



ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT STATE OF DESERT TOURISM IN ALGERIA: AVAILABLE RESOURCES AND CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

Desert tourism has become a highly significant sector today, often described as tourism for the wealthy. This has prompted Algeria to focus on developing and enhancing this sector due to its substantial resources. Algeria is home to the second-largest desert in the world, covering two million square kilometers and offering golden sands, oases, ancient ruins, unique local heritage, distinctive geological sites, and rich biodiversity. These features highlight the need to prioritize this form of tourism and establish a strong policy framework for its development. This study aims to analyze the current state of desert tourism in Algeria and to identify its various resources and challenges. A descriptive approach was adopted, utilizing statistical analysis of relevant data and information, along with a review of previous studies. The findings indicate that, despite the diverse potential of the Algerian desert, tourism activities in desert areas remain minimal, even with the support provided by the Algerian government. This underscores the need for further measures to better utilize desert areas and contribute to economic growth.

Keywords: Algeria, deserts, foreign tourists, tourism, tourist destinations



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AZ ALGÉRIAI SIVATAGI TURIZMUS JELENLEGI ÁLLAPOTÁNAK ELEMZÉSE: RENDELKEZÉSRE ÁLLÓ ERŐFORRÁSOK ÉS KIHÍVÁSOK

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ABSZTRAKT

A sivatagi turizmus napjainkra rendkívül jelentős ágazattá vált, amelyet gyakran a gazdagok turizmusának is neveznek. Ez arra készítette Algériát, hogy jelentős erőforrásai miatt, ennek az ágazatnak a fejlesztését helyezze előtérbe. Algéria ad otthont a világ második legnagyobb sivatagának, amely kétmillió km²-t tesz ki, és amelynek turisztikai kínálata magában foglalja az arany színű homokot, az oázisokat, ősi romokat, egyedülálló örökségi helyszíneket, jellegzetes geológiai lelőhelyeket és a biológiai sokféleséget. Ezek a jellemzők jelzik annak szükségességét, hogy a turizmusnak ez a formája támogatásra érdemes, amelynek fejlesztéséhez saját szakpolitikai tervet kell kialakítani. A tanulmány célja, hogy elemezze a sivatagi turizmus jelenlegi helyzetét Algériában, és azonosítsa annak különféle erőforrásait és kihívásait. Leíró megközelítésben a releváns adatok és információk statisztikai elemzését, valamint az e tárgyban korábban megjelent publikációk áttekintését végeztük el. Az eredmények azt mutatják, hogy az algériai sivatag gazdag potenciálja ellenére a sivatagi területeken a turisztikai jelenlét minimális maradt, az algériai kormány támogatása ellenére is. Ez rámutat a további intézkedések szükségességére a sivatagi területek jobb kihasználása és a gazdasági növekedéshez való hozzájárulásának növelése érdekében.

Kulcsszavak: Algéria, külföldi turisták, sivatagok, turisztikai desztinációk, turizmus

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1. Introduction

Deserts are often portrayed as harsh, forbidding, and lifeless environments, with fragile ecosystems that pose significant challenges for their development as tourist destinations. However, deserts frequently captivate individuals who are drawn to visit them, contradicting the stereotypical image of barren sand dunes. Many see deserts as home to extraordinary ecosystems and landscapes.

The Algerian desert, the second-largest in the world, spans approximately two million square kilometers, covering about 85% of Algeria's territory (2,000 km from east to west, and 1,500 km from north to south) (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and National Community Abroad, 2024). It is rich in natural, cultural, and historical heritage. Known for its vastness and diverse desert landscapes, the Algerian desert stands as a unique and important tourist destination. It competes with other types of tourism and offers an alternative that can significantly contribute to the national economy, particularly as the sector accounted for a modest 3.49% of the gross domestic product in 2021 (STATISTA, 2024a) and employed 5% of the country's total workforce (STATISTA, 2024b).

In light of this, the present study seeks to examine the current state of desert tourism in Algeria, emphasizing the wealth of resources and potential that the Algerian desert offers.

