Forum For Economic Studies and Research Journal

Volume: 10/ N°: 01 (2026), p 371 - 378

Desert tourism in Algeria – Challenges and prospects for development

Labaci Ayoub [*1], Kouache Khaled [2]

[1] University of algiers 03, labaciayoub@gmail.com,

[2] University of algiers 03, drkouache@yahoo.fr,

Received:23/11/2025 **Accepted: 17/05/2026**

Abstract:

This study aims to highlight the resources and assets of the Algerian Sahara that provide it with a competitive advantage and position it as a leading destination capable of attracting tourists and competing at both regional and international levels. Despite these significant assets, Saharan tourism in Algeria continues to occupy a low position at the global, continental, and regional levels because of the slow pace of development. Therefore, the study examines the obstacles that impede the revitalization of this sector and concludes with a set of proposals designed to promote development and strengthen the position of Saharan tourism within the national tourism industry.

Key Words : *Desert Tourism, Algerian Sahara, Saharan Tourism Development, Desert Tourism Attractions, SDAT 2030.*

JEL Classification: *L83, Z32, Q56, R58, Z38.*

* - Corresponding author: Labaci Ayoub, e-mail: labaciayoub@gmail.com.

1. *Introduction*

Algeria possesses a remarkable wealth of natural and geographical assets that enable it to occupy a prominent position among regional and international tourism destinations. Its natural landscape extends from diverse coastlines to mountainous highlands and expansive plateaus, culminating in a vast desert that is regarded as one of the most distinctive in the world. This diversity reflects an interaction between natural elements and geographical environments, on the one hand, and rich cultural and civilizational resources, on the other. Furthermore, the country's variety of climates has contributed over time to the emergence of successive civilizations, whose vestiges remain visible across various regions and attest to the deep historical heritage accumulated over centuries.

Despite this exceptional heritage, the tourism sector in Algeria continues to fall short of the economic and social objectives expected of it. The progress achieved to date remains limited when compared with the abundance and diversity of the country's tourism assets.

In response to this situation, the present study examines the natural and human potentials that can be mobilized to strengthen the development of desert tourism. This objective is consistent with recent policy orientations adopted by the state, which emphasize greater attention to the tourism sector. Such orientation reflects a growing consensus among experts that desert tourism has the potential to serve as a catalyst for revitalizing national tourism, provided it is developed in a manner that aligns with the specific characteristics of the Algerian Sahara and its strong capacity to attract both domestic and international visitors.

Main Problematic

This study is guided by the following primary research question:

What are the fundamental components of desert tourism in Algeria, and what measures are required to develop and enhance this form of tourism?

Significance and Objectives of the Study

The significance of this study stems from the growing role of the tourism sector in supporting economic, social, cultural, and environmental development, particularly in desert regions that require special attention from public authorities due to their distinctive assets.

In addition, the study is important because it aims to identify the obstacles that hinder tourism development despite the abundance of resources available in the Algerian Sahara. It also seeks to propose realistic and applicable solutions to overcome these constraints and promote sustainable tourism development.

Research Outline

To address the research problem and achieve the objectives of the study, the research is structured as follows:

- The nature of desert tourism and its principal components.
- Desert tourism in Algeria.
- The national strategy for the development of desert tourism, with an analysis of current realities and future prospects.

Research Methodology

The study relies on a theoretical framework that examines desert tourism and its essential components. Furthermore, it adopts the descriptive method to analyze the various dimensions of desert tourism, and the analytical method to interpret selected indicators and statistical data relevant to the research topic. This combined methodological approach aims to clarify the current state of tourism in Algeria and to assess the role of desert-tourism assets in revitalizing and strengthening the national tourism sector.

2. *Definition of Tourism*

Tourism is a social and economic phenomenon that has accompanied humanity throughout its stages of development. Its concept, however, has never been confined to a single, comprehensive definition; rather, it has continually expanded and evolved in response to societal transformations and changing modes of human mobility. Fundamentally, tourism involves the movement of individuals beyond their habitual environment for a range of purposes, including recreation, culture, therapy, or other motivations. As this activity has developed and its impacts have broadened, numerous attempts have been made to define tourism scientifically, considering its economic, social, cultural, and environmental dimensions. Today, tourism is studied both as a productive sector that shapes the global economy and as a complex human phenomenon that reflects multifaceted interactions among tourists, host societies, and natural environments. Understanding its conceptual foundations is therefore essential for appreciating its growing significance in contemporary development.

The definitions of tourism have varied over time. In 1905, the German scholar Joir F. Froehler described tourism as a phenomenon of the modern era, emerging from individuals' increasing need for rest, environmental change, and engagement with natural landscapes and their unique characteristics. He also noted that tourism reflects a desire to experience spaces different in character from one's habitual environment, and that its development has been closely linked to advancements in transportation technologies **(Tawfiq, 1997, p. 22).** This definition highlights the social dimension of tourism while giving relatively less attention to its economic aspects.

The World Tourism Organization (WTO) provides a more comprehensive definition, describing tourism as the various activities undertaken by individuals during travel to and stay in destinations outside their usual environment for a consecutive period not exceeding one year, for purposes such as leisure, business, or other motivations related to personal interests and needs **(djellouli, p. 182).** These activities constitute the core of the tourism process, reflecting the interactions between tourists and host destinations and the resulting economic, social, and cultural effects.

