

KENYA IS DESTROYING ITS TOURISM



Visa chaos blocks planes, and rising national park fees alarm Kenya's tourism-dependent millions of citizens.

Kenya's breathtaking landscapes, wild animals, and unique culture attract travelers. Over 1.5 million tourists visited the East African country last year. Tourism is a crucial industry for Kenya, contributing over 10 percent to its gross domestic product and supporting almost two million jobs. To increase economic growth, Kenya has set a target to welcome 2.5 million tourists by 2026.

Kenyan Tourism focuses on a few areas in the country

Kenya has over 50 national parks, private wildlife sanctuaries, and a 400km Indian Ocean coastline. Popular destinations include Tsavo East and Amboseli National Elephant Parks and the Masai Mara National Reserve for lions and leopards. However, tourism in many areas with potential still needs to be developed. Despite government efforts, tourism promotion has failed.

Kenya wants to more than double entrance fees for national parks in some cases

Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) plans to double national park entrance fees and increase safari prices, causing concern in the tourism industry. Competing with other safari destinations is a challenge, but conservation is expensive. Kenya's tourism has benefited from combining beach vacations and safaris, but higher prices may drive travelers away. Many travelers plan their safaris four months in advance and may be upset by the sudden cost increase.

Kenyan tourism experts warn: "This will break our necks."

Starting in January 2024, Kenya's national parks and reserves may have a high and low season. Prices will drop in the low season but rise sharply in the high season. Some experts think the price increase is too much and may harm tourism. For example, entrance fees to Tsavo East may increase from \$52 to \$80 in high season, and Nairobi National Park's admission may go up from \$43 to \$100.

Masai Mara's plan against over-tourism: 200 instead of 70 US dollars entrance fee

The Masai Mara (The National Reserve in Kenya) has implemented an updated admission policy, charging visitors per calendar day instead of 24 hours. The park is a popular yet attractive tourist destination, particularly during the migration season between June and October, leading to over-tourism and rule-breaking. The park borders the Serengeti and is known for its wildlife, including millions of wildebeest and zebra. Concerns have been raised about this impact on American tourists.

Kenya is facing a decrease in guests and animals leaving the Masai Mara. The area has 49 camps and lodges, with 5800 beds, but many lack proper licenses. Ideas have been suggested, such as limiting safari time or regulating prices.

The entrance fee to the Masai Mara will rise to \$100 in the low season and \$200 in the high season, making it the most expensive protected area globally. The Kenyan Association of Hotel Keepers and

Caterers believes it's a wrong move and may hurt tourism revenues in the long run. They suggest that the government should have allocated more money to sustain tourism and updated tariffs once tourism recovered.

Repeated problems with the e-visa

Kenya abolished visa-on-arrival and implemented an e-visa system to reduce airport queues and fight corruption. However, the system is complicated, requiring extensive data and specific photo sizes. Payment is not accepted in all browsers, and there are issues with entering the state and logging in via a mail code.

Kenyan government pleads for compromise on entry fees

After the visa is issued, applicants should not expect to receive mail with the visa attached, as is the norm in most countries. Mail may be sent occasionally, but visas are rarely connected. Most of the time, there won't be any mail at all. Travelers must actively log into their e-visa account to check if the visa has been approved. Once approved, it must be printed in color. A black-and-white printout may result in entry being prohibited.

This process can be overwhelming for traditional package travelers. Some travelers have even shared their decision not to travel to Kenya due to the risk of not taking a paid vacation because of a faulty system.

Take-off and landing ban for foreign airlines at Mombasa Airport

Travelers are often expected to be spontaneous and flexible. In 2020, when airports reopened after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Kenyan government considered supporting its national airline, Kenya Airways, as it was facing financial difficulties. As a result, the government stopped granting take-off and landing permits to several foreign airlines in Mombasa, including Turkish Airlines, KLM, and Condor. This decision affected the primary connections between Europe and East Africa. However, Condor can now fly again, and Ethiopian Airlines and Fly Dubai have received more slots.

After all, there is now a ray of hope regarding prices. The tourism industry also brought protests to the public. The Kenya Wildlife Service and the Kenyan government heard intense criticism. Now, the government is pushing to raise prices less sharply.

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