2. Previous Studies and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Previous Studies

In recent years, the topic of desert tourism has garnered significant attention in academic circles, viewed as a modern approach necessitated by the need to develop the tourism sector in Algeria. Several studies have addressed the subject of desert tourism in Algeria. Among these studies is the work of Chehma (2011), which examined the reality of the desert in Algeria by presenting the various potentials of the Algerian desert and the challenges it faces. The study concluded that the Algerian desert is a vast reservoir of natural, cultural, and historical resources that can play a crucial role in the country's economic activity. However, its enormous potential also entails weaknesses that must be considered to preserve and maintain it, as well as to rehabilitate and wisely enhance it.

Another study (Aroub, 2015) aimed to analyze the national strategy and action plans adopted by the government to develop the desert tourism sector in Algeria, in addition to attempting to identify the main obstacles to its development. To achieve this objective, the researcher relied on a descriptive approach and statistical analysis. The study concluded that developing desert tourism in Algeria requires several measures, the most prominent of which are: enhancing security in those areas, involving local residents in the tourism offering, and developing electronic tourism promotion.

Conversely, a study by Anoune and Habbache (2019) sought to examine the current state of desert tourism in Algeria and outline strategic directions to promote sustainable

tourism in the region. The study concluded that, despite Algeria's considerable potential, the country lacks adequate tourism infrastructure and equipment in various desert areas, compounded by its reputation as a high-risk destination.

Yet another study (Zourdani, 2019) highlighted the importance of tourism in Algeria while seeking solutions to the obstacles hindering the sector's development, which has led to missed development opportunities in a rapidly changing social and economic landscape. The study concluded that desert tourism in Algeria has yet to achieve the expected outcomes.

Another study (Merabet, 2021) aimed to analyze tourism in the Timimoun area, a unique desert oasis in southwestern Algeria. The study sought to explore the environmental, cultural, social, and economic issues associated with desert tourism in the region. To achieve this objective, the researcher used a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, including observation, questionnaires, interviews, immersion in the local community, and a review of multidisciplinary previous studies. The study concluded with several findings, the most notable being the promising prospects for desert tourism in the Timimoun area, due to its significant resources. However, the region remains mostly marginalized.

The significance of archaeological tourism in the Algerian desert was also examined, with a focus on the Tassili N'Ajjer National Park in southern Algeria (Khouidat & Chadli, 2021). The researchers highlighted the various natural landmarks and tourist facilities in the area, employing a SWOT analysis to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats associated with desert tourism. The study revealed the presence of substantial natural and human resources, many of which remain untapped.

The assessment was undertaken in a recent study (Benaissa et al., 2022) of the current state of desert tourism in the city of Béni Abbès in southwestern Algeria identifying various shortcomings. The study concluded that although Béni Abbès is an important tourist destination, the number of visitors has significantly declined in recent years, necessitating immediate action to restore the city's tourism sector to its previous levels.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

2.2.1 Origin and Concept of Desert Tourism

Desert tourism, often referred to as geographical tourism by its proponents, is a branch of ecotourism (Murgante et al., 2021). The Global Environment Facility defines ecotourism as “travel to unpolluted natural areas that have not experienced any disruption of their natural balance, with the aim of enjoying their natural scenery, plants, and wildlife” (Barkane et al., 2020: 124). This type of tourism holds significant global importance, not only as a source of income but also for its role in environmental conservation and the promotion of sustainable development practices. Ecotourism is generally classified into three categories: nature tourism, aquatic tourism, and desert tourism (Barkane et al., 2020). The desert product is relatively new, emerging in the 1970s. Deserts have only

recently become tourist sites after being transformed from isolated areas into spaces of well-being and relaxation for city dwellers (Meyabe & Bencheikroun, 2022). Desert tourism refers to tourism dedicated to exploring the desert, with oases serving as starting and ending points. It encompasses “any tourist stay in a desert location, centered around enjoying the various natural, historical, and cultural potentials of this environment, accompanied by related activities such as entertainment, recreation, and discovery” (Benaissa et al., 2022: 904).

The British Tourism Association (1976) described tourism as the “short-term seasonal movement to tourist areas away from permanent residence and work” (Beaver, 2002: 312). Based on this definition, desert tourism can be understood as short-term visits to desert tourist locations, either for recreation and enjoyment of the natural, historical, and cultural resources of these areas, or for other purposes.

