

EGYPT: GLOBAL WARMING TO NEGATIVELY IMPACT DIVING TOURISM



Diving tourism is likely to be hit hard by the impact of global warming on coral reefs. The diving centers of Sharm Al-Sheikh already express their worries.

The rich and diverse coral reefs of the Red Sea offer an unparalleled underwater landscape. These colorful coral forests, which include nearly 209 species in Egypt alone and are home to more than 1,000 kinds of colorful fish, attract divers from all over the world. The amateurs of nautical activities who practice scuba diving, snorkelling and glass-bottom boat excursions come to discover and contemplate this fabulous universe.

However, **all this natural wealth is threatened by global warming, which will have a negative impact on the tourism sector including diving tourism.** It risks losing a large part of its income from this important type of tourism which brings to Egypt about 7 billion dollars per year.

"Egypt stands to lose more than 90% of its income from coral reef tourism by 2100. Corals are fragile ecosystems threatened with extinction around the world because of climate change, storms, pollution, or overfishing," warns Khaled Allam, an expert in the project to strengthen the organization and management of Egyptian nature reserves and author of a study presented at the 26th United Nations Conference on Climate Change.

According to the study, coral reefs live and thrive at temperatures between 25°C and 40°C, and if the temperature exceeds this limit, the reefs bleach and eventually die. In addition, human activities also have a negative impact on the development of Red Sea reefs. These include illegal and destructive fishing methods, unsustainable coastal developments that cause pollution in coral reef areas, and overcapacity of tourism at a site.

"Although the situation of coral reefs in Egypt is not the worst among the countries affected by rising temperatures in the world, it is believed that it will be severely affected in terms of economy, as Egypt ranks first in the world in terms of countries with the highest revenues from diving tourism," Allam warns. Thus, the risk to coral reefs in Egypt is of more concern to tourism professionals than to scientists. "If the corals disappear, it would be catastrophic for us all. We risk losing our livelihood," says Mohamad Abdel-Aziz, a diving instructor in Sharm Al-Sheikh.

In fact, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) had warned in 2018 about this catastrophic scenario. It warned in a report that without drastic measures to stabilize rising temperatures, 70 to 90 percent of coral reefs will disappear in the coming decades. This is a universal phenomenon, as the Status of Coral Reefs of The World 2020 report, published by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), reports that in 1998 alone, 8% of the world's corals disappeared. In the following 20 years, 14% of the world's corals have been bleached. The World Wildlife Fund (WWF - an international non-governmental organization) warns that between rampant evaporation, inexorably rising temperatures and human over-activity, corals are dying out faster, and two-thirds are now seriously threatened.

According to Nasser Kamel, Egyptian Secretary-General of the Union for the Mediterranean, some regions of the world are more in danger than others. "The Red Sea is warming 20% more than the global average. Faced with such challenges, and pending strong global decisions, **the divers of Sharm Al-Sheikh have reduced their activities to try to curb this phenomenon that also threatens their livelihood.**

In addition to these precautions, the Egyptian Tourism Office has installed mooring buoys for boats far from the fragile reef areas, in order not to damage them. And a major awareness campaign has been launched for the employees of the 269 existing dive centers in Sharm Al-Sheikh, so that they are better informed about the dangers to coral reefs, and therefore to diving tourism.

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