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Peace and Tourism in Nigeria

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Nigeria is endowed with a wealth of rich and varied human, natural, and cultural resources which are a great asset to the country's tourism development. However despite the growth of international tourism and its importance in developing countries, in Nigeria the tourism industry has not grown significantly. Peace and stability are important prerequisites to tourism development. The political instability, crime, and ethno-religious disputes in Nigeria have been a major impediment to tourism development. Tourism, if based on the principles and good practices honed through ecotourism, could be a powerful tool that would reduce the country's dependence on oil. This type of socially and environmentally responsible tourism could also reduce national instability by helping to create wealth, bridge cultural differences, foster peace among the different ethnic and religion groups, and develop rural communities.

Current State of the Tourism Industry in Nigeria

Nigeria, Africa's largest country, has some 370 ethnic groups, 4000 dialects, and over 140 million people which constitutes one-seventh of the continent's population. The country, with its rich cultural heritage has 36 states and six geopolitical zones that group people largely by ethnic background: North-West, North-East, South-West, South-South, South-East and Central Nigeria. The country is also blessed with tropical rain forests, savannah grasslands, mangrove swamps, and the sahel savannah near the Sahara Desert. Attractions for tourists are therefore both natural and cultural. They include an excellent climate with sunshine year round, vast tracts of unspoiled nature ranging from tropical forests, magnificent parks and protected areas, waterfalls, unique wildlife, beautiful rivers, beaches, *inselbergs*, or isolated rocky hills, and a good location along the West African coast. Its cultural attractions include many national museums, ancient slave sites, palaces and shrines, well-preserved local customs, a rich variety of handicrafts, and the authentic, unpretentious, and friendly population.ⁱ

Nigeria gained independence from Britain in 1960, but it wasn't until 1976 when the government established the Nigeria Tourism Board (NTB) that tourism was officially recognized as a potential economic activity. However, ongoing political instability and a string of military dictatorships have meant that developing a tourism industry was largely neglected.ⁱⁱ Nigeria

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also suffered from a number of intra-and inter-state conflicts, most significantly the Biafra secessionist war from 1967 to 1970 during which as many as 30,000 Nigerians died.ⁱⁱⁱ This remains a landmark political event and is a reminder of the fragility of the Nigerian nation state.

It was only in 1990 that a national tourism policy was finally formulated and adopted. Over the last four decades, several tourism development programs have been started by both the Federal (national) government and various state governments. These include programs relating to wildlife conservation, museum and archaeological site preservation, and the development of accommodations and other facilities in areas of outstanding natural beauty.

Other constraints have also limited the growth of tourism in Nigeria. Tourism attractions are dispersed over large areas and road linkages are inadequate, so tourists face serious transportation problems. Additionally, the widespread poverty, a perception of the country as unsafe because of high crime rates, and frequent political, religious, and ethnic disturbances have all served to hinder tourism development.^{iv} In addition, both private and government investors still lack skills in packaging tourism products for local and international consumers.

Consequently, earnings from tourism have been very low, accounting for only about three percent of all international travel to all of Africa between 1998 and 2003.^v The majority of Nigeria's foreign arrivals are business travelers, officials on mission, and family visits. Most come from Western Europe, North America, South-East Asia, and neighboring West African countries. On top of these challenges, Nigeria has been crippled by the lack of accurate statistics on arrivals and departures. For any country to create a substantial international tourism industry and measure its impacts there needs to be a reliable mechanism for keeping records of inbound and outbound traffic.

Finally, domestic tourism has also been very low, as many Nigerians are too poor to vacation and those with resources have not developed a "culture" of tourism. As Alhaji Aliyu Akwe Doma Governor of Nasarawa State told a tourism workshop in 2008, "Our major challenges to my mind, is first and foremost to develop our domestic tourism which is largely un-organized. This is a pre-condition to attracting foreign tourists and investors in the sector."^{vi} In recent years educated, high income earners and students in Nigeria are an increasingly important source of domestic tourism.^{vii}

According to tourism expert Tayo Fakiyesi,^{viii} the current state of tourism in Nigeria can be summarized as follows:

- Nigeria has a unique, untapped tourism goldmine that offers potential opportunities for investors.
- Nigeria's tourism industry operates well below international standards.
- Nigeria's tourism industry lags behind that of many other African countries.
- The interdependence between tourism, culture and the environment has become an important consideration in the formulation of tourism policies.
- Successive governments have failed to establish comprehensive and well coordinated agendas for tourism development, either among departments at the national level or between national and local governments.
- The Ministry of Tourism is often seen as a junior player in government.