3. Definition of Desert Tourism

Desert tourism encompasses all forms of accommodation and tourist activities conducted within a desert environment, drawing on its natural, historical, and cultural resources. This form of tourism involves recreational and exploratory experiences that allow visitors to engage with the desert's unique ecological systems, local heritage, and traditional lifestyles **(Manajlia, p. 8)**. Unlike general tourism, desert tourism is shaped by its specific geographical context, which imparts distinctive characteristics to the experience. It extends beyond the mere appreciation of landscapes to include cultural and historical encounters with local communities, customs, and traditions. Moreover, it often emphasizes adventure and recreation, appealing to tourists seeking

immersive and novel experiences. By relying on a combination of natural, historical, and cultural assets, desert tourism reflects the richness of the desert in both tangible and intangible heritage, highlighting the interplay between environment, culture, and human activity.

4. Components of Desert Tourism (Graibeh, 2012, pp. 76-91)

4.1. Natural Components

4.1.1 Geographical Location

The geographical positioning of Arab deserts, typically within hot latitudinal zones, renders them particularly attractive to tourists from colder regions. Their climatic contrast, combined with expansive open landscapes, offers a distinctive appeal that is rarely found in temperate or polar environments.

4.1.2 Geological Structure and Landforms

The natural foundations of desert tourism can be classified into three main categories:

- Geological (Rock) Formations: These include the diverse lithological structures that shape the desert's physical appearance, such as rocky plateaus, mountain outcrops, and unique mineral formations. This geological diversity supports scientific tourism, adventure tourism, and landscape-focused travel.
- Tectonic Features: The Arab deserts have experienced various tectonic activities over geological time, resulting in structural features such as fault lines, uplifted blocks, and folded terrains. These formations enhance the desert's geomorphological uniqueness and offer sites of scientific, aesthetic, and exploratory interest.
- Major Landforms: This category encompasses large-scale geomorphological features emblematic of desert environments, including:
    - Vast enclosed depressions
    - Long, dry valleys (wadis)
    - Sand dunes of varying shapes and sizes
    - Interior plateaus
    - Oases, serving as pockets of life within arid expanses

Together, these natural components form the foundation of desert tourism, combining scenic beauty, geological distinctiveness, and ecological diversity to attract researchers, adventurers, and nature enthusiasts.

4.1.3 Climatic Elements

The Arab desert is characterized by high solar radiation and elevated temperatures, interspersed with periods of moderate conditions. These climatic features distinguish it sharply from colder regions of Europe, northern Asia, and North America. Historically, the desert's environment drew Arab travelers who explored its depths for intellectual, cultural, and observational purposes. Today, the desert's diverse climate and distinctive atmosphere continue to attract tourists, particularly from nearby European countries, seeking warmth, tranquility, and adventure-driven experiences.

4.1.4 Water Resources and Their Forms

Water is one of the most critical elements in desert tourism, serving as a vital natural resource that shapes life in arid regions. Its availability influences vegetation density, animal diversity, human settlements, and habitation patterns. Consequently, water resources play a central role in defining the environmental characteristics and overall tourism potential of desert areas.

4.2 Human Components

Human components of desert tourism can be divided into two main categories:

4.2.1 Tangible (Material) Aspects

These encompass all physical products created by humans, including housing, clothing, transportation means, as well as tools and equipment used to manage daily life. This dimension reflects the human capacity to adapt and modify the environment to meet diverse needs, demonstrating how humans shape their surroundings to serve practical and cultural requirements.

4.2.2 Intangible (Non-Material) Aspects

This dimension is manifested through beliefs, customs, traditions, ideas, culture, values, and knowledge that constitute the psychological and intellectual framework of individuals and communities. It represents the intangible heritage of humanity, encompassing social constructs, symbolic meanings, and conceptual systems that reflect human perceptions and interpretations of the world.

4.3 Biological Components

The biological components of desert tourism consist of elements derived from the desert's living environment, including human populations and their communities, as well as flora and fauna that constitute part of the local ecosystem. The biological environment, through the interactions between humans and other living organisms, forms an essential component of the natural environment as a whole, contributing to both ecological balance and the experiential value of the desert for tourists.

5. Tourism Components of the Algerian Sahara:

5.1 Natural Components:

5.1.1 Geographical Location:

The southern, eastern, and western borders of the Algerian Sahara coincide with Algeria's political boundaries with Tunisia, Libya, Niger, Mali, Mauritania, Western Sahara, and Morocco. The northern boundary, however, is defined naturally by the Saharan Atlas mountain range. The Algerian Sahara covers an area of approximately 1,987,600 km², representing nearly 90% of Algeria's total area of 2,381,741 km² **(Jaraya, 2017, p. 343)**. Its vast extent and strategic location make it a significant natural and geopolitical feature, while also offering diverse landscapes suitable for tourism development.

5.1.2 Geological Structure and Landforms **(Saïhi, Ben Sghir, & Jnidi, p. 80)**

The immense expanse of the Algerian Sahara, coupled with its marked diversity of terrain, provides an array of natural assets that render it suitable for the development of promising desert tourism. The Sahara can be divided into two main regions: Northwestern Sahara, intersected by protruding Atlas Mountain chains, and Southeastern Sahara, distinguished by the Hoggar and Tassili Massifs, famous for their rock formations and prehistoric rock engravings of significant historical value.