2.2.2 Components of Desert Tourism

In one definition of desert tourism (Eshraghi et al., 2010), such activities are limited and primarily tied to natural elements, relying on tourism resources, desert climate, and the geographical characteristics of desert and semi-desert areas, in addition to specific tourist activities. The main components of desert tourism can be outlined as follows (Niknejad, 2019):

- **Natural resources:** These include topography, climate, water resources, vegetation, and natural landscapes such as desert scenery, night skies, wildlife, and sand dunes.
- **Human resources:** This category covers various aspects of desert communities, including traditional social practices, local beliefs, customs, and historical artifacts that attract tourists. Examples include ancient ruins, caves, shrines, architectural landmarks, handicrafts, sports, traditional lifestyles, human coexistence with nature, and cultural rituals.
- **Tourist activities:** These activities depend on tourism resources, the weather, and land use. Popular recreational activities in desert regions include sand therapy, wilderness walking, biking, motorcycling on wide wheels, camel riding, bird watching, stargazing, shopping for handicrafts, visiting historical sites, climbing, and more.

In general, desert tourism is based on the following elements: historical landmarks and palaces, natural areas, geological and topographical features, religious sites, archaeological locations, biodiversity, and astronomical sites (Gharaibeh, 2012).

2.2.3 Forms of Desert Tourism

A quick examination of current desert tourism activities reveals a distinct pattern of association with several factors, including exceptional geological features influenced by climatic conditions, ancient or unique plant species, caravan trips, indigenous culture, oases, and protected areas (Tremblay, 2004).

According to the World Trade Organization, tourists visiting desert areas often seek opportunities to exchange experiences with local communities or to pursue authentic experiences that enhance comfort and well-being. Others are drawn to adventure and sporting activities, which require a solid understanding of local topography, while artists, writers, and photographers visit the desert for personal projects.

In reality, there are additional, albeit less prominent, reasons driving desert tourism, which nonetheless contribute to income generation and social and economic development. The key factors driving desert tourism include the following (Zourdani, 2019):

- Recreational tourism: Involves recreational activities like visiting amusement parks, zoos, etc.
- Sports tourism: A rapidly developing form of tourism involving athletes and spectators traveling to sports events.
- Cultural tourism: Involves all activities related to visiting historical sites such as castles and palaces.
- Health (therapeutic) tourism: Involves treatment using environmental elements for preventive and therapeutic purposes.
- Religious tourism: Includes visiting religious landmarks, attending places of worship, and religious events.
- School tourism: Supervised trips by teachers, such as exploration classes and end-of-study trips.

2.2.4 Impacts of Desert Tourism

Desert tourism results in several impacts, both positive and negative. The positive impacts of desert tourism can be summarized in *Table 1*.

Table 1: Positive impacts of desert tourism

Impact	Mechanism of Achievement
Job creation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protected areas appoint new guides, guards, researchers, or managers to meet the growing demands of ecotourism in surrounding communities; • Local residents may be employed as taxi drivers, tour guides, innkeepers, or artisans, or they may participate in other tourism-related projects; • Other types of employment opportunities may be indirectly created or enhanced through tourism, such as construction workers, restaurant staff, and souvenir makers.

Stronger economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing income for individuals employed in the sector enables them to spend more locally, thereby increasing economic activities, particularly in hotels, restaurants, shops, guiding services, and transportation systems. This, in turn, fosters growth opportunities.
Environmental education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introducing visitors to local customs, animal behaviors, and plant uses; • Understanding the economic, political, and social issues surrounding environmental conservation.
Improved conservation efforts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As most residents feel motivated to protect their areas, they may modify their resource usage patterns. Agricultural practices may shift, litter on roads may be cleaned up, water management may improve, and awareness at the national level often increases as a result.

Source: Prepared by the authors based on Eshraghi et al., 2010.

The negative impacts of desert tourism include the following (World Tourism Organization, 2007):

- **Environmental impacts:** The steadily increasing needs of populations living in semi-arid environments place growing pressure on natural resources. This pressure manifests in the overexploitation of land and excessive removal and harvesting of vegetation. The consequences include reduced crop productivity, depletion and pollution of streams and groundwater, and soil leaching.

