesses in the formal sector in Côte d'Ivoire", the country recorded a loss of 22,962 jobs as a result of the restrictive measures linked to the pandemic, between March and September 2020.

The financial assistance of the State has not benefited all, according to officials of the National Federation of Tourist Industries of Côte d'Ivoire (Fenitourci). According to Doudou Mbaye, president of this federation, only 4 operators out of nearly 200 affiliated companies have been able to meet the eligibility criteria of the government's support programme for Côte d'Ivoire tourism sector.

Three quarters of the operators of the tourism sector in San Pedro in the informal and formal sectors, notably restaurants, maquis, bars, nightclubs, tea rooms and the like, in addition to some small hotels and hotel complexes, have been affected to the tune of 90%, says Doudou Mbaye, regional president of Fenitourci.

As they did not meet the criteria imposed by the State, which include certificates of regularity with the National Social Security Fund (CNPS) and regularity in terms of taxes imposed, many of these companies were unable to benefit from the support funds.

Pulling the Brakes

When the pandemic appeared in Côte d'Ivoire, the tourism sector was in the process of entering a phase of expansion. After contributing 6.25% to the gross domestic product (GDP) in 2018, it rose to 7.3% in 2019, according to Siandou Fofana, the Minister of Tourism.

The number of tourist arrivals in Côte d'Ivoire reached 4.2 million in 2019, compared to just over 3 million in 2018.

The government's objective, before Covid-19, was to increase the contribution of tourism to GDP to about 8% by 2025 through the national tourism development strategy 2018-2025 called "Sublime Côte d'Ivoire".

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