

# Tourism, The Catalyst Of Development In Algeria: Opportunities And Challenges

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## ABSTRACT

This article seeks to highlight the importance of the tourism sector and its role as a significant part in Economic development process, as tourism is considered a lever for economic growth in many countries of the world, and aims mainly to eradicate poverty through wealth creation, which significantly contributes in raising the standard of living of individuals, societies and communities in addition to improving their lifestyles, while also contributing to enhancing citizens' awareness and their sense of belonging to their homeland.

Tourism helps in the development of various economic sectors, including social, cultural and educational sectors, as well as improving international relations. After the concept of tourism was limited to trips and entertainment, it has become a human phenomenon and a basic social necessity in our modern era on which many countries of the world depend as an important economic source to support development, increase national income, expand productive bases, and create thousands of job opportunities.

**Keywords:** Tourism, economic and social development.

## Introduction

Tourism is one of the most important economic sectors that can contribute significantly to achieving sustainable development in countries with diverse natural and cultural resources such as Algeria; as it possesses a rich historical and cultural heritage and stunning landscapes, from the beautiful coasts of the Mediterranean Sea, to the Sahara Desert and historical

monuments that manifest a long history of different civilizations, not to mention urban tourism which is a factor in the development of cities and their communities, as the latter offer a variety of tourism opportunities that include economic, cultural and architectural aspects

Algeria has always been an attractive destination, as seen in its ancient urban networks such as the Numidian capital Cirta and ancient Roman cities such as Timgad, Gemila and Tipaza. In addition to Kasbah of Algiers that is among those historic cities, with its museums, majestic palaces and famous historical mosques, all the way to the Great Mosque, a religious edifice that is the most attractive tourist destination and the jewel of tourism in Algeria.

Despite Algeria's potential, the tourism sector faces many challenges that hinder its development and optimal utilization. These challenges include limited infrastructure and lack of effective tourism marketing. On the other hand, there are many opportunities that can be exploited by improving these factors, such as developing ecotourism, cultural tourism, and desert tourism projects that can contribute to creating new job opportunities, as well as retraining and qualifying human resources to promote the sector and enhance its contribution to the national economy and diversify it beyond the hydrocarbon sector.

Based on this context, the current study will attempt to investigate the following questions: What is the reality of tourism in Algeria? what are the opportunities for exploitation and challenges of confrontation, and what are the prospects for development?

To answer this question, the article can be divided into the following elements:

- **Conceptualization.**
- **The historical development of tourism in Algeria.**
- **The reality of tourism in Algeria (opportunities and challenges).**
- **State efforts to promote the tourism sector.**
- **Prospects for the Development of the Tourism Sector.**

#### **First: Defining the concepts**

##### **1- The concept of tourism:**

The concept of tourism has received the attention of many researchers with different specializations, as it is one of the pillars and requirements of development:

According to the World Tourism Organization, the word tourism contains two concepts:

**Tourist:** Every temporary visitor who stays in the country he visits for at least 24 hours so that the reasons for the visit “travel” are for entertainment, rest, health, vacation, study, sports, or for doing family business, attending conferences, scientific, cultural, and political seminars.

**Hitchhiker:** Any temporary visitor whose stay does not exceed 24 hours at most outside his/her usual place of residence.<sup>1</sup>

The German **Freuler Guyer** defines it as “a modern phenomenon that stems from the growing need to obtain rest and recreation, change the weather, feel and taste the beauty of nature, and feel the joy and pleasure of staying in areas that have their own nature, which is the fruit of the advancement of transportation.”<sup>2</sup>

The Austrian **H. Schullard** defined it as “a term for the overlapping processes, especially economic processes that relate to the entry of foreigners, their temporary stay, and their spread within the borders of a particular region or country.”<sup>3</sup>

Tourism is also defined as “a social, cultural and economic phenomenon involving the movement of people to countries and regions outside their usual environment for personal, professional or commercial purposes and these people are called visitors, as they can be tourists, hikers or non-residents.”<sup>4</sup>

It is defined as the activities undertaken by persons during their travel and stay in places outside their usual environment, for leisure or other reasons related to the exercise of work activity, for a period not exceeding one year.<sup>5</sup>

Based on these previous definitions, a procedural definition of tourism can be derived:

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<sup>1</sup> Gerard Guibilato: *Economie Touristique*, Delta et Spes, Suisse, 1983, p10.