- **Impact on freshwater:** Tourism significantly contributes to the depletion of wells and water sources due to excessive water use, pollution of wells and valleys, and bathing in reservoirs and oases.

- **Impact on climate change:** All climate change prediction models forecast the expansion of desert conditions and an increase in the frequency of extreme weather events (storms, heat, drought). Additionally, tourist air travel contributes to the accumulation of greenhouse gases, potentially worsening phenomena related to natural disasters and global warming.

- **Impact on local populations and their culture:** Tourism can significantly disrupt and ultimately damage local lifestyles by disrespecting traditional ways of life, looting archaeological sites, and degrading desert sculptures and paintings through excessive visitor movement and overcrowding. This leads to site degradation and the artificial folkloric treatment of the community's culture and intangible heritage.

2.2.5 Challenges and Obstacles of Desert Tourism

The uniqueness of deserts gives them an almost individual character, depending on their proximity to the ocean, the local ecosystem, and other related factors. The implementation

challenges for most desert sites can be traced back to several key reasons (Ghoshal & Petrick, 2014):

- Individuals often proactively alter the local environment for comfort, housing, and financial reasons, frequently with little regard for environmental degradation;
- Oil drilling, mining, new technologies, and weapons testing can cause permanent damage to the fragile desert ecosystem;
 - Excessive land use, overgrazing, and similar activities can accelerate desertification;
 - Livelihoods that promote environmental sustainability should be prioritized, as tourism exceeding the carrying capacity without proper infrastructure can severely damage the ecosystem.
- The use of detergents, washing clothes and utensils can lead to the death of plants and animals in water bodies, which disrupts the natural self-cleaning process, rendering the water unsuitable for use.

3. Methodology

The primary purpose of this study is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the current state of desert tourism in Algeria. Various factors that can serve as indicators of this reality are discussed, including the emergence and development of desert tourism in Algeria, its components, characteristics, structures, the evolution of its activities, its strengths and weaknesses, the measures taken for its development, and the requirements for its advancement.

This study also aims to emphasize the importance of desert tourism in Algeria by drawing attention to the topic, especially given the limited number of local studies addressing this subject, despite Algeria's substantial potential and supportive government policies.

To achieve these objectives, the descriptive method was primarily employed, as it is the most suitable approach for comprehensively covering the topic in its various aspects and complexities. This method helps in identifying the phenomenon under study and then describing it accurately (Elliott & Timulak, 2021). It involves not only the collection and categorization of data but also the analysis and interpretation of the data to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Dzhafovor & Perry, 2011).

Researchers often choose to use the descriptive qualitative method when (1) defining a precise problem statement or research objectives is challenging; (2) the research objectives call for a more detailed and in-depth exploration; (3) the goal is to study the occurrence of natural phenomena; (4) the researcher aims to examine multiple interconnected research contexts; and (5) a more contemporary approach is necessary (Furidha, 2023).

To assess the current state of desert tourism in Algeria, various essential data were gathered from the official website of the Algerian Ministry of Tourism and Handicrafts, including information on the development of tourist agencies, hotels and their capacity, the share of desert regions in hotel infrastructure, types of accommodation, and the

number of domestic and foreign tourists during the period 2015–2022. Additionally, the findings from previous studies were also utilized.

4. Results and Discussion

Algeria is one of the African countries rich in material, human, and natural resources. Algerian tourism experts regard desert tourism as one of the most promising sectors for investment. Jeremy Keenan has stated that Algeria is unparalleled in its tourism assets (Boulassel, 2020).

4.1 Emergence of Desert Tourism in Algeria

The Algerian experience in desert tourism dates back to the 1960s, initiated by public institutions in two regions in the far south of Algeria: Tassili and Hoggar (Ferguene & Idir, 2012). One of the goals of focusing tourism in the south was to create permanent job opportunities in a region with limited resources, employing qualified staff from desert areas. Additionally, tourism has a multiplier effect on other sectors such as transportation, construction, and retail trade (Blake & Lawless, 1972). Desert tourism saw a late boom, significantly developing during the 1980s, fluctuating in the 1990s, and reaching its peak in the early 21st century before collapsing. The first decline in desert tourism in Algeria occurred after the Black Decade. As a result, the southern Sahara was closed to tourism from 1993, causing tourists and European investors to shift to other areas, benefiting other countries.

