

INSECURITY AND THE CHALLENGES OF AFRICA'S TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

Michael Mashal JEMLAK

Abstract: *Africa's tourism industry holds immense potential due to its rich cultural heritage, diverse landscapes, and abundant wildlife. This study explores the impact of insecurity on Africa's tourism sector, highlighting key challenges and proposing strategies such as improved security policies, regional cooperation, and investment in infrastructure to foster a safer and more attractive tourism environment. The data for this study were collected from secondary sources such as textbooks, journal articles and internet sources while content analysis was used to analysed the data collected. This study argues that insecurity remains a significant barrier to its growth and sustainability. Issues such as terrorism, political instability, civil unrest, and high crime rates deter international and domestic tourists, affecting revenue generation and economic development. Additionally, poor infrastructure, weak governance, and inadequate security measures exacerbate the problem, making many destinations unsafe or inaccessible. Lastly, addressing these concerns is crucial for unlocking Africa's tourism potential and driving socio-economic development across the continent.*

Keywords: *Africa, Government, Development, Tourism*

Introduction

Tourism is one of the oldest human activities, evolving from early human migration, trade, and exploration. The roots of organized tourism can be traced back to ancient civilizations, where travel for religious, economic, and leisure purposes was common (Smith, 2014). In ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, Greece, and Rome, tourism was closely linked to religious pilgrimages, trade, and public events. The Egyptians traveled to temples and festivals, while the Greeks introduced the concept of leisure travel, especially through the Olympic Games and visits to sacred sites such as Delphi (Mathieson & Wall, 1982). The Romans are often credited with pioneering large-scale leisure tourism, with the development of extensive road networks and infrastructure allowing citizens to visit coastal resorts, thermal baths, and cultural festivals across the empire (Timothy & Olsen, 2006).

The fall of the Roman Empire led to a decline in long-distance travel during the Middle Ages, mainly due to political instability, economic downturns, and threats from invasions. However, religious pilgrimages, such as those to Santiago de Compostela and Canterbury, continued to sustain some form of tourism (Cooper, 2005).

The Renaissance sparked a revival in art, culture, and science, reinvigorating travel among European elites. From the 16th to 18th centuries, the

Grand Tour became a rite of passage for young aristocrats, particularly from Britain, who traveled across Europe to experience its culture, architecture, and history (Urry, 1990). This era laid the groundwork for modern tourism by fostering appreciation for heritage and leisure travel.

The Industrial Revolution of the 18th and 19th centuries fundamentally transformed tourism by making travel more accessible to the emerging middle class. Innovations such as the steam engine, railways, and steamships dramatically reduced travel time and costs (Williams & Lew, 2015). Seaside resorts, like those in Brighton and the French Riviera, became popular holiday destinations. The establishment of the railway system in England also promoted domestic tourism, with the working class gaining opportunities for leisure travel (Hudman & Jackson, 2003).

The 20th century saw tourism become a global industry. The invention of the automobile and airplane further expanded mobility, and after World War II, international tourism grew rapidly due to economic prosperity, improved infrastructure, and increased leisure time (Sharpley, 2018). The rise of package holidays in the post-war period democratized travel, making it affordable for mass populations. Tourist destinations diversified to include natural parks, cultural heritage sites, and urban centers worldwide.

Today, tourism is characterized by globalization, digitalization, and sustainability concerns. Ecotourism, cultural tourism, and experiential travel are rising trends reflecting growing awareness of environmental and social impacts (Baker & Cameron, 2008). The COVID-19 pandemic has also profoundly affected global tourism, accelerating shifts toward domestic travel and contactless services (Gössling et al., 2020).

In Africa, tourism holds enormous potential due to the continent's abundant natural resources, rich cultural diversity, historical landmarks, and diverse ecosystems (World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), 2022). However, despite these comparative advantages, Africa's tourism industry continues to underperform relative to its potential. One of the most pressing impediments to tourism development on the continent is insecurity.

Insecurity—manifesting in forms such as terrorism, armed conflict, political instability, civil unrest, and high crime rates—has significantly deterred both domestic and international tourists (Mensah & Adomako, 2022). Notably, the emergence of extremist groups like Boko Haram in Nigeria, Al-Shabaab in Somalia and Kenya, and insurgent militias in the Sahel region has heightened global safety concerns, leading to travel advisories and a decline in tourist arrivals (Adeola & Evans, 2021). These conditions not only threaten tourist safety but also damage the reputation and image of African destinations on the international stage.

