

# AFGHANISTAN LOOKS FOR TOURISM DEVELOPMENT



After regaining power in Afghanistan, the Taliban have attempted to establish connections with the international community. However, their strict implementation of Sharia law and oppressive measures against women have resulted in the country becoming almost entirely isolated.

Since the fall of Kabul in August 2021, many countries have cut off diplomatic relations with the new Afghan government. As of now, no nation in the world officially recognizes the government. Some countries are pushing to re-establish diplomatic ties, but only a few nations, namely Russia, Turkey, Japan, India, Pakistan, and China, still maintain embassies in the country. China is the only country that has appointed an ambassador, but it does not recognize the Afghan government.

## **Growing interest in Afghanistan**

Although discouraged by Western chancelleries, Afghanistan is paradoxically attracting foreign tourists despite the security risks, including attacks, kidnappings, and arbitrary detention, as well as the absence of consular services in case of problems.

To dissuade potential visitors, some emphasize the administrative complexities of moving between different provinces and checkpoints, the lack of tourist infrastructure, and the scarcity of cultural sites that were destroyed and looted during the decades of war.

Despite these challenges, 7,000 foreign tourists visited Afghanistan in 2023, encouraged by increased air links, primarily via Dubai or Istanbul. However, this number is still a far cry from the nearly 200,000 Western tourists who crossed Afghanistan in the 1970s on their way to Kathmandu or Goa.

Today, tourists who come to explore the unique beauty of Afghanistan and its outstanding cultural and historical sites are primarily from China, Thailand, or Japan, as they are avoiding Pakistan due to growing insecurity.

## **Rehabilitation of tourist sites**

The Taliban is attempting to improve its image by promoting the restoration of security. While this is somewhat true, there are still sporadic attacks by the Islamic State organization. Nevertheless, some bloggers claim that Afghanistan has not been as secure since the Soviet invasion in 1979. Additionally, some people highlight that it is now feasible to travel to the southern part of the country, which was previously impossible.

The Taliban have recently announced the reopening of an Institute of Tourism and Hotel Management. Even more surprising is that they have launched a program to revive tourism at sites, including Bamiyan, home to two giant Buddhas dating back to the sixth century. Unfortunately, the Taliban destroyed these Buddhas with dynamite 23 years ago. They are counting on this site to attract tourists and NGOs, which would facilitate the return of investments suspended due to international sanctions.

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