In the early 21st century, Algeria reopened, with Tamanrasset reconnected in 2000, Djanet in 2001, and Timimoun in 2008, followed by the return of tour operators. The Algerian government, in an effort to promote domestic tourism, decided to revive international tourism in the far south, despite its near disappearance after the Ain Amenas events in 2013. Visas were gradually reissued for organized tours around Djanet, although the Tassili area remained officially unadvised. Tour operators in some foreign countries offered trips during the 2017-2018 season and beyond. However, weak cooperation from central authorities regarding security conditions, visa complexities, and declining bookings caused most tour operators to opt out (Gagnol, 2018).

4.2 Potential of Desert Tourism in Algeria

The desert constitutes nearly 83% of Algeria's total area and shares borders with six African countries: Mali, Niger, Mauritania, Tunisia, Morocco, and Western Sahara. The Algerian desert offers numerous tourist attractions, including natural sites (sand dunes, lakes, the Taghit oases, Beni Abbas), as well as cultural, religious, and historical heritage (palaces, zawiyas, mosques). It is also known for handicraft activities such as basket weaving, pottery, leather goods, textiles, and artistic practices like folk festivals. For example, in Touggourt, there are 12 region-specific artistic events, including Ghaita and Teksad for popular poetry, and the Sidi Ammar festival. These cultural and artistic traditions reflect

societal diversity and serve as key tools for tourism development. Additionally, Oued Righ is home to numerous shrines and zawiyas (Moulai & Ahamad, 2020).

Some of the major desert areas in Algeria include:

- **Adrar:** Covers an area of 427,000 km² in the southwest of Algeria, bordered by the provinces of Bechar, Naama, and Ghardaia to the north, Tindouf to the west, Tamanrasset to the east, and Mauritania and Mali to the south. It consists of 11 districts and is served by three airports (Adrar, Timimoun, and Bordj Badji Mokhtar). Adrar is known for its vast topographical features, such as Erg Chech, the Great Western Erg, and the Tanezrouft plateau, which cover three-quarters of the province, along with the regions of Touat, Gourara, and Tidikelt. It also serves as a commercial transit route linking the southern Sahara with North Africa. Adrar is a cultural melting pot, rich in folklore and renowned for its pottery crafts (Hosni, 2000).

- **Illizi:** Located in the far southeast of Algeria, Illizi province covers an area of 286,808 km². It is bordered by Tamanrasset to the north, Tunisia to the northeast, Libya to the east, and Niger to the south. A key feature of the province is the Tassili area, designated a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1982. The region combines protected wildlife and plant areas, offering a variety of activities such as hotels, desert camping, 4x4 tracks, camel riding, and hiking. It is also home to more than 15,000 rock paintings displayed in their natural setting (Brahimi & Rouaski, 2021).

- Located 1,900 km south of the capital and about 40 km north of the Mali border, Tamanrasset's main highlight is the Hoggar National Park. This province is home to numerous natural and cultural sites, revealing millions of secrets related to human, animal, and plant existence. It is classified as one of the world's largest open-air museums, covering an area of 5,000 km². The region's rock formations contain evidence of ancient animals and plants, remnants of forests with over 350 plant species, water sources, geological formations, mines, archaeological sites, and tomb remains. The Hoggar is a popular tourist destination and a base for hiking, camel riding, and 4x4 excursions.

- **Tindouf:** Situated in the far west of Algeria, Tindouf province borders Bechar and Adrar to the east, Western Sahara and Mauritania to the west, and Morocco to the north. Covering an area of 168,000 km², it is known for the Tindouf oasis, a stronghold of nomadic communities, renowned for its historic palaces (Hosni, 2000).

The southern Algerian oases, primarily located in cities such as Biskra, El Oued, Touggourt, Ouargla, and Bousaada, are also notable.