<sup>2</sup> BOUHDID Laila, & YAHYAOUI Elham. (2016). The possibility of benefiting from the Turkish experience in Algeria's local tourism industry. *Journal of Economics and Development*. 2016, p114.

<sup>3</sup> Maher Abdulaziz Tawfiq, *The Tourism Industry*, Dar Zahran for Publishing and Distribution, Jordan, 2013, p. 23

<sup>4</sup> Farid Bakhti, Reda Bahiani, Desert tourism as a method to promote domestic tourism in Algeria, *Journal of Economic Research*, Vol. 05, No. 02, 2020, p. 159

<sup>5</sup> ERICK LEROUX, *Management du tourisme et des loisirs*, Magnard\_ruibert; paris, 2014, p235.

It is an activity through which an individual moves from one place to another with the aim of entertainment, hiking, exploration, and may also be for cultural, therapeutic, sports or religious purposes, and includes several elements of transportation, accommodation, interaction with the new social environment and learning about local cultures, and this activity constitutes for the receiving country a source of income, and whenever there is a large turnout, this contributes to achieving development.

**Tourism varies according to the tourist's goal:**

- Recreational tourism: For traveling and recreation in tourist places such as beaches and resorts.
- Cultural tourism: To explore heritage, history, arts, cities, museums and monuments.
- Ecotourism: To enjoy nature and visit nature reserves and mountainous areas.
- Medical tourism: To travel with the aim of treatment and recovery through hot springs and health centers.
- Religious tourism: to visit holy places and religious monuments.

**2- The concept of development:**

Development is a term that refers to the revitalization of the national economy, and its transformation from a state of stagnation to a state of movement and dynamism, by increasing the ability of the national economy to achieve a tangible annual increase in the gross national product, with a change in production structures, means and level of employment, and an increased reliance on the industrial and craft sector, matched by a decrease in traditional activities and means changing the economic structure by shifting to an industrial economy, and for this reason the tangible annual increase in gross national product and average per capita income were considered basic indicators of development<sup>6</sup>.

Development is also defined as “the planned process of developing society in all its aspects, whether economic, social, cultural, or political, requiring the unification of the efforts of all parties of society, including citizens and public bodies.”<sup>7</sup>

Development is a continuous improvement process aimed at raising the standard of living and achieving progress in various economic, social, political and cultural fields, to reach the well-

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<sup>6</sup> Habiba Ammar, The role of economic institutions in achieving sustainable development in light of global economic blocs, PhD thesis, Messila University, Algeria, 2016, p. 54.

<sup>7</sup> Suhair Hamid, The Problem of Development in the Arab World, Dar Al-Shorouk for Publishing and Distribution, Amman, 2007, p. 23.

being of the members of society through the optimal utilization of available resources.

### **Second: The historical development of tourism in Algeria:**

Tourism in Algeria has a long and complex history, as it went through several stages that witnessed different developments and challenges, and the following can review the historical situation of tourism in Algeria while highlighting the efforts made in this field.

#### **1) Colonial period:**

During the colonial era, the French had begun to explore Algeria's natural and historical resources, but tourism was mostly geared to serve colonialism and French colonizers. Travel and tourism were mainly directed to the French classes in Algeria, and there were no real efforts to develop local tourism or preserve the cultural heritage of Algerians, but rather tourism was limited to coastal areas and areas governed by colonial interests.

The Kasbah of Algiers as a tourist model, in addition to being the historical nucleus of the city of Algiers for **3000** years, witnessed important events such as its transformation into the capital of the country in the 16th century and was the scene of the heroic Battle of Algiers in 1957 during the National Liberation War, which gave it an enormous symbolic value.<sup>8</sup>

#### **2) The post-independence period (1962-1980):**

At the beginning of independence, Algeria inherited a very limited tourism sector, consisting of a simple chain of hotels and a few coastal buildings. This infrastructure, which was aimed more at locals than tourists, was not suitable to support a significant tourism activity.

