

ECOTOURISM IN MOROCCO: A NICHE OF OPPORTUNITIES



Morocco has an enormous ecotourism potential that must be further developed to attract national and international tourists. It is green tourism which could bring important foreign currency to the Kingdom.

If you think that beach tourism is taking over all the other categories, it's probably because you haven't tried ecotourism in Morocco yet. Try it and you won't be able to resist! In fact, many tourists have taken the plunge and have not regretted it. **Countries like Kenya, Tanzania and Rwanda have turned it into a real green business through their safaris.** A benchmark that should inspire Morocco, given its many potentialities in this field.

The Kingdom has an animal ecosystem that is certainly far from those of these three East African countries, but which could seduce adventure enthusiasts. A wealth of wildlife is perceptible in the ten national parks of the Kingdom, namely Toubkal, Tazekka, Souss-Massa, Iriki, Talassemtane, Ifrane, and the Eastern High Atlas, Al Hoceima, Khenifiss and Khenifra.

When you think of rural tourism, you think of accommodation. No need to worry. Tourists can stay in more than 300 classified rural lodgings listed at the national level by the Ministry of Tourism in 2016. A number that should increase given the growing craze for ecotourism in Morocco.

Establishments are mainly based in the regions of Souss-Massa, Tangier-Tetouan-Al Hoceima and Marrakech-Safi, and have a capacity of more than 1,696 rooms, that is to say, more than 5,083 beds. Gastronomy also could be a good way to whet the appetite of tourists, especially through couscous, which is classified as an intangible cultural heritage by UNESCO.

In addition to the ecological aspect, ecotourism is a great provider of jobs in remote areas often plagued by endemic unemployment. Just to have an idea, its activities generated 2.31 billion dirhams in 2015, or 3.9% of tourism revenue. According to our interlocutor, who is also the founder of the Atlas Kasbah Ecolodge in Agadir, "the demand, which was already noticeable before the pandemic, has increased during this health crisis. We notice that Moroccans are more and more sensitive to sustainable tourism, hence the importance of preparing an adapted offer in the coming years to allow them to enjoy more plains, mountains, hiking, surfing, etc."

Major Moroccan companies are also encouraging this green tourism. This is the case of the **Crédit Agricole du Maroc group, which organized the first edition of the national "Green Jobs" competition on 26 and 27 May 2022 in Rabat**, to support green Moroccan startups led by young people in rural and mountainous areas, in partnership with the German cooperation agency GIZ and the National Agency for Water and Forests. Ten projects developed in Tangier-Tetouan-Al Hoceima, Fez-Meknes, Rabat-Salé-Kénitra and Beni Mellal-Khénifra were selected from over 200 applications – projects that focus on ecotourism, the professions of natural areas, the development of natural resources, but also local products and fish farming.

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