4.3 Characteristics of Desert Tourism in Algeria

Desert tourism in Algeria, similar to other regions in the Sahara Desert, is characterized by the following features:

- **Low number of local tourists:** Domestic tourism is extremely limited, with the majority of visitors being international, particularly from Europe, as the Sahara Desert is the closest desert to Europe.

- **Strong climate dependency:** This is a seasonal form of tourism, primarily occurring in the winter, with the peak season running from late December to late February. A trip to the desert remains an adventure that can quickly become dangerous for beginners, requiring special preparations and knowledge of the environment.
- **Weak individual tourism:** Although individual tourism exists, it is almost non-existent in terms of scientific consideration and remains limited compared to organized tours.
- **Male dominance in tourism activities:** Local tourism stakeholders are predominantly male, mostly from urban areas. Women are generally excluded from or choose not to participate in tourism activities, contributing only marginally in roles such as secretarial work in agencies, informal handicraft sales, or lodge maintenance.
- **Reliance on informal activity:** Due to the irregular and volatile nature of tourism, local actors do not regard tourism as their primary or sole profession. While profitable, it is risky and often serves as a complement to other activities, leading to widespread informal and multi-activity engagements (Gagnol, 2018).
- **Dependence on temporary camps:** Temporary camps are the most common form of accommodation due to the lack of tourist infrastructure. These camps recreate the traditional caravan style, offering desert stays for limited periods. Most camps are concentrated in areas like Tamanrasset, Djanet, and Taghit (Benbelaid, 2022).

4.4 Desert Tourism Structures

Visitors require essential infrastructure to facilitate their travel, primarily including tourist agencies and hotels.

4.4.1 Tourist Agencies

Tourist agencies are widely spread across Algeria, as the tourism sector in any country depends significantly on the activities of these agencies. *Table 2* shows the evolution of the number of tourist agencies in Algeria from 2015 to 2022.

Table 2: Evolution of the number of tourist agencies in Algeria during the period 2015–2022

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Number of tourist agencies	1643	2041	2220	2626	2942	3549	4267	4722

Source: Prepared by the authors based on the website of the Ministry of Tourism and Handicrafts: <https://www.mta.gov.dz>

It is evident from *Table 2* that there has been a significant increase in the number of tourist agencies in Algeria. The number of agencies grew from 1,643 in 2015 to 2,626 in 2018, an increase of 983 agencies over three years. By 2020, the number had reached 3,549, rising even further to 4,722 in 2022. Despite this substantial growth, the contribution of tourist agencies to promoting domestic tourism remains minimal. This is largely because most

agencies focus on Hajj and Umrah services, due to weak tourism laws and regulations governing the operations of these agencies.

Referring to the latest available data on the number of tourist agencies within the Algerian desert regions, Table 3 presents this information:

Table 3: Number of tourist agencies in the Algerian desert regions

Province	Number of Tourism Agencies	Province	Number of Tourism Agencies
Adrar	26	El Oued	68
Biskra	26	Ghardaia	26
Bechar	14	Laghouat	6
Tamanrasset	74	Ouargla	30
Illizi	46	Tindouf	3

Source: Prepared by researchers based on: Monograph data of the states, Ministry of the Interior: <https://www.interieur.gov.dz/Monographie>

The table highlights that the southern regions have a significant number of travel agencies, with the majority concentrated in Tamanrasset, Illizi, and El Oued. However, some provinces have very few agencies, with no more than three in Tindouf and fourteen in Bechar. Despite the presence of a considerable number of travel agencies, this falls short of expectations for the desert regions, which possess numerous sites and features that could qualify them as distinguished tourist destinations.

4.4.2 Hotels

Tourist accommodation is one of the most important components of the tourism value chain, playing a crucial role in the selection of a tourist destination. Table 4 illustrates the distribution of hotels and establishments by type and number of beds, with a particular focus on hotel establishments located in desert regions.