In 1963, the Ministry of Tourism was created to develop and promote the sector, focusing on traditional tourism and handicrafts, through three delegations in three major regions of the country. It had to wait until 1966 to begin a comprehensive reflection on tourism activity to produce a document titled "Prospects for Tourism Development". Assessment studies were underway concerning the inventory of coastal resources, pre-desert oases, and thermal resources, but until the mid-1970s, interest in tourism was relatively weak compared to the country's potential.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Icheboudene larbi, Casbah d'Alger, la sauferde et les acteurs, in colloque de Unesco; à Fes, 02-03 March 2003.

<sup>9</sup> Icheboudene larbi, Tourisme et Medina, la casbah d'Alger entre statuts et activités, colloque a l'université de Constantine fevrier,2015.

### **3) The period from 1980 to 2000:**

During this period, Algeria witnessed some developments in the field of tourism, but it was facing economic challenges and political and security conflicts. At the beginning of the 1980s, there were some major tourism projects, such as those aimed at developing desert tourism, which is one of the most prominent tourist attractions in Algeria; however, the security situation during the 1990s and under the Black Decade led to a significant decline in tourism activity.

With Algeria's dependence on oil revenues, tourism became one of the marginalized sectors, resulting in a decrease in the number of tourists and the deterioration of traditional industries associated with the sector, and the interest in restoring tourism began only recently with the decline in oil prices and the search for economic alternatives,<sup>10</sup> and tourism as a strategic option, as the next stage will show.

### **4) The period from 2000 to the present:**

In the new millennium, the tourism sector in Algeria began to witness greater attention from the government, as part of efforts to promote economic diversification away from dependence on oil and gas, Algeria launched several strategies aimed at developing tourism, such as improving infrastructure, expanding the transportation network, and developing tourism services, for example, some tourist areas were developed such as "Timgad" and "Kasbah" in Algiers, which were added to the UNESCO World Cultural Heritage List, and some tourist parks were launched in desert areas, such as "Tassili Nager" and "El Houariya". Under the new policy of economic recovery until 2010, Algeria has worked to rehabilitate this sector, promote investment in it and grant concessions to both national and foreign investors, in the context of flexible legal legislation and support and assistance bodies, with the aim of identifying the available tourism resources and exploiting them rationally and economically in order to achieve the desired goals.

Algeria's traditional industries and heritage have received great attention in recent years, as it has become globally competitive. The women's costume of eastern Algeria has been classified as part of the intangible world heritage by UNESCO, the seventh such classification for Algeria, as UNESCO had previously listed seven intangible heritage elements as part of the world heritage, namely the traditional Gorara people and associated customs in 2008, the customs and craft skills associated with the Tlemcen wedding costume in 2012<sup>11</sup>, the annual visit to the shrine of Sidi Abdelkader Ben Mohammed (Sidi Cheikh) in

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<sup>10</sup> Icheboudene larbi, Same as previous reference

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.annahar.com/arab-world/north->

2013, and the rites and celebrations for Sbeiba Day in 2014, which is the seventh such classification for Algeria.

The third largest mosque in the world is located on the Mohammedia plateau in the capital. This religious and cultural edifice is a unique tourist destination because of the meaning of antiquity, originality and contemporaneity at the same time, and what characterizes this architectural masterpiece is its Moorish-Andalusian character, the beauty of Islamic architecture, and the latest innovations in engineering and construction.

Despite Algeria's availability of many tourism resources that make it a leading tourist destination, and despite the development of the sector through these stages, the indicators of the tourism sector remain far from the value and importance of these resources, this situation calls for rethinking the tourism policy that allows Algeria to take its place within the global tourism market.

### **Third: The reality of tourism in Algeria**

The situation of tourism in Algeria reflects a combination of great potential and continuous challenges, and although Algeria possesses diverse tourism components, the tourism sector has not yet reached a level commensurate with these potentials, let's take a look at the most prominent aspects of this situation by highlighting:

#### **1. Diverse tourism assets:**

Algeria possesses important tourism ingredients that make it a unique destination for travelers and explorers, and witnesses a great diversity of tourist attractions and contains indisputable tourist riches, diverse locations (coastal, mountainous, plains, desert), and multiple archaeological riches, including:

- Cultural and historical tourism: Algeria is home to many historical sites such as the Kasbah in Algiers (which has been recognized by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site), Timgad, Jamila, as well as other Roman sites scattered throughout the country.
- Desert tourism: The Algerian desert is one of the most prominent tourist destinations, with famous landmarks such as Tassili Nagger (a World Heritage Site) and Haqqar, and safaris to the Algerian desert are popular, but still face infrastructure challenges.
- Coastal tourism: Algeria has a long coastline on the Mediterranean Sea with stunning beaches such as those of Tipaza, Algiers, and Bejaia, but these beaches still lack some of the modern services that make them an ideal tourist destination.