These two desert regions are separated by a curving line stretching from the southwest to the northeast, passing through the Tanezrouft basin, the Tadmaït Plateau, and Chott Melghir.

The natural features of the Sahara manifest in several distinct landforms, including:

- Reg: Vast stony plains primarily composed of gravel and rocks.
- Erg: Extensive sand seas covering approximately one-fifth of the total desert area.

- Hamada: Rocky plains layered with limestone formations.
- Sebkha: Closed depressions or basins where vegetation grows and certain crops may thrive.

Based on surface characteristics and natural organization, the Algerian Sahara can be subdivided into three major units:

- Eastern Low Desert (Great Eastern Basin).
- Northern and Western Rocky Plateaus.
- Southeastern Mountain Ranges (Hoggar – Tassili Massif).

This rich geomorphological diversity provides a strong foundation for developing varied desert tourism experiences, from adventure and ecological tourism to cultural and heritage-based exploration.

5.1.3 Climatic Elements

Annual rainfall in the Algerian Sahara is extremely scarce, not exceeding 150 mm per year. Daytime temperatures are very high, while nighttime temperatures drop sharply, resulting in a climate marked by extreme thermal amplitude and pronounced aridity.

This region is dominated by a dry desert climate, characterized by a long and intense hot season extending from May to September, during which temperatures may reach 40°C to 45°C. The remaining months of the year are marked by relatively moderate temperatures (Sayhi, Ben Sghir, & Gnidi, p. 80). These climatic conditions shape the natural environment of the Sahara, influencing both human settlement patterns and the types of tourism activities that may be developed within this vast space **(Saïhi, Ben Sghir, & Jnidi, p. 80)**.

5.2 Human Components

These components refer to the elements associated with the inhabitants of the Sahara, encompassing both material and non-material dimensions:

Material aspects include various manifestations of daily life such as housing styles, clothing, transportation methods, and other tools or means that desert dwellers rely upon to manage their everyday activities. These elements reflect the ingenuity and adaptability of the Saharan population in confronting the challenges of an arid environment.

Non-material aspects are embodied in the system of customs, traditions, cultural expressions, and social values that characterize these communities and express their unique civilizational identity. This intangible heritage enriches the cultural landscape of the desert, offering tourists an opportunity to engage with deeply rooted symbolic and social practices.

Together, these human components form a vital pillar of desert tourism, providing cultural depth and authenticity that complement the region's natural and environmental attractions.

6. Major Tourist Regions of the Algerian Sahara

The Algerian Sahara comprises 20 out of the country's 58 administrative provinces. These include Adrar, Béchar, Biskra, El Oued, Ghardaïa, Illizi, Laghouat, Ouargla, Tamanrasset, Tindouf, Bordj Badji Mokhtar, Timimoun, Béni Abbès, Ouled Djellal, El Meghaier, El Menia, Djanet, Touggourt, In Salah, and In Guezzam.

The Sahara also contains fourteen distinct natural regions, including: El Daïa, Ziban, Oued Righ, M'zab Valley, the Ksour region, Mizab, Ouargla, Gourara, Saoura, Touat, Tassili, and Tidikelt. These regions constitute unique geographic and cultural units that highlight the environmental and human richness of the desert landscape **(Khoumija & Snoussi, 2025, p. 439)**.Below are the most prominent regions **(Aicha, pp. 492-493)**:

6.1 Oasis Regions:

These comprise provincial capitals, cities, and settlements spread throughout the Saharan belt. Among the most notable are:

6.1.1 Tamanrasset (Capital of the Hoggar)

Tamanrasset stands as a distinguished tourist destination and serves as the primary desert gateway for Algerians heading toward the Sahara and the Sahel states. The city is located amidst rocky highlands bordered by vast plateaus, while the Hoggar range surrounds it with towering mountain chains, some reaching nearly 3,000 meters in altitude. This dramatic setting grants the region a unique natural character and reinforces its great tourism value.

6.1.2 M'zab Valley

The M'zab Valley is composed of several fortified ksour (traditional settlements): El Atteuf, Bounoura, Ghardaïa, Beni Isguen, Melika, Metlili, El Guerrara, and Berriane. In 1982, UNESCO classified the M'zab ksour as a World Heritage Site.

The region is renowned for its traditional crafts such as weaving, copper and wood engraving, leatherwork, and pottery, all of which reflect the richness of the local cultural heritage. Its appeal is further enhanced by its stunning dunes, natural oases, and unique ecological architecture, making it one of the most visited sites in the Algerian desert.

6.1.3 Ouargla Region

Ouargla features several notable tourist sites, including the Old Palace, the Palace of Ngoussa, Sidi Khueilid's Zawiya, and the ruins of ancient Sedrata, in addition to the Sahara Museum. The region also contains several lakes, such as Lake Chott, Ain El Tayba, Hassi Ben Abdallah, and Oum R'eneb.

6.1.4 Biskra Region

Known as the "Bride of the Ziban" and the "Gateway to the Desert", Biskra serves as a natural transition between northern and southern Algeria. The region bears archaeological evidence of ancient habitation such as arrowheads, stone tools, and rock engravings found in Chettma, El Kantara, M'Zirâa, and M'chouneche.