Table 4: Development of the number of hotel establishments and their capacity by type in Algeria during the period 2015–2022

	2015		2017		2019		2020		2021		2022	
	N	Beds	N	Beds	N	Beds	N	Beds	N	Beds	N	Beds
Urban	870	62479	949	69861	1045	80470	1070	81863	1115	85577	1154	93906
Coastal	230	30380	239	31326	252	32926	253	32971	258	33588	283	37586
Desert	55	3636	59	4928	76	5895	80	6299	83	6620	86	6946

Thermal	21	3860	23	4266	25	4502	27	4598	27	4598	33	5189
Climatic	19	1883	19	1883	19	1883	19	1883	19	1883	20	1899
Total	1195	102244	1289	112264	1417	125676	1449	127614	1502	132266	1570	145526

Source: Prepared by the authors based on the Ministry of Tourism and Handicrafts website: <https://www.mta.gov.dz>

Table 4 shows that the number of hotel establishments increased between 2015 and 2022, rising from 1,195 in 2015 to 1,449 in 2020, and reaching 1,570 in 2022. This represents an increase of 375 establishments over eight years, indicating slow growth in Algeria's hotel infrastructure. The number of beds also increased, growing from 102,244 in 2015 to 145,526 in 2022.

Regarding the types of hotel establishments, the table shows that urban establishments dominate in terms of the number of hotels and beds. In 2022, urban hotel establishments reached approximately 1,154, representing 73.50%, followed by coastal establishments at 18.02%. Desert, thermal, and climatic establishments constitute a very small portion of the hotel infrastructure, with minimal growth in such establishments from year to year.

For desert hotels, the number increased from 55 in 2015 to 76 in 2019, reaching 86 in 2022, with a total capacity of 6,946 beds. This remains a very low figure, which does not reflect the efforts made to promote desert tourism or the potential of desert regions. Table 5 presents the share of desert hotel establishments and the number of beds as part of the total hotel infrastructure during the period 2015–2022.

Table 5: Share of desert regions in the hotel infrastructure in Algeria during the period 2015–2022

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Hotel share %	4.6	4.54	4.57	5.33	5.36	5.52	5.52	5.45
Bed share %	3.55	4.44	4.38	4.59	4.69	4.93	5	4.77

Source: Calculated by researchers based on data from the Ministry of Tourism and Handicrafts: <https://www.mta.gov.dz>

In addition to the scarcity of hotel establishments in desert areas and the limited number of beds, many of these establishments remain unclassified. Table 6 shows the types of tourist accommodation establishments in desert areas.

Table 6: Types of accommodation establishments in desert areas

Province	Number of hotel establishments	Number of classified establishments
Adrar	21	3
Biskra	16	3
Béchar	-	-
Tamanrasset	9	5
Ouargla	31	-
Illizi	7	-
Tindouf	5	-
El Oued	12	10
Ghardaïa	-	8
Laghouat	8	-

Source: Prepared by researchers based on data from the Monograph of the States, Ministry of the Interior: <https://www.interieur.gov.dz/Monographie>

It is noteworthy that, according to ministry statistics, out of 225 tourist expansion areas, the southern region has 23 sites available for various tourism projects, catering to the capabilities and preferences of all segments of society. Additionally, 54 tourism projects are currently being implemented in the Greater South, particularly in the provinces of Adrar, Tamanrasset, Djanet, and Béchar.

4.5 Desert Tourism Activity in Algeria

The cost of a week's stay in the desert ranges from DZD 70,000 to 100,000, depending on the type of accommodation, the number and distance of visitor sites, and the tourism activities offered by travel agencies. Table 7 shows the evolution of the number of tourists in the Algerian desert during the period 2015–2021.

Table 7: Evolution of the number of tourists in desert areas during the period 2015–2021

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Residents	218373	132597	112837	300143	240927	127418	512871
Foreigners	16504	7506	17502	25871	23501	12857	15035
Total	234877	140103	130339	326014	264428	140275	527906

Source: Prepared by researchers based on data from the Ministry of Tourism and Handicrafts: <https://www.mta.gov.dz>

The table indicates that the number of tourists visiting desert areas fluctuated over the years. In 2015, the number of tourists in these regions reached 234,877. This figure declined in 2016 and 2017. However, in 2018, the number of tourists increased again, surpassing the 2015 figure, with 326,014 visitors. During 2019 and 2020, there was a significant decline in tourist numbers due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. With the global economic recovery, the number of tourists eventually exceeded half a million.