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- Tourism is typically viewed as an industry that primarily benefits elites.

By examining why Nigeria, with its abundant natural and cultural resources, has experienced only small gains in tourism, this paper seeks to outline both the causes and some solutions.

Measures to Overcome Challenges Facing Tourism Industry in Nigeria

While the post-colonial government was very slow to create a tourism board until 1976, the private sector founded the Nigerian Tourist Association in 1962, just two years after independence. Efforts by the Association led to the admission of the Nigerian government as a full member of the International Union of Official Travel Organizations in 1964. This body later became the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO).^{ix}

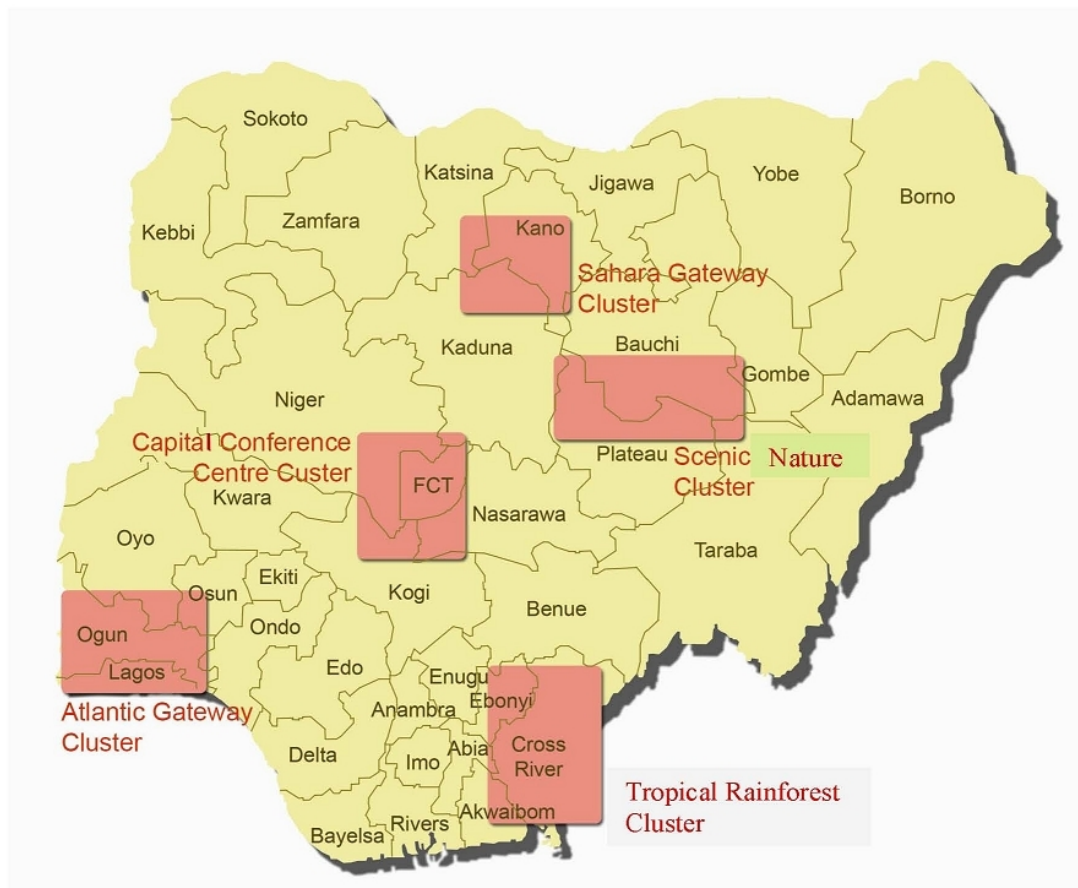
The military government Decree 54 of 1976 established the Nigerian Tourist Board. Subsequently, to strengthen and revitalize the Tourism Board, Decree 54 was replaced by Decree 81 in 1992, which created Nigerian Tourism Development Corporation (NTDC). The NTDC was given overall power to develop, promote, and market tourism both within and outside the country. Despite these institutional measures, high level corruption within the military governments meant that little or nothing was achieved in the area of tourism development.^x