Historically, Biskra witnessed the succession of several civilizations: Numidian, Roman, Byzantine, and Islamic. In 27 AH / 627 CE, the commander ʿUqba ibn Nafieʿ liberated North Africa, including Biskra, from Roman garrisons. He was later martyred in 63 AH in Thahouda near Sidi ʿUqba, where his shrine stands today. Major landmarks include the shrines of Abu Muhajir Dinar and ʿUqba ibn Nfie, as well as El Kantara, M'chouneche, and Ain Zatout.

6.1.5 Timimoun Region

Timimoun is distinguished by its traditional architecture built primarily from red earth and clay. It contains numerous ancient ksour that reflect the authenticity of Saharan urban heritage. The region also hosts the saline Sebkha Lake and the vast Tadmaït Plateau, which enhances its scenic allure.

6.1.6 Taghit Region

Taghit is one of Algeria's most iconic tourist destinations. It boasts remarkable natural diversity that offers visitors a variety of environmental landscapes. The region is also known for ancient rock engravings dating back more than 10,000 years BCE, giving it exceptional archaeological and cultural value.

6.1.7 Souf Region (El Oued)

The Souf region, located in southeastern Algeria near the Grand Erg Oriental, is renowned for its vast expanses of golden sand, making it a preferred winter destination for tourists and Algerians alike.

Beyond its natural features, Souf contains a unique environmental and human heritage—most notably the "ghout" palm groves. These are cultivated in depressions dug into the sand near groundwater sources, demonstrating the ingenuity of local people in adapting to harsh desert climates. The "ghout" system was recognized as UNESCO World Heritage in 2011.

The region also features distinctive architecture characterized by domed rooftops, designed to protect structures from sand accumulation, marking a key element of Soufi architectural identity.

6.1.8 Béni Abbès Oasis

Located in southwestern Algeria, Béni Abbès is home to numerous exceptionally beautiful ksour. It also contains significant historical and cultural landmarks, most notably the Hermitage of Father Charles de Foucauld, enhancing its cultural and spiritual appeal.

6.1.9 Oued Righ Region

Oued Righ is among Algeria's most notable tourist destinations, characterized by its flat topography and abundance of wadis. The region contains several lakes, including "Ayata Lake" in Sidi Amrane existing for centuries and located in a depression nearly 40 meters deep. Oued Righ is also a sanctuary for rare bird species and includes major chotts such as Chott Marouane in El Meghaier, covering about 8,534 km². The region was designated a Wetland of International Importance in 2011.

The area also features significant archaeological sites, such as the ancient Palace of Tamourth in Sidi Amrane, which reflects the deep historical heritage of Oued Righ.

6.2 Nature Reserves and National Parks

6.2.1 Tassili National Reserve

The Tassili mountain range, inscribed by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site in 1982, constitutes one of the most significant repositories of scientific research on ancient human and animal life. Covering an area of approximately 10,000 hectares, the range contains thousands of rock carvings that document various aspects of early human existence, particularly the struggle for survival through hunting gazelles and other wildlife species. These engravings represent an invaluable archive of prehistoric cultural expression and environmental conditions.

6.2.2 The Hoggar National Park

Located in the city of Tamanrasset, at the heart of the Algerian Sahara, this park encompasses numerous living natural monuments that reveal, across millennia, the secrets of human, animal, and plant existence. The region has been described as the world's largest open-air natural museum, extending over 50,000 km². Its significance as a national and international tourism destination stems from its remarkable geological formations, abundant water sources, and the presence of more than 350 plant species, including remnants of ancient forests, alongside diverse wildlife. The park also preserves archaeological sites, mineral resources, and fossil remains, all of which highlight the richness of the region's natural and cultural heritage.

6.2.3 Desert Sciences Museum

Located in the town of Taghit in Béchar Province, this museum is considered unique on a global scale for its ability to preserve natural formations and a wide variety of plant and animal species.

The site is closely linked to local cultural and Saharan events, including festivals and forums that showcase regional heritage and illuminate the environmental and social characteristics of the surrounding desert landscape.

7. Tourism Indicators in Algeria

7.1 Number of Tourists

Official data indicate a steady increase in the number of tourists visiting Algeria. In 2024, the country received 3,548,405 tourists, representing a growth rate of 7.77% compared with 2023, during which 3,508,292 tourists were recorded.

There was also a notable rise in the number of foreign tourists, who accounted for 69.18% of all entries across Algerian borders in 2024, equivalent to 2,454,706 visitors, marking a growth rate of 11.81% compared to 2023.

In terms of countries of origin, foreign tourist arrivals in 2024 were led by:

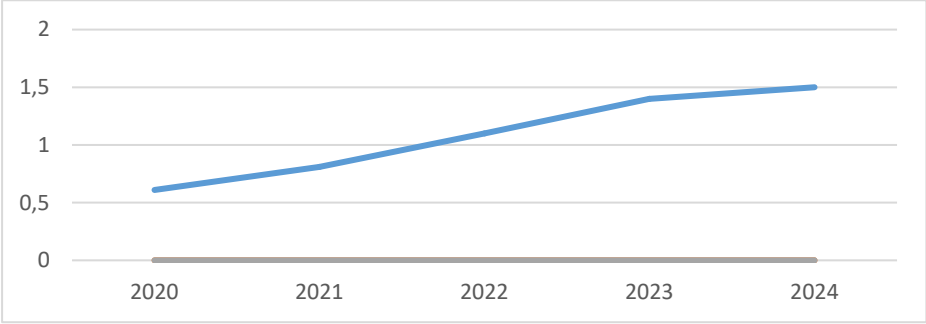
Tunisia: 2,000,038 tourists (83.02% of all foreign tourists), France: 124,715 tourists (5.08%), Libya: 35,853 tourists (1.46%), China: 25,080 tourists (1.02%), Spain: 22,267 tourists (0.91%), Turkey: 14,095 tourists (0.57%), Italy: 11,825 tourists (0.48%).