Regarding the nature of the tourists, most visitors to the desert areas are domestic tourists, while foreigners constitute only a small percentage of the total tourists. *Table 8* illustrates the share of foreign tourists in desert tourism during the period 2015–2021.

Table 8: Share of foreign tourists in desert tourism in Algeria during the period 2015–2021

Year	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Share of Foreign Tourists %	7.02	5.35	13.42	7.93	8.88	9.16	2.84

Source: Calculated by researchers based on data from the Ministry of Tourism and Handicrafts: <https://www.mta.gov.dz>

The table shows that the share of foreigners among the total tourists did not exceed 14% at best. The weakest percentage was achieved in 2021, at 2.84%.

4.6 Strengths and Weaknesses of Desert Tourism in Algeria

4.6.1 Strengths of Desert Tourism in Algeria

The strengths of desert tourism in Algeria include the following (Chaoui, 2017):

- The natural characteristics of the Algerian desert are vast, making it an open-air environmental museum where visitors can explore remarkable natural sites and prehistoric relics.
- The richness and biodiversity of desert spaces, along with the authenticity of their ecosystems, are invaluable assets of growing significance.
- Various tribes living in the desert, such as the Tuareg and the Mozabites, offer a completely unique cultural experience.
- The desert inhabitants are renowned for their hospitality and attentiveness to guests, a crucial factor that significantly enhances the quality of the stay.

4.6.2 Weaknesses of Desert Tourism in Algeria

The weaknesses of desert tourism in Algeria are as follows:

- Poor tourism management, fragmented tourism products, and the lack of a coherent structure for tourism offerings;
- Low quality of services, which presents a contradictory image of the desert as a destination;

- Difficulty in mobilizing commercial skills, along with a lack of customer feedback and competitive intelligence;
- Limited use of new technologies by four-wheel drive vehicles;
- Insufficient qualification of tourism professionals;
- Inadequate administrative structures that do not adhere to international standards;
- Ineffective marketing of Algeria as a tourist destination;
- Insufficient transportation and communication infrastructure.

4.7 Measures Taken to Develop Desert Tourism in Algeria

In 2008, Algeria implemented a national plan for sustainable tourism development, known as the Tourism Development Plan 2030. Its goals include re-establishing Algeria as a preferred tourist destination, addressing citizens' needs for recreational and leisure facilities, developing opportunities in hospitality, air transport, infrastructure, and handicrafts, and prioritizing training and apprenticeships in the field. Additionally, the plan seeks to align the banking and financial system with the requirements of supporting tourism investment (Ministry of Tourism and Handicrafts, 2024a). Some measures taken to support and develop desert tourism are as follows:

- Investors wishing to undertake tourism investment projects and modernize tourist facilities under the framework of the Tourism Quality Plan in the southern regions benefit from a 4.5% reduction in interest rates on bank loans;
- Exemption of investors from various taxes and fees during the implementation phase, including exemption from customs duties on imported goods directly used in the project, value-added tax on locally purchased goods and services involved in the implementation, property transfer tax, real estate advertising fees on real estate acquisitions, and registration fees on company incorporation contracts and capital increases, among others;
- Exemption from corporate tax and professional activity tax for a period of 5 to 10 years starting from the operational phase;
- Supporting investors through the Directorate of Tourism Investment, which provides initial approval for hotel plans and assists investors by offering guidance, support, and intervention with all relevant provincial departments;
- Replacing consular visas with on-arrival visas, exceptionally and temporarily, for tourists traveling to southern Algerian destinations via accredited travel agencies;
- Participating in major European tourism exhibitions since 2022, conducting communication campaigns, educational tours, and press trips to attract 3 million visitors in the coming years by leveraging the destination's appeal;
- Connecting various desert areas with an extensive road network. While only tracks existed after World War II, today the Algerian desert is covered with paved roads. More than 6,500 km of roads have been built since independence, now linking all major oases and most desert areas (Fontaine, 2005).

4.8 Requirements for Developing Desert Tourism in Algeria

Theobald (2004) proposed strategic directions that serve as the foundation for desert tourism policy. This strategy can be