It wasn't until 1999, with the return to civilian government under President Olusegun Obasanjo, that tourism was repositioned to occupy a central role in Nigeria's economic recovery plans. Obasanjo established a Ministry of Culture and Tourism, with the NTDC continuing as a parastatal or semi-governmental organization. (The NTDC has, for instance, the responsibility of classifying all hospitality establishments in the country and ensuring that international standards are maintained.) The civilian government identified tourism as one of six priority sectors through which an economic turnaround would be achieved. A Presidential Council on Tourism was set up, chaired by Obasanjo and composed of the Vice President, several ministers, and state governors. Obasanjo's determined drive to promote tourism has opened a new era starting with the establishment of a new Tourism Policy and, in 2006, a National Tourism Master Plan.^{xi} In order to promote Nigeria as a tourist destination, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism organized in 2005 the first Abuja Carnival. This annual festival was dubbed "The Mother of All Carnivals" and has quickly become a major event on Africa's cultural and tourism calendar.^{xii}

The government's strategy is to develop tourism clusters in each of the country's six geopolitical zones and across the 36 states. This approach is designed to provide a holistic national tourism package while directing investment into flagship tourism products with cultural and wildlife features. The government is also encouraging public-private partnership arrangements, with the government investing in basic infrastructure such as roads, water, electricity, and communications and private companies investing in accommodations and other tourism projects.^{xiii} Under the new arrangements, local governments and local communities are to develop projects that would positively impact the lives and living conditions of the local people.

The NTDC serves as facilitator, providing expertise and technical support, helping to link up local communities and donor agencies such as World Bank and UNESCO.

Map of Nigeria



In June 2008, the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and National Orientation, launched “e-Tourism”, an initiative designed to use the internet and other technologies to more effectively market both domestic and international tourism. E-Tourism includes five main products:^{xiv}

1. The National Tourism Portal as a powerful web-based resource that will improve tourist access to information on Nigeria, while at the same time provide a robust platform for travel, tourism and hospitality service businesses:
2. State Portals to showcase the tourism resources and tourism related services in each of Nigeria's 36 states.

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3. The *Tour Nigeria* publication to depict Nigeria's "unity in diversity," including different festivals and cuisines.

4. The Tourism Communication Card, a prepaid calling voucher for making low cost international calls that avoid the high cost of traditional telecom carriers.

5. The Tourism Cash Card which allows electronic payment for goods and services, such as car hire, accommodations, and tickets.^{xv}

As Dr. Felix Obada, Chairman of e-Tourism frankly stated, "It is true that our image has been battered, but we are not threatened. In fact, tourism is the best solution to our image problem."^{xvi} Minister of Tourism, Culture and National Orientation, Prince Adetokunbo Kayode predicted that the e-Tourism products "would re-shape the tourism industry," and that together with, the Nigerian Tourism Development Master Plan would lead to sustainable development, especially at the grassroots level.^{xvii}

Causes of Conflicts in Nigeria

As stated above, the axiom that peace and political stability are prerequisites for tourism remains true in Nigeria. Yet, even though the return to a democratically elected civilian government after 20 years of brutal and corrupt military rule has helped to build investor and traveler confidence, Nigeria continues to suffer from internal instabilities. According to a 2008 report by the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), a voluntary self-monitoring procedure run by the African Union, "By all standards, Nigeria is one of the most complex ethno-linguistic formations on the African continent."^{xviii} Perception survey data cited in the APRM Country Report on Nigeria identified communal conflicts as the most prevalent form of conflict in Nigeria, followed, in descending order, by political, resource control, ethnic and religious, and land conflicts. The report lists the principle cause of conflicts as economic inequality and wealth distribution, followed by petroleum resource control and religious intolerance.^{xix}