- Environmental and natural tourism: The diversity of natural landscapes from mountains such as Mount Djergera and Mount Sharia, to green areas such as national parks, provide opportunities for eco-tourism and nature adventures.

## **2. Challenges faced by the tourism sector:**

Despite this enormous tourism potential, Algeria's tourism sector faces a number of challenges that hinder its development, the most important of which are:

- Limited infrastructure: Despite some recent projects, the infrastructure in many tourist areas still needs improvement, whether in the field of services, transportation network, hotels, or tourist facilities, as they require restructuring and development in line with international standards.
- Weak tourism marketing and promotion: Algeria's tourism is not well known internationally, and the country lacks effective marketing campaigns to attract international tourists, despite its great potential.
- Administrative complexity and bureaucracy that may hinder investment in the tourism sector, discouraging investors from engaging in it.
- Limited diversity of tourism services such as high-quality hotels, recreational facilities, and organized tour programs.
- Lack of societal awareness of the importance of tourism as a vital economic sector, which may lead to a lack of appreciation of tourist areas or their unsustainable exploitation.
- The security situation or the false impression of it abroad can affect the attraction of foreign tourists, even though Algeria is safe and stable.
- On the other hand, the lack of integration between sectors (such as transportation and agriculture) to support rural and desert tourism is a hindrance.
- Lack of digitalization in the tourism sector, such as e-apps or online booking, which limits access to young, tech-savvy tourists.
- Lack of training and quality of services: There is a need to develop the skills of workers in the tourism sector to ensure high-quality services, and training in hospitality and foreign language, especially English and French, has become essential to meet the needs of international visitors.
- Absence of a role for tourism media and lack of involvement of diplomatic actors to attend various local events to promote local tourism.
- Global competition: Countries are competing to attract tourists, which requires large investments in marketing, infrastructure, and improving the quality of services, and Algeria faces great difficulties in keeping up with this competition, similar to other developing countries.



#### Fourth: State efforts to promote the tourism sector

Tourism activity witnessed a significant increase in 2023, in terms of total arrivals, as **3,292,508** tourists were recorded, an increase of **135.5%** compared to 2022,<sup>12</sup> This was achieved thanks to the policy adopted and the relentless efforts by the state to develop tourism; they can be summarized as follows:

- Economic diversification strategies: As part of the economic transformation away from oil and gas, the Algerian government seeks to develop tourism as one of the important sectors to diversify sources of income, and budgets have been allocated to develop tourism in recent years.
- Infrastructure improvement projects: These projects include developing hotels, building new tourist areas, and improving the transportation network between tourist cities.
- Encouraging investment in desert tourism: The private sector and the government are working together to develop tourism services in the desert, including the development of desert hotels and tours, and there are notable efforts to develop safari tourism and desert excursions.
- “Green Tourism” strategy: Algeria seeks to develop ecotourism in protected natural areas, such as national parks and protected areas in the south and east. This strategy is one of the sustainable tourism development initiatives in recent years, where Algeria has begun to focus on sustainable ecotourism, developing tourism in natural areas while preserving the environment and biodiversity.
- Commercialization of cultural heritage: There is a growing interest in preserving and promoting historical and cultural sites globally, especially after several Algerian sites were classified as world Heritage Sites.
- Opportunities for international cooperation: Algeria has started to open up more to cooperation with other countries in the field of tourism, through agreements with international tourism companies, which may contribute to improving Algeria's image on the global tourism map, and participation in international tourism exhibitions can contribute to promoting Algeria's tourism assets.
- Adoption of the “ Quality Tourism Algeria” scheme: The Algeria Tourism Quality Scheme aspire to unite all Algeria professionals in the tourism sector through the voluntary pursuit of quality, keen to meet the needs of customers and satisfy them, national and foreign, the Algeria Tourism quality scheme was developed with professionals and for professionals, in accordance with international standards, the quality scheme allows to define the path for the

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.mta.gov.dz>

progressive improvement of services and obtains the brand Quality Tourism Algeria; The Algeria Tourism Quality Scheme is linked to the following points: <sup>13</sup>

- Establishing the Algerian Tourism Quality brand.
- Strengthening the competencies of human resources.
- Organizing tourism activities.
- Modernization of infrastructures.