Moreover, the impact of insecurity extends beyond immediate safety risks. It weakens institutional capacity, discourages private sector investment in the hospitality and transport sectors, and leads to the deterioration of tourism infrastructure (Chigora & Guzura, 2020). In many cases, governments prioritize military spending over tourism promotion and infrastructure, thereby further

stalling the sector's growth. Insecurity also disrupts the operations of tour operators and reduces confidence among stakeholders in the tourism value chain (Rogerson & Baum, 2020).

Therefore, addressing insecurity is not just a security concern but a critical economic imperative. The development of sustainable tourism in Africa requires robust policy frameworks, regional cooperation, community-based security initiatives, and strategic investments in infrastructure and law enforcement. Without creating a secure and stable environment, Africa's tourism sector will continue to struggle, limiting its contributions to national development and regional integration. In the light of the above this study explores the impact of insecurity on Africa's tourism sector.

Conceptual and Literature Review

Insecurity refers to the condition of being exposed to risk or danger, particularly regarding life, property, and well-being. In the context of tourism, insecurity encompasses acts of violence, terrorism, political instability, civil unrest, and crimes that pose threats to tourists and tourism infrastructure (Mensah & Adomako, 2022). Insecurity generates fear and deters tourists from visiting destinations perceived as unsafe, thereby directly impacting tourism flows and economic growth.

Tourism development involves the strategic planning and implementation of initiatives that enhance the growth of tourism-related activities and infrastructure. It includes the creation of hospitality facilities, transport networks, cultural attractions, and security mechanisms that make destinations attractive and accessible to tourists (UNWTO, 2022). Sustainable tourism development also emphasizes environmental conservation, community participation, and economic inclusivity.

However, several studies have examined the relationship between insecurity and tourism in Africa. Adeola and Evans (2021) found a negative correlation between rising insecurity and tourism revenues across West Africa. They observed that countries affected by terrorist incidents experienced up to a 30% drop in international arrivals within a year of a major attack. Similarly, Chigora and Guzura (2020) argued that insecurity not only reduces tourist numbers but also increases operational costs for tour operators who must invest in additional safety measures. Their study on Zimbabwe revealed that security concerns discouraged long-haul travel, especially from Western countries.

Mensah and Adomako (2022) highlighted the compounded effect of insecurity with weak governance, noting that poor institutional response to crime and violence erodes public trust and discourages investment in tourism infrastructure. In contrast, countries like Rwanda and Botswana that have made significant strides in improving internal security have seen substantial tourism growth. Rogerson and Baum (2020) also emphasized that beyond direct violence, insecurity includes structural and political instability. Their study post-COVID-19

suggests that rebuilding Africa's tourism sector must go hand-in-hand with strategies to enhance national and regional stability.

While existing literature confirms the detrimental effects of insecurity on Africa's tourism sector, most studies focus on individual countries or specific regions. There is a need for a more integrated, continental perspective that explores cross-border cooperation, regional policy harmonization, and collective security measures to promote tourism. Furthermore, little attention has been given to the role of digital surveillance and technology-driven safety solutions in mitigating security threats in tourism hotspots.

On the whole, insecurity remains a major obstacle to tourism development in Africa, affecting both perception and actual tourist experiences. The reviewed literature provides ample evidence of its negative impacts but also highlights opportunities for recovery through improved governance, regional collaboration, and innovation. A strategic and multi-level approach is essential to overcoming these challenges and unlocking the full potential of tourism on the continent.

History of Tourism in Africa

Tourism in Africa has a long and complex history shaped by colonial legacies, natural and cultural richness, socio-political dynamics, and recent globalization trends. While the continent has always possessed the foundational elements of a vibrant tourism industry—such as wildlife, beaches, and historical landmarks—its tourism trajectory has been uneven due to a variety of internal and external factors.

Tourism in Africa can trace its roots back to pre-colonial times when ancient kingdoms such as Egypt, Mali, and Ethiopia attracted travelers, traders, and pilgrims from Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. The ancient pyramids of Egypt and the rock-hewn churches of Lalibela, Ethiopia, are early examples of cultural sites that drew international attention (Dieke, 2000).

