

Living the Dream: The Real Cost of Tourism in Kenya

Thousands of overseas tourists visit Kenya each year in search of beautiful sandy beaches and unforgettable safaris. Tourism now contributes over 12% of Kenya's GDP. However, some argue that the problems caused by the influx of visitors outweighs the many benefits.

Kenya's government has promoted tourism in recent years. Visa fees for adults were halved in 2009 and completely scrapped for children, making it a much cheaper and more popular destination for tourists. Figures show that Kenya had 0.9 million visitors in 1995 and this increased to 1.8 million in 2011. Since 2000, Kenya's Human Development Index has increased from 0.45 to 0.55. This is a significant improvement, and is partly due to the money that tourists bring into the country.

A staggering 10% of all jobs in Kenya are in the tourist industry: that's nearly 600,000 people! Many are directly employed by large hotels, such as the Royal Court Hotel in Mombasa. Others are indirectly employed in the tourist industry. Joseph, a mango farmer, sells his produce to many large restaurants and hotels in the country. He said "I am glad that the tourists come. Without them, I would not be able to send my children to school."

The investment from the tourist industry has also seen the area's roads and infrastructure improve. Unfortunately, studies have found that much of the money spent by tourists in Kenya stays in the large hotels. These are generally owned by foreign investors and as a result much of the income generated does not stay in Kenya.

Down on the sea front in Mombasa, street vendors selling crafts and



A photo of Mombasa.

jewellery haggle with the visitors. Sarah Mendes, from Coventry, is currently on holiday for two weeks in the east African country. She said "The sellers are quite persistent and sometimes do not let me relax. However, I can tell some of them are very poor and need my money."

Safari holidays in Kenya's National Parks are big business, with many visitors in search of the illusive 'Big Five' (lion, elephant, buffalo, leopard, and rhinoceros). However, according to a recent report by the International Livestock Research Institute, the reserve's animal populations have declined

sharply from 1989 to 2003 as a result of poaching and human activity. Giraffe numbers are down 95%, warthogs 80% and impala 67%.

Recently, people have begun to worry about the impact that the tourists are having on the country's environment. The coral reefs have been damaged by the tourists and the large beach-front hotels are responsible for destroying natural vegetation and habitats. In the National Parks, restrictions are in place to protect the environment; however, safari vehicles frighten animals and cause soil erosion as tour guides stray off designated tracks in search of a glimpse of the 'Big Five'.

Eco-tourism, a booming global industry, has begun to offer more eco-friendly holiday options for the more conscious traveller. Eco-lodges are often built from local wood so they fit in more with their surroundings. They use solar panels to produce electricity and hot water, rather than using fossil fuels and they restrict the numbers of visitors, which minimises the impact on the local environment and wildlife. This also reduces the amount of emissions and greenhouse gases going into the atmosphere which could hopefully reduce global warming.

Use the information you have just read to complete this table, listing the benefits and problems of tourism in Kenya.

Benefits of Tourism in Kenya	Problems of Tourism in Kenya