These conflicts have clearly affected international tourism investment and arrivals. A December 2008 U.S. State Department travel advisory, for instance, warned "of the risks of travel to Nigeria" and recommended "avoiding all but essential travel" to much of the Niger Delta. It also said that "violent crime is a problem in Lagos and other large cities as well as on roads between cities" and that religious and ethnic tensions "occasionally results in violence."^{xx} Repeatedly, over the years U.S. travel advisories

have warned U.S. citizens against travel to Nigeria for three major reasons: political instability, crime, and ethnic disputes.^{xxi}

- **Inter-State, Communal and Resource Conflicts**

According to the APRM, the majority of recent conflicts in Nigeria stem from ethno-religious differences. The report notes that the patterns of intra-state conflicts over the last two decades or so have created areas that are flash points violence. The states in the North Central area of Nigeria have experienced the most protracted and recurrent ethno-religious conflicts. The recurrent sectarian conflicts between the Muslim majority and the Christian minority have resulted partly from fear and anxiety that followed the adoption of the Islamic legal code by states in this region.^{xxii}

The other major conflict zone is the Niger Delta with a population of about 30 million people and Nigeria's major oil and gas deposits that account for 80 per cent of the country's annual foreign exchange earnings. Since the 1990s, this region has experienced one of the most protracted and deadly conflicts in Nigeria. This conflict is largely a product of poverty in the midst of resource plenty and the catastrophic environmental impacts of the oil production. Indeed in spite of huge oil resources, local communities in the Niger Delta remain some of the poorest in the world.^{xxiii} These injustices have led to murders, kidnappings, gang warfare, sabotage of the pipelines, and stealing of crude oil. The military government countered with violence the peaceful demands by social movements in the Delta for a greater share of the oil wealth. Nigeria's return to democratic civilian rule in 1999 did not, however, end the hostilities. Just since 2006, more than 200 foreign oil workers have been kidnapped and hundreds of Nigerians have been killed in the Niger Delta. This struggle has pitched local communities against oil companies, the state and federal governments, and one another, resulting in massive loss of life and property and disruption of oil prospecting and extraction.

The Niger Delta conflict over oil has made tourism virtually impossible in this region. It also holds lessons that could be used to help build a socially and environmentally responsible tourism industry. One is that local communities must benefit from their natural resources. For developing countries around the world, oil and tourism are the two most important foreign exchange earners.^{xxiv} The people of Niger Delta have seen virtually no benefits from the oil industry, whose profits have flowed to international corporations, the central government, and a powerful and corrupt Nigerian elite. Another lesson is that it is risky for a country to be heavily dependent on a single industry. Therefore tourism should be developed in Nigeria as part of a diversified portfolio of economic activities.

- **Political Instability in Nigeria**

Despite the official return to democracy, “The Nigerian government remains,” according to political analyst Darren Kew, “distant from serving the interest of its people.” He goes on to state:

Politics at the federal, state, and local levels of the Nigerian federation are dominated by the powerful mandarin politicians who built vast patronage networks during the military days and who now use political office to expand these networks and their personal fortunes. Moreover, many of these so called ‘godfathers’ have been cultivating personal militias to secure their positions, promoting a local arms race in some regions...while basic infrastructure in many parts of the country remains as dilapidated as it was under military rule.^{xxv}

This instability has resulted in the leadership becoming parochial with its primary concern being personal survival rather than national or regional development.

According to the APRM report on Nigeria, corruption at all levels is one of the factors causing political instability and ethno-religious conflicts. Corruption is so entrenched that it can be described as a way of life for many people, particularly for political office holders. Although several institutions, namely, the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) and Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC), are actively engaged in fighting corruption, they do not have enough resources and their officials are sometimes themselves thought to be on the take. Further, the electoral process in the country has been corrupted by the use of money in politics, thus undermining the principles of good governance.. “Systematic corruption and low levels of transparency and accountability have been major causes of development failure. Illegal activities...have torn the fabric of Nigerian society.”^{xxvi}

The litany of corrupt practices include money laundering and other types of unconventional and fraudulent trade, misappropriation or diversion of funds, kickbacks, under and over invoicing, bribery, false declarations, abuse of office, and collection of illegal funds. This has led to Nigeria receiving the dubious rating as one of the most corrupt nations in the world.^{xxvii}

All these have adversely affected the international arrivals and earnings from tourism in Nigeria as tourism is sensitive to the slightest whispers of political discontent, crime, and conflict. When people feel unsafe, they will either chose to alter their travel plans or cancel altogether until public memory of the episode begin to fade.