However, it was during the colonial era that structured tourism activities began to emerge. European colonial powers established exclusive resorts, game parks, and railways—primarily for the leisure of European settlers and elite travelers. The development of safari tourism in East and Southern Africa during the 19th and early 20th centuries is one example, largely marketed toward European aristocrats (Christie et al., 2013). Unfortunately, this form of tourism was exclusionary and did not benefit local populations, with infrastructure primarily built to serve colonial interests.

Following the wave of independence across African nations in the 1960s, governments began to view tourism as a potential driver for economic development, foreign exchange, and employment. Countries like Kenya, Morocco, Egypt, and Tunisia invested in national parks, coastal resorts, and international airports to attract visitors from Europe and the Middle East (Akama & Kieti, 2007).

However, the sector faced significant obstacles. Political instability, weak infrastructure, and limited marketing capacity hampered growth. In some regions,

the legacy of colonial land policies also created tension between local communities and tourism developers, particularly around protected wildlife areas.

The 1980s and early 1990s were marked by economic decline and structural adjustment programs (SAPs) across much of Africa. These programs, imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank, often resulted in reduced government spending on tourism infrastructure and promotional activities (Sindiga, 1996). Moreover, rising insecurity and civil conflicts in countries like Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Rwanda damaged Africa's image as a safe destination.

Despite these challenges, some countries—such as South Africa after apartheid and Egypt following its peace agreements—experienced a surge in tourist interest due to improved political conditions and liberalized economies. The 2000s marked a period of recovery and expansion for African tourism, as global interest in ecotourism, adventure tourism, and cultural heritage grew. The rise of middle-class travelers in Asia and increased connectivity through budget airlines and digital platforms contributed to Africa's inclusion in global travel circuits (UNWTO, 2022). Notable tourism destinations like Cape Town, Marrakech, and Victoria Falls gained international recognition.

Rwanda emerged as a model of post-conflict tourism development, leveraging its mountain gorillas and safety reforms to attract high-value ecotourists (Novelli et al., 2012). Similarly, Ghana and Senegal positioned themselves as centers of African diaspora tourism, inviting people of African descent to explore their roots through cultural festivals and heritage sites. Nonetheless, challenges remain. Issues such as terrorism, pandemics (e.g., Ebola and COVID-19), poor infrastructure, and governance deficits continue to hinder the full realization of Africa's tourism potential.

History of Insecurity in Tourism in Africa

Tourism in Africa has long been affected by waves of insecurity, which have constrained its development and limited its global competitiveness. Since the post-independence era, African nations have faced numerous security-related challenges—ranging from civil wars and military coups to terrorism and violent crimes—that have disrupted tourism growth and deterred international visitors.

Following the wave of decolonization in the 1960s and 1970s, many African countries experienced political upheaval, civil wars, and military coups. These unstable conditions undermined tourism prospects in countries such as Uganda, Angola, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (Dieke, 2000). Infrastructure collapse, mass migration, and lack of safety discouraged both domestic and foreign tourists, leading to decades of stagnation in the tourism sector.

The 1998 U.S. embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania marked a significant turning point for tourism insecurity in East Africa. The attacks by Al-Qaeda not only resulted in tragic loss of life but also severely damaged the perception of the region as a safe travel destination (Gosa, 2015). In the 2010s, new

waves of terrorism emerged with Boko Haram in Nigeria, Al-Shabaab in Somalia and Kenya, and other extremist groups across the Sahel region. These groups have frequently targeted tourist areas, hotels, and transport systems—such as the 2013 Westgate Mall attack in Nairobi—leading to significant declines in tourist arrivals and revenue losses (Mensah & Adomako, 2022).

Tourism in countries like Kenya and Zimbabwe has also been affected by domestic political violence. The 2007–2008 post-election violence in Kenya led to widespread cancellations of tourist bookings and a 30% drop in arrivals (Rogerson & Baum, 2020). Similarly, Zimbabwe's repeated election-related crises and economic instability have hindered efforts to attract tourists and foreign investment (Chigora & Guzura, 2020).

