



# **The SAGE International Encyclopedia of Travel and Tourism**

## **Cameroon**

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Cameroon is located on the Gulf of Guinea between West and Central Africa. It is a geographically, topographically, and multiculturally diverse country often described as “all of Africa in one country.” Cameroon has a total surface area of 475,442 square kilometers (295,425 mi<sup>2</sup>) and had a population of 22.8 million inhabitants in 2014, according to the World Bank. English and French are the official languages.

The beginnings of tourism in Cameroon date back to the period of colonization in the late 19th century. It was explored first by German adventurers (1884–1919), and later by English but most especially French colonizers who designated parts of the country as big game hunting reserves and later national parks in the second quarter of the 20th century.

Cameroon was ranked 15th out of 130 countries in terms of the concentration and number of total known floral and faunal species in the 2008 World Economic Forum (WEF) Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report. In 2013, a subsequent WEF report ranked Cameroon 32nd out of 140 countries in terms of natural resources and the level of ecologically sustainable tourism development and opportunities. With more than 830 tourism sites identified and inventoried by Cameroon’s Ministry of Tourism and Leisure (MINTOURL), the country’s top destinations include the Waza National Park, Lobeke National Park, Korup National Park, Dja Faunal Reserve, Ebogo Ecotourism Site, Sultanate of Foumban, Lamidat of Rey Bouba, the Fondom of Bafut, and the coastal resorts of Kribi and Limbe at the foot of Mount Cameroon. Two natural sites in Cameroon, the Dja Faunal Reserve and Sangha Trinational (which encompasses national parks in Cameroon, Central African Republic, and Congo), are on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

Tourism became a key development objective in Cameroon in 1981 when a law was promulgated creating a General Delegation of Tourism responsible for tourism development in the country. However, it is only within the last two decades that Cameroon’s tourism industry has seen significant efforts being made toward promoting its development and enhancing its competitiveness through a series of reforms undertaken by the government.

Presidential Decree No. 99/112 of May 27, 1999, created a National Tourism Council (NTC) bringing together the key public, private, community, and nongovernmental organization stakeholders to coordinate and manage tourism development in Cameroon. The government also adopted a Commonwealth-sponsored *Cameroon Tourism Marketing Plan* produced by Expansion Strategies Ltd and the *Cameroon Destination Branding Report* published by Emerging Markets Group, demonstrating political commitment to incorporating the recommendations into a national tourism policy. In addition to plans to create a national tourism office, there has been a shift toward moving from a highly centralized system to decentralization and devolution, with local authorities being given almost full responsibility to manage local tourism development.

## Tourism Trends

The main types of tourism activities being developed and/or practiced now in Cameroon include ecotourism, cultural tourism, heritage tourism, mountaineering, and hiking, as well as hunting and photo-safari tourism, often done in combination with sun, sand, and sea tourism in different parts of the country. The contribution of the industry to the country’s GDP and employment, though small, has been increasing. In 2014, the direct contribution of travel and tourism to GDP was 2.8%, while its total contribution to GDP was 6.2%, according to the World Travel & Tourism Council. That same year travel and tourism directly supported 124,000

jobs, or 2.4% of total employment in Cameroon. The industry contributed to a total of 281,000 jobs, including those indirectly supported by tourism, or 5.5% of total employment. International arrivals, according to MINTOURL, have been steadily increasing, from 277,000 in 2000 to 912,000 in 2013.

Cameroon's tourism products, its relative peace and political stability in a region rife with political instability, and its relatively unknown but rich and diverse cultural heritage have helped it to compete against other tourism destinations and make it a hotspot for ecologically sustainable nature and cultural tourism development. This potential is further enhanced by the use of French and English as the official languages, with most international visitors coming from France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Belgium.

## Challenges

Despite the contribution made by the private, public, and not-for-profit sectors including government departments, trade and industry groups, and local and international nongovernmental organizations to develop tourism in recent years, Cameroon's tourism industry still faces some daunting challenges. This is due to a number of factors, such as a weak regulatory framework for tourism development, an unfavorable business environment and infrastructure (including air transport and ground transport infrastructure and accommodations), information and communications technology and associated infrastructure, price competitiveness in relation to other destinations offering similar products, the lack of qualified human resources, and a shortage of educational and training facilities at all levels. In addition, parts of the eastern but most especially the northern regions of Cameroon, where a good number of the nature and wildlife safari tourism attractions are located, are beginning to witness the spill-over effects of the political instability in northeastern Nigeria and the Central African Republic, leading to tours being cancelled.

In spite of these challenges, a concerted effort has been observed in both the private and public sectors toward developing tourism in the country within the last 5 years, especially after it was included in the country's development master plan as one of the pillars that will enable the country to achieve emerging economy status by 2035. This has been manifested in the adoption and implementation of various laws all geared toward addressing some of the challenges mentioned earlier, as well as the opening of various academic and vocational training institutions aimed at facilitating the development of tourism.

*Albert N. Kimbu*

**See also** [Chad](#); [Cultural Tourism](#); [Ecotourism](#); [Gabon](#); [Heritage Tourism](#); [Nigeria](#); [Travel Trends in Africa](#)

## Further Readings

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UNESCO World Heritage sites in Cameroon: [whc.unesco.org/en/statesparties/cm](http://whc.unesco.org/en/statesparties/cm)

- Cameroon
- tourism
- cultural tourism
- World Economic Forum
- national parks
- tourism sector
- ecotourism

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