

KENYA'S TOURISM OUTCRIES OVER TAX BULLYING



There has been outrage in Kenya following an announcement by the Kenya Revenue Authority (KRA) regarding the taxation of goods worth over \$500 carried by travelers entering the country. The KRA's message on social media stated that travelers can bring in personal or household items valued at \$500 or less. Any items exceeding this amount will be subject to taxation.

Despite assurances from the KRA that this is not a new directive, the message has sparked concern and anger among Kenyans, including members of parliament and a government minister, who have described it as harassment of tourists. **This announcement comes amid growing discontent in Kenya over the government's recent introduction or increase of several taxes**, with President William Ruto citing the need to generate revenue to address the country's heavy debt burden.

Alfred Mutua, the Tourism Minister, expressed concern over the possibility of deterring tourists from visiting the East African country, famous for its wildlife parks and beaches. He pointed out that tourists are often harassed upon arriving at the airport, which might explain why they don't return. He mentioned examples of other countries, such as Rwanda, South Africa, and Dubai, where tourists are not harassed.

Senate Majority Leader Aaron Cheruiyot called the search of passengers' items by KRA agents at Nairobi International Airport a "national disgrace" and urged for a differentiation between personal and commercial items. Another member of parliament, Nelson Koech, expressed regret that such announcements were made when Kenya was trying to boost its tourism industry, which is a key sector for the country's foreign exchange earnings. The industry experienced a 24% currency depreciation in the past year. "This is not the time to intimidate visitors to Kenya," he stated in remarks quoted by local media.

Kenya's tourism sector is still recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic, with only 1.54 million traveler arrivals recorded last year, below pre-pandemic levels. The chairman of the Kenya Tourism Board, Francis Gichaba, has expressed hope that the number of tourist arrivals will surpass two million for the 2023 financial year, up from 1.9 million in 2019. The organization aims to attract 5.5 million international tourists by June 2028. Before the pandemic, tourism revenue contributed almost 10% of Kenya's GDP.

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