In addition to large-scale conflict and terrorism, everyday crime such as theft, armed robbery, and scams poses a threat to tourists in many African cities. Cities like Johannesburg, Lagos, and Nairobi have been frequently flagged in international travel advisories due to high crime rates, impacting tourism operators and traveler decision-making (Adeola & Evans, 2021). In response, several countries have deployed tourist police units and launched public safety campaigns, though with mixed success.

Despite persistent insecurity, several African countries have demonstrated resilience. Rwanda, for instance, has emerged as a leading example of tourism recovery following the 1994 genocide. Through strong governance, investment in infrastructure, and security-focused reforms, Rwanda has become a model for post-conflict tourism revival (UNWTO, 2022). Morocco and South Africa have also strengthened internal security and destination marketing to rebuild tourist confidence and mitigate negative perceptions.

Impact of insecurity on Africa's tourism sector

Insecurity, in its various forms—including terrorism, armed conflict, political unrest, and high crime rates—represents one of the most pressing barriers to the development of Africa's tourism sector. These security threats contribute to negative perceptions of Africa as a tourist destination and result in reduced tourist arrivals, canceled trips, and diminished investor confidence (Mensah & Adomako, 2022). The fear of violence not only deters international tourists but also restricts the movement of domestic travelers, further limiting tourism's economic potential (Adeola & Evans, 2021).

Many African countries face challenges related to unstable political environments. Coups, election violence, and protest movements frequently disrupt tourism operations and create a climate of uncertainty. Political instability reduces the predictability needed for tourism planning and makes long-term investment in the sector risky (Rogerson & Baum, 2020). For example, prolonged unrest in countries like Sudan and parts of Ethiopia has resulted in the near-collapse of local tourism economies.

The presence of terrorist groups such as Boko Haram in Nigeria, Al-Shabaab in Somalia and Kenya, and ISIS affiliates in the Sahel has further

destabilized regions once considered safe for tourism. Terrorist attacks on hotels, resorts, and public transportation have a direct and immediate impact on tourism by instilling fear among potential visitors and disrupting business continuity (Chigora & Guzura, 2020).

Inadequate infrastructure—such as poor road networks, limited airport facilities, and unreliable electricity—further compounds the challenges facing Africa's tourism sector. These limitations, coupled with weak governance structures and ineffective security policies, make many destinations either unsafe or logistically difficult to access (UNWTO, 2022). Additionally, poor crisis management and weak enforcement of safety regulations often result in prolonged recovery times after security incidents (Mensah & Adomako, 2022).

Despite these challenges, there are opportunities for revitalizing Africa's tourism sector. Strengthening regional cooperation on security, developing integrated tourism safety policies, and increasing investment in transport and hospitality infrastructure are essential strategies. Countries like Rwanda and Morocco have demonstrated that with effective governance, coordinated security efforts, and focused investment, tourism can thrive even in post-conflict or high-risk settings (Adeola & Evans, 2021; UNWTO, 2022).

Conclusion

Insecurity remains a formidable barrier to the growth and sustainability of Africa's tourism industry. Despite the continent's vast natural beauty, cultural richness, and unique attractions, persistent issues such as terrorism, political instability, civil unrest, and high crime rates continue to undermine tourism development. These security challenges not only deter potential visitors but also discourage investment, weaken tourism infrastructure, and damage Africa's global image as a travel destination. Additionally, poor governance, inadequate infrastructure, and fragmented security policies exacerbate the problem, making many tourism sites unsafe or inaccessible. Addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach that includes the implementation of robust security policies, regional cooperation, improved infrastructure, and strong governance frameworks. If effectively managed, Africa's tourism sector has the potential to significantly contribute to economic diversification, job creation, and regional integration. A secure and stable environment is therefore not only essential for attracting tourists but also for driving broader socio-economic development across the continent.

Recommendations

a. Strengthen Regional Security Cooperation

African governments should collaborate more effectively through regional bodies such as the African Union (AU), ECOWAS, and SADC to address cross-border security threats. Joint security operations, intelligence sharing, and coordinated anti-terrorism strategies can help create a more secure environment for tourism.

b. Invest in Tourism Infrastructure and Security Technology

Governments and private investors should prioritize the development of essential tourism infrastructure, including roads, airports, emergency services, and surveillance systems. Modern security technologies such as CCTV, drones, and digital monitoring can improve safety and restore tourists' confidence.

c. Develop and Enforce Tourism-Specific Security Policies

Clear, tourism-focused security policies and crisis management frameworks should be developed at national and local levels. These should include emergency response protocols, tourist police units, and safety certification for hospitality establishments.

d. Promote Good Governance and Political Stability

Long-term tourism development depends on political stability and transparent governance. Governments should ensure free and fair elections, uphold the rule of law, and engage in inclusive policymaking to build both domestic and international trust.

e. Enhance Destination Image through Strategic Marketing

African countries must counter negative security perceptions through targeted tourism campaigns. Highlighting safe destinations, success stories, and unique attractions via international media, travel expos, and digital platforms can reshape Africa's image as a secure and desirable tourism destination.