However, it is important to note that Algeria's tourism numbers remain modest when compared with neighboring countries. In 2023, Tunisia recorded 9.37 million tourists, according to Tunisian Ministry of Tourism statistics, while Morocco welcomed 14.5 million tourists during the same year.

7.2 Tourism Sector Share in Gross Domestic Product (GDP)

The tourism sector's contribution to Algeria's GDP has shown development as follows:

Fig.1. Curve Illustrating the Evolution of the Tourism Sector's Share in Gross Domestic Product (GDP), 2020–2024



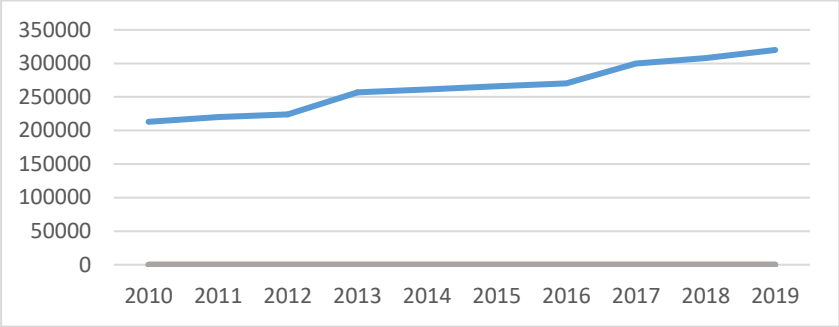
Source: National Office of Statistics (ONS).

The data indicate that the tourism sector's share of the Gross Domestic Product has been steadily increasing, rising from 0.61% in 2020 to 1.5% in 2024. This corresponds to a total value of 541.55 billion Algerian dinars, or approximately 4.04 billion USD. The sector also recorded a growth rate of 7.14% compared with the year 2023.

7.3 Contribution of the Sector to Job Creation

The tourism sector's contribution to job creation has also experienced continuous growth, as illustrated in the following graph:

Fig.2. Curve Showing the Evolution of Employment in the Tourism Sector, 2010–2019



Source: Ministry of Tourism and Handicrafts.

Upon analyzing the data presented in the curve, it becomes evident that the tourism sector plays a substantive role in job creation. The graph shows a steady year-on-year increase in the number of employees working in the sector, indicating a continuous expansion of tourism-related employment opportunities.

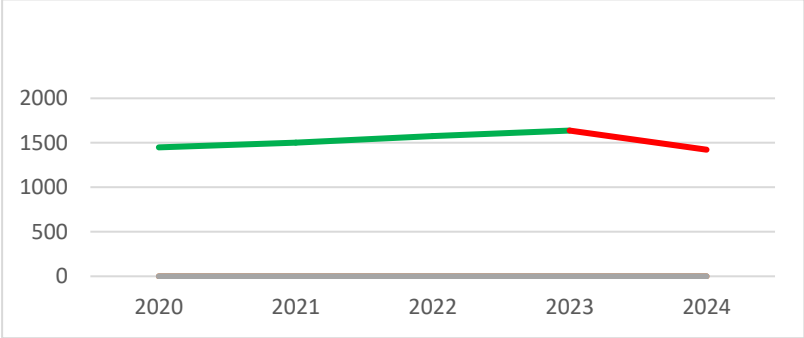
7.4 Accommodation Capacity

Table 1. Status of the National Hotel Infrastructure (2020–2024)

Year	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Number of Hotels	1,449	1,502	1,576	1,638	**1,423**
Accommodation Capacity	127 614	132 266	145 526	151 052	**139 963**

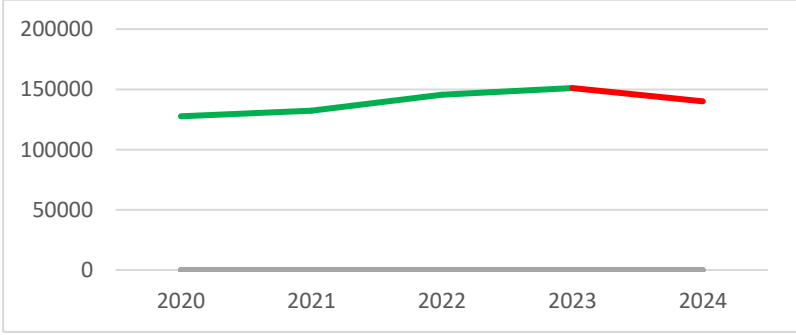
Source: Statistics of the Ministry of Tourism and Handicrafts

Fig.3. Curve Illustrating the Evolution of the Number of Hotel Establishments, 2020–2024



Source: Ministry of Tourism and Handicrafts.

Fig.4. Curve Illustrating the Evolution of Accommodation Capacity in Hotel Establishments, 2020–2024



Source: Ministry of Tourism and Handicrafts.