- **Poverty and Crime in Nigeria**

“Nigeria is indeed a country of extreme paradoxes, with widespread and endemic poverty in the midst of plenty,” states the 2008 APRM report on Nigeria. It continues:

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The country is richly endowed with human and natural resources, particularly oil and gas, but also plentiful mineral deposits such as coal, gold and sulfur. With a real GDP of \$58.4 billion and a population of about 140 million, Nigeria is one of the four largest economies in Africa.... Despite the rich human and resource endowment, Nigeria's GDP per capita is only about US\$752, and poverty is widespread with about 54 percent of the population living on less than one dollar per day.^{xxviii}

Nigeria also ranks low on human development indices. In its Human Development Report for 2007/2008, the UNDP ranked Nigeria at 157 out of 177 countries, down from 148 out of a total of 173 in 2003.⁸ This economic crisis and the inability of the Nigerian government to reduce inequalities has led to the growth of criminal activities. According to a 2008 international business report, "The threat from criminals is critical. Random, violent crime is endemic throughout the country. Armed street robberies, murder, carjackings, sexual assaults, residential burglaries, home invasions and financial fraud threaten every person in the country."^{xxix}

It is well known that crime, ethnic crises and political instability send tourist arrival plummeting.^{xxx} In Nigeria, tourism will never flourish as long as there is instability: peace is a prerequisite for a robust tourism sector. However, if Nigeria is to use tourism as an effective tool for social and economic development, it must pursue not simply a strategy for increasing mass tourism, but must carefully and actively develop sustainable tourism as a means for improving the socio-economic conditions of the Nigerian people and diversifying the economic base

How Tourism Industry can Mitigate Conflicts in Nigeria

Sustainable tourism can be powerful tool for promoting and establishing tolerance among different cultures by motivating people to move beyond the confines of their everyday worlds and providing the building blocks for stable and peaceful development. In the 2006 *Nigeria Tourism Development Master Plan*, the Secretary-General of the UNWTO, Francesco Frangialli, wrote in the foreword that an immediate benefit of the tourism industry is its ability to create employment. Frangialli states, "As a labour-intensive industry, tourism has potential to create more jobs per unit of investment than any other industry and tourism can be a useful source of employment for women and ethnic minority groups."^{xxxi} While with conventional or mass tourism, these jobs are often low skill, low paying, and sometimes seasonal, tourism based on sound social criteria can lead to skilled jobs, permanent employment, job training and advancement for locals. The UNWTO chief states that "because of tourism's enormous economic power and high potential for employment creation, its capacity to spread its socio-economic benefits to all levels of society and to all areas of developing countries, and its resiliency in times of crisis, tourism

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can be a leading industry in the fight against poverty.”^{xxxii} Economically, as well, tourism can bring many benefits to the federal government, local authorities, and the private sector through the generation of foreign revenue, financial returns on investment, and tax revenue.

In addition, sustainable tourism can assist with environmental and cultural protection. According to Frangialli, “Environmentally, tourism when properly developed and managed can serve as a mechanism for protecting natural environments; preserving historical, archaeological and religious monuments; and, stimulating the practice of local folklore, traditions, arts and crafts and cuisine.”^{xxxiii}

The UNWTO Secretary General commends Nigeria’s initiative “to actively develop tourism as a means for improving the socio-economic conditions of the Nigerian people and diversifying its economic base.” But he goes on to warn that “the success of Nigeria’s tourism industry depends on its sustainability.” He says that this is why the Master Plan focuses on promoting “the sustainable development of the tourism industry through capacity building...”^{xxxiv}

Gatchalian and Reiman, in their 2005 paper, argue that tourism has the potential to bring even more profound benefits. They write, “Tourism, as an instrument that fosters open and friendly communication between nations and cultures, creates a global language of peace that can help people understand one another and accept their differences. It can bring about unity in diversity – where people eventually realize that, although they may differ in customs, traditions and value systems, they share the same hopes and dreams for the future.”^{xxxv}

According to these experts, the poverty challenges facing the majority of Nigerians could be mitigated through the development of a robust and sustainable tourism industry. When properly developed and managed, tourism can serve as a tool for protecting natural environments, preserving historical, archaeological, and religious monuments, and stimulating local cultures, folklore, traditions, arts and crafts, and cuisine.

Peace in Niger Delta region of Nigeria is critical to the region’s survival and economic revival of the entire Nigerian state. Unless grievances about economic inequality, environmental degradation, and social injustice are resolved, the region will continue to be plagued by violence and poverty. A diversification of Nigerian economy beyond oil into sustainable tourism would have positive social and environmental effects. This could reduce the current focus of the Niger Delta people on having a share of the ‘national cake’, as sustainable tourism development would lead to emergence of new public and private investors. This could help to reduce the

political crimes and corruption in the country, while providing Niger youth with employment opportunities.

Recommendations for the Future

In developing its tourism potential, Nigeria must do so based on the sound principles and practices of eco- and sustainable tourism that have evolved over the last three decades. One of the most important tools would be for Nigeria to develop a certification program to measure the environment and social impacts of tourism businesses. In addition, the 2006 Tourism Master Plan contains a number of sound, concrete recommendations that should be followed by both the government and the tourism sector.^{xxxvi} With these as the backdrop, some of the most important recommendations for building an environmentally, socially and economically responsible tourism industry in Nigeria are the following:

- **Demonstrate effective sustainable management:** the tourism industry and individual businesses comply with all relevant international or local legislation and regulations; ensure all personnel receive periodic training regarding their role in the management of environmental, sociocultural, health and safety practices; ensure customer satisfaction is measured and, when necessary, corrective action is taken.
- **Maximize social and economic benefits to the local community and minimize negative impacts:** the tourism industry and individual businesses should actively support local initiatives through travelers' philanthropy programs; ensure local residents are employed including in skilled and management positions and receive a fair wage; ensure equitable in hiring women and local minorities, including in management positions; and ensure that its activities do not jeopardize the provision of basic services, such as water, electricity, and sanitation, to neighboring communities.
- **Maximize benefits to cultural heritage and minimize negative impacts:** the tourism industry and individual businesses should follow established guidelines and codes of conduct for visits to cultural and historic sites; ensure historical and archaeological artifacts are not sold, traded, or displayed, except as permitted by law; and promote 'a sense of place' through the use of local art, architecture, and cultural heritage and promotion of local handicrafts, foods, and other products, while respecting the intellectual property rights of local communities.
- **Maximize benefits to the environment and minimize negative impacts:** the tourism industry and individual businesses should ensure that renewal and alternative energy use is actively promoted; use of plastics and other disposable goods is reduced; energy and water consumption are measured and reduced; greenhouse gas emissions from all sources are measured and reduced; a solid waste management plan is implemented; and conservation of biodiversity, ecosystems and landscapes is ensured.

- **Promote Nigeria’s cultural offerings:** The Nigerian government should both foster local enterprises that promote the country’s cultural offerings and should treat culture as a valuable ‘export’ product that can enhance the experiences of international visitors. The government’s role should be to project the country’s many cultural attractions through international travel shows and its embassies abroad.
- **Improve basic infrastructure to facilitate tourism flows around the country:** The current lack of infrastructure inhibits the growth of tourism and contributes to the country’s political instability. The hospitality industry needs to upgrade existing facilities to compete with other countries, while the government needs to construct or upgrade to international standards roads leading to major cities and needs to provide in key tourism destinations basic amenities such as electricity, good water, and effective communication systems.
- **Improve tourism data collection:** In order to effectively measure tourism’s contribution to economic and social development, the government needs to put in place systems to regularly and precisely track tourism arrivals and receipts and measure the visitor experience through periodic surveys.

Most fundamentally, for tourism to grow and contribute positively to poverty reduction and cultural and environmental protection, Nigeria needs to curb political instability, crime, and ethnic disputes. As elsewhere, tourism needs a foundation of political and social stability in order to grow. Peace, therefore, is a primary prerequisite for tourism – while, in turn, socially and environmentally responsible tourism helps to foster stability, economic equity, and ultimately, a more peaceful society.

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