References

- Adeola, O., & Evans, O. (2021). *Tourism and insecurity in Africa: Exploring the nexus*. *Journal of African Development Studies*, 13(2), 104–119.
- Akama, J. S., & Kieti, D. M. (2007). Tourism and socio-economic development in developing countries: A case study of Mombasa Resort in Kenya. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 15(6), 735–748. <https://doi.org/10.2167/jost543.0>
- Baker, M., & Cameron, E. (2008). Critical success factors in destination marketing. *Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 8(2), 79–97. <https://doi.org/10.1057/thr.2008.4>
- Chigora, P., & Guzura, T. (2020). *Tourism development and security issues in Africa: A critical assessment*. *African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure*, 9(3), 45–58. <https://ajhtl.com/uploads/Volume9Issue3/Article5.pdf>
- Christie, I., Fernandes, E., Messerli, H., & Twining-Ward, L. (2013). *Tourism in Africa: Harnessing tourism for growth and improved livelihoods*. Washington, DC: World Bank.
- Cooper, C. (2005). *Tourism: Principles and practice* (3rd ed.). Pearson Education.
- Dieke, P. U. C. (2000). *The political economy of tourism development in Africa*. New York: Cognizant Communication Corporation.
- Gosa, T. (2015). Tourism in East Africa and the impact of terrorism: A historical overview. *African Security Review*, 24(4), 380–392. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10246029.2015.1086069>
- Gössling, S., Scott, D., & Hall, C. M. (2020). Pandemics, tourism and global change: A rapid assessment of COVID-19. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 29(1), 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2020.1758708>
- Hudman, L. E., & Jackson, R. (2003). *Geography of travel and tourism* (4th ed.). Thomson Learning.
- Mathieson, A., & Wall, G. (1982). *Tourism: Economic, physical and social impacts*. Longman.
- Mensah, C., & Adomako, S. (2022). *Insecurity and tourism in Africa: Trends, impacts, and policy implications*. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 43, 100997. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2022.100997>

- Novelli, M., Morgan, N., & Nibigira, C. (2012). Tourism in a post-conflict situation of fragility. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 39(3), 1446–1469. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2012.03.003>
- Rittichainuwat, B. N., & Chakraborty, G. (2009). *Perceived travel risks regarding terrorism and disease: The case of Thailand*. *Tourism Management*, 30(3), 410–418. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2008.08.001>
- Rogerson, C. M., & Baum, T. (2020). *COVID-19 and African tourism resilience: Opportunities and challenges*. *Tourism Review International*, 24(3-4), 213–228. <https://doi.org/10.3727/154427220X15988187676923>
- Sharpley, R. (2018). *Tourism and development: Concepts and issues* (2nd ed.). Channel View Publications.
- Sindiga, I. (1996). Domestic tourism in Kenya. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 23(1), 19–31. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0160-7383\(95\)00035-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/0160-7383(95)00035-6)
- Smith, V. L. (2014). *Hosts and guests: The anthropology of tourism* (2nd ed.). University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Timothy, D. J., & Olsen, D. H. (2006). *Tourism, religion and spiritual journeys*. Routledge.
- United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). (2022). *Tourism in Africa: Development strategies for sustainable recovery*. Retrieved from <https://www.unwto.org>
- Urry, J. (1990). *The tourist gaze: Leisure and travel in contemporary societies*. Sage Publications.
- Williams, S., & Lew, A. (2015). *Tourism geography: Critical understandings of place, space and experience* (3rd ed.). Routledge.

Notes on the author

Michael Mashal JEMLAK - Department of Political Science, Karl Kumm University, Vom-Nigeria. michaelmarshal688@gmail.com