The national hotel infrastructure in Algeria comprises 1,423 establishments with a total accommodation capacity of 139,963 beds. The private sector dominates with over 1,307 hotels, compared to 97 in the public sector and 16 under local government ownership. Classified hotels include 26 five-star, 91 four-star, 140 three-star, 134 two-star, and 200 one-star establishments.

Despite Algeria's efforts, the country still lags behind neighboring nations in accommodation capacity: Tunisia had 230,726 beds in 2023 (National Tunisian Tourism Office), and Morocco 289,321 beds in 2022 (World Tourism Organization). By contrast, Algeria's accommodation capacity reached 139,963 beds in 2024, according to the Ministry of Tourism and Handicrafts. The official goal is to achieve 250,000 beds by 2030.

However, as shown in the previous table and figures, both the number of hotel establishments and accommodation capacity declined between 2023 and 2024: establishments fell from 1,638 to 1,423, and capacity decreased from 151,052 to 139,963 beds. This trend contradicts the objectives outlined in the national tourism strategy and highlights the need for targeted interventions to revitalize the sector.

8. Indicators of Desert Tourism in Algeria

From the previously mentioned statistics, a key question arises: what is the share of desert tourism within the national tourism sector?

8.1 Number of Tourists

Official data indicate that the number of tourists during the desert tourism seasons has been steadily increasing, as illustrated in the following table:

Table 2. Evolution of Tourist Numbers during Desert Tourism Seasons

Year	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024
Domestic Tourists	240.927	127.418	512.871	465.025	**500.029**
Foreign Tourists	23.501	12.857	15.035	26.827	**37.030**
Total	264.428	140.275	527.906	491.852	**537.059**

Source: Ministry of Tourism and Handicrafts.

The data indicate that during the 2023/2024 desert tourism season, the total number of tourists reached 537,059, reflecting an increase of 9.19% compared to 491,852 in the 2022/2023 season. This growth affected both domestic and foreign tourists: domestic tourists increased by 7.52%, while foreign tourists surged by 38.03% relative to the previous season.

However, despite this upturn, the total remains modest compared to Algeria's substantial natural, cultural, and historical assets, which position it to potentially become a leading destination for desert tourism both regionally and internationally. Moreover, the contribution of desert tourism to national development remains very limited, as shown in the following table:

Table 3. Distribution of Hotel Establishments Commissioned in 2024 by Type

Type	Number of Hotel Establishments	Number of Beds
Urban	30	**2.593**
Coastal	14	**1.875**
Desert	02	**75**
Thermal	01	**144**
Total	47	**4.687**

Source: Ministry of Tourism and Handicrafts.

From the table, it is evident that the share of desert tourism in 2024 amounted to only two hotel establishments, with a combined accommodation capacity of no more than 75 beds.

8.2 Accommodation Capacity

The share of desert tourism within the national hotel infrastructure can be highlighted through the following table:

Table 4. Accommodation Capacity by Type of Establishment

		Urban	Coastal	Desert	Thermal	Climatic	Total
2020	Number of Beds	81,863	32,971	6,299	4,598	1,883	**127,614**
	Number of Hotel Establishments	1,070	253	80	27	19	**1,449**
2021	Number of Beds	85,577	33,588	6,620	4,598	1,883	**132,266**
	Number of Hotel Establishments	1,115	258	83	27	19	**1,502**
2022	Number of Beds	93,906	37,586	6,946	5,189	1,899	**145,526**
	Number of Hotel Establishments	1,154	283	86	33	20	**1,576**
2023	Number of Beds	97,721	39,059	6,986	5,339	1,947	**151,052**
	Number of Hotel Establishments	1,197	298	87	34	22	**1,638**
2024	Number of Beds	81,303	43,909	5,641	7,414	1,696	**139,963**
	Number of Hotel Establishments	958	316	72	55	22	**1,423**

Source: Statistics of the Ministry of Tourism and Handicrafts.

A study of the table's data reveals that desert tourism is faring no better than the overall national tourism sector. In 2024, the number of desert hotel establishments declined to 72, down from 87 in 2023, leading to a reduction in accommodation capacity from 6,986 beds in 2023 to 5,641 beds in 2024. Consequently, the share of desert tourism in the total national accommodation capacity amounts to only 4.03%, despite the increasing number of tourists.

9. National Strategy for the Development of Desert Tourism in Algeria

Despite Algeria's abundant natural and cultural tourism assets, the country continues to occupy a relatively low global ranking in terms of tourist arrivals and sectoral revenue. This situation has prompted public authorities to adopt a long-term strategic vision aimed at revitalizing national tourism and enhancing its competitive capacity. Central to this approach is the "Tourism Development Master Plan 2025", extended to 2030, which embodies a professional and comprehensive strategy focused primarily on the rehabilitation of tourism infrastructure, with the goal of enabling Algeria to expand its presence in the global tourism market.

The Tourism Development Master Plan (SDAT 2030) serves as the strategic reference framework underpinning Algeria's tourism policy. It represents the official document through which the state articulates its vision and tourism project for 2030, providing guidance to all stakeholders, sectors, and regions. This plan embodies a clear national commitment to valorize the country's natural, cultural, and historical assets, deploying them in service of a sector no longer seen as merely an optional alternative, but as a pressing necessity given its potential role in diversifying the economy and reducing reliance on hydrocarbons. Originally prepared in 2008

by the Ministry of Spatial Planning, Environment, and Tourism, the plan aims to position Algeria as an active tourism destination within the Euro-Mediterranean space. Within this context, 172 sites were earmarked exclusively for tourism development and designated as tourism expansion zones, encompassing a land area of 48,500 hectares under executive decree.