Despite the development of tourism in Algeria in recent years, there is still a long way to go to achieve sustainable progress and develop the tourism sector in line with the country's great potential.

#### **Fifth: Prospects for the Development of the Tourism Sector**

Tourism is a powerful engine for economic and social development, but it requires wise management to overcome the challenges it faces, by adopting the principles of sustainable tourism, where the state can maximize the economic and social benefits of tourism, while preserving the environment and local culture, as tourism contributes to

1. Increasing GDP by diversifying sources of income and providing foreign currencies.
2. Providing job opportunities and contributing to reducing unemployment, as last year in the field of tourism investment recorded **2235** approved projects, with a capacity of **271336** beds, which will provide **94468** jobs<sup>14</sup>.
3. Promoting cultural exchange, in addition, tourism encourages the preservation of local cultural heritage.
4. Developing infrastructure, whether it is economic infrastructure such as public utilities, public works, transportation, communication, or social infrastructure, often related to health structures, banks, and services that contribute to improving the standard of living.<sup>15</sup>
5. Supporting local communities by encouraging small enterprises, expanding local markets and encouraging traditional industries to meet the demands of tourists; for its part, the traditional industry sector recorded, during 2023, the creation of **26537** new activities, including **17950** established activities, which allowed the creation of **68797** jobs<sup>16</sup>.
6. Tourism is one of the most important reasons for social development in tourist countries, as it provides an

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.mta.gov.dz>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.mta.gov.dz>

<sup>15</sup> Abdul Nasser bin Abdul Rahman, Tourism Investment in AlUla Governorate, Research submitted to the General Authority for Tourism and Antiquities, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, 2008, p. 13

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.mta.gov.dz>

opportunity for members of society to learn about other ideas, interests, and cultures through their direct contact with tourists.<sup>17</sup>

7. Promoting sustainability: Sustainable tourism encourages the responsible use of natural resources by following the principles of governance, protecting the environment, and supporting local projects that take into account environmental and social standards.
8. Encouraging tourism investment, as it leads to the elimination of all forms of social corruption and dangerous social diseases caused by unemployment by creating new job opportunities.<sup>18</sup>
9. Sustainable tourism guarantees minimizing the environmental impact, protecting natural resources and using them optimally to develop tourism locally.
10. Developing long-term plans that take into account the absorptive capacity of tourist sites and the protection of natural resources.
11. Promote local participation: Involve local communities in tourism decision-making and distribute tourism revenues.
12. Invest in technology: Using modern technology to improve the tourist experience, such as smartphone applications and artificial intelligence in managing tourist destinations.

Thus, tourism represents a major pillar in the process of economic development, as it is considered a social requirement as it expresses a human desire for mobility and opens the way for job creation, and an economic requirement as it helps raise the level of incomes, the flow of foreign currencies, attracting capital and opening the way for investment, which makes it an important source of national income.

### **Conclusion:**

The reliance on the rentier economy has delayed the development of the tourism sector in Algeria similar to other sectors, in addition to the Black Decade, which was a concern for tourists, which contributed to the weakening of the sector.

However, with the realization of the importance of tourism as an economic tributary, the tourism sector in Algeria is witnessing optimism for a promising future if the potential is well invested. Increasing investments, improving tourism

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<sup>17</sup> Wafa Zaki Ibrahim, *The role of tourism in social development - an evaluation study of tourist villages*, Modern University Office, Alexandria, 2006.

<sup>18</sup> Hussein Omar, *Investment and Globalization*, Modern Book House, Cairo, Egypt, 2000, p. 57

infrastructure, improving training programs for tourism workers, and expanding international marketing, in addition to exploiting the opportunities available in ecotourism and desert tourism, can enhance the role of tourism in driving economic development in the country, in addition, there is a trend towards sustainability, which is in line with global trends in environmental preservation.

The success of these efforts depends on adopting a clear and integrated strategy, supporting investment in tourism, and restructuring the sector to ensure its sustainability as a key factor in economic development.

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