The SDAT, as part of the national spatial planning vision toward 2030, constitutes the operational framework for implementing the national strategy for the development and sustainability of desert tourism. The plan sets out several priorities, including the establishment of tourist villages, the creation of a dedicated tourism investment bank, and the identification of key tourism hubs aimed at attracting investment. Projections suggest that realizing this vision will require broad participation from both public and private investors, potentially creating around 400,000 direct and indirect jobs.

The strategy seeks to achieve sustainable tourism development through the implementation of a clear spatial planning system and precise regulatory frameworks that preserve environmental quality. It also emphasizes the identification of qualified tourism areas and the conditions for their utilization in accordance with international tourism service standards. Additionally, the strategy highlights the importance of training qualified human resources to manage tourism structures and activities, strengthening media promotion, addressing deficiencies in hospitality infrastructure, and enhancing local community participation in planning, implementation, and management of tourism services. Desert tourism is targeted for sustainable development, emphasizing support for local culture and traditional crafts, and enabling communities to market their products through hotels and historic sites.

Furthermore, the plan calls for the development of a coordinated regional tourism vision tailored to the economic, social, and cultural characteristics of each area, coupled with programs for human resource training and avenues for civil society engagement to mitigate social concerns related to tourism activities. Within this framework, the Algeria Destination Promotion Plan underscores that enhancing the country's image is essential for transforming it into a competitive tourism destination grounded in authenticity, innovation, and quality. The Public-Private Partnership (PPP) framework also holds particular significance, as sustainable tourism development cannot be achieved without effective collaboration between public and private sectors to meet the growing demand for high-quality tourism products and services **(Moufida, pp. 453-455)**.

In addition to the aforementioned measures, the authorities provide a range of incentives and facilitation mechanisms to support tourism investments, notably financial incentives, which are manifested in the reduction of interest rates applied to bank loans.

This reduction is stipulated in accordance with the Supplementary Finance Law No. 44/2021, which amended Article 94 of the 2016 Finance Law. The law prescribes:

- 3% reduction in interest rates for tourism investments located in the southern regions and highland areas.
- Duration of the benefit:

Five years for loans with a repayment period exceeding seven years.

Three years for loans with a repayment period equal to or less than seven years.

This provision aims to encourage investment in priority tourism areas, particularly in the desert regions, and to foster the development of the tourism infrastructure therein.

Furthermore, tax incentives are provided under Investment Law No. 22-18, whereby investors in the agricultural sector who operate in the form of companies subject to Algerian law benefit from tax exemptions for a period ranging between three and ten years, depending on the applicable incentive scheme.

10. Major Challenges Facing the Tourism Sector in Algeria

After reviewing the abundant resources of the Algerian desert, as well as the national strategies aimed at revitalizing this sensitive sector, it is essential to highlight the principal obstacles and constraints that hinder the achievement of the desired objectives, despite the substantial material resources allocated. These challenges can be summarized as follows:

10.1 Security

Given the vast southern border with Tunisia, Libya, Niger, Mali, Mauritania, Western Sahara, and Morocco, effective monitoring is extremely difficult. The southern borders, in particular, are exposed to irregular migration due to socio-economic instability and security vacuums in these neighboring countries. This phenomenon gives rise to a range of social problems, including the proliferation of narcotics, and can also generate public health risks through the spread of various diseases, among which Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) is one of the most serious. Such health threats have a direct impact on local development and the tourism image of the region, thereby negatively affecting its attractiveness and constraining the growth and sustainability of the tourism sector.

10.2 Insufficient Tourism Infrastructure and Facilities

Tourism infrastructure constitutes a fundamental prerequisite for the development and activation of desert tourism and for ensuring the realization of its economic benefits. These facilities include accommodation and catering services, such as hotels, lodges, guesthouses, campsites, restaurants, and rest areas. The development of these establishments should take into account the desert architectural style, as this significantly enhances the appeal of the region and attracts tourists, especially international visitors.

As previously mentioned, the share of desert tourism within the national hotel sector remains modest, with 72 establishments offering a total of 5,641 beds. Moreover, the limited accommodation capacity drives up prices, which is incompatible with the purchasing power of domestic tourists.

10.3 Shortage of Services

The quality of accommodation, hygiene, food standards and pricing, as well as the availability of traditional products, all contribute to ensuring tourist satisfaction and providing value for money. Southern regions, particularly the Greater South, suffer from a lack of tourism training centers, which negatively affects the quality of services provided **(Saïhi, Ben Sghir, & Jnidi, p. 83)**.

10.4 Weakness in Tourism Promotion

Current data indicate that tourism promotion in Algeria remains limited and fails to adequately reflect the rare and valuable assets of the Algerian desert. Institutions responsible for promotion continue to rely on outdated methods that do not correspond to the quality of the products offered. Furthermore, they have yet to fully utilize modern technologies capable of effectively influencing and persuading potential visitors.

10.5 Neglect of Traditional Crafts in Stimulating Tourism Activity:

Traditional crafts play a significant role in enhancing tourist mobility and contribute to local development by generating employment opportunities in remote tourist areas. However, these industries face numerous challenges that threaten their survival and continuity, including limited resources, inadequate promotion and marketing, and competition from imported African products, which are often cheaper. Such factors endanger an important component of local heritage **(Mustafa & Setti , p. 319)**

10.6 High Airfare Costs:

In recent years, airfare prices have risen significantly, rendering air travel—the fastest and most convenient means of reaching the southern provinces, given the vast distances from other regions of the country—largely inaccessible for a substantial segment of the population. Consequently, air travel has become restricted primarily to specific groups, such as official personnel, patients, and foreign tourists, depriving many domestic tourists of the opportunity to visit the South due to high transportation costs **(Mustafa & Setti , p. 320)**.In some cases, the cost of flights to certain southern provinces exceeds that of international travel to other continents.

11. Mechanisms for Developing Desert Tourism Activities

The development of desert tourism requires a set of conditions that ensure visitor satisfaction. Key mechanisms include:

- ***Ensuring Security:***

A sense of safety is fundamental to a tourist's decision to travel and stay in a destination. Visitors need guarantees of physical security and protection of their property from any material or psychological threat. Consequently, the prosperity of the tourism sector is closely linked to comprehensive security; any breach negatively affects the tourist experience, potentially shortening stays, discouraging repeat visits, and, in some cases, generating negative publicity that harms the reputation and image of the destination.

- ***Enhancing Accommodation Capacity:***

Expanding accommodation facilities creates a balance between supply and demand, promotes competition, and leads to more competitive pricing. It is also essential to provide a range of facilities that cater to different market segments, from luxury to budget accommodations.

- ***Implementing Administrative and Legal Measures:***

Effective regulations are necessary to protect environmentally and culturally significant sites and to prevent their degradation or exploitation.

- ***Improving Quality of Tourism Services:***

Investment in human resources is crucial, particularly by training local tour guides who can transmit authentic knowledge of the desert and its culture. This includes specialized training programs, vocational education, and foreign language instruction, enabling guides to interact effectively with diverse tourist demographics.

- ***Comprehensive Field Inventory and Digitization of Tourist Sites:***

This entails establishing a comprehensive digital database encompassing all tourist locations and landmarks, with detailed descriptions of the characteristics and nature of each site. These datasets should be linked with geolocation systems, enhancing the quality of tourism services and facilitating visitor access to information in a modern and efficient manner **(Ilyas & Kahoul, 2016, p. 65)**.

- ***Restoration and Rehabilitation of Historical Forts and Citadels :***

Given their architectural and historical value, the preservation and careful rehabilitation of old ksars and citadels are essential.

- ***Preservation of Distinctive Desert Architecture:***

All new constructions in desert regions must respect and maintain the unique architectural character of these areas.

- ***Community Awareness and Engagement:***

Efforts should focus on sensitizing local populations to the importance of conserving various tourist assets.

- ***Support for Artisans:***

Traditional crafts play a critical role in attracting tourists and stimulating local economies, and thus require reinforcement and encouragement.

- ***Leveraging International Best Practices :***

Experience from countries with well-established desert tourism, such as Jordan and Egypt, should be studied and adapted to local contexts.

- ***Activating the Role of Tourism Agencies:***

Tourism agencies should extend their operations beyond outbound travel to actively promote domestic destinations.

- ***Utilization of Media and Social Platforms:***

A strong emphasis should be placed on diverse media channels, particularly social networks, including collaboration with Algerian content creators. Invitations should also be extended to Arab and international tourism influencers to explore the Algerian desert.

- ***Promotion of Festivals and Cultural Events:***

Special events, festivals, and national and religious holidays—such as the Sebiba Festival in Djanet and the Prophet Muhammad's Birthday in Timimoun—should be actively promoted.

- ***Participation in International Tourism Exhibitions:***

Such events provide a platform for interaction between international agencies and investors and serve as opportunities to establish partnerships and agreements.

- ***Incentives for Domestic Tourism:***

Measures such as airfare discounts for youth and families and the utilization of low-cost carriers can encourage domestic tourism.

- ***Encouragement of Local and Foreign Investment:***

Policies should aim to attract both domestic and international investment to Algerian tourist destinations.

- ***Development of Environmentally Integrated Tourism Products:***

Tourism plans and products should be designed to harmonize with the local desert environment, ensuring sustainability and authenticity.

12. Conclusion

Tourism, in its various forms, plays a pivotal role in supporting national economies, serving as a major source of foreign currency, generating employment, and stimulating key sectors such as transportation, accommodation, dining, and ancillary services.

In the Algerian context, desert tourism, in particular, represents a strategic opportunity in light of the pressing need to diversify national income sources, especially amid the declining reliance

on traditional sectors. The availability of distinctive natural and archaeological resources in the Algerian desert reinforces this potential, as these areas are widely recognized by experts and international organizations for their tourism value and their potential to become a global hub. However, their current utilization remains limited and does not fully reflect their inherent assets. From this perspective, adopting a development strategy focused on providing essential infrastructure, improving service quality, and enhancing management and administrative capacities is paramount. These measures are crucial for enabling desert tourism to fully contribute to economic and social development, attract local and foreign investments, and reposition Algeria as a tourism destination characterized by diversity, authenticity, and distinctive cultural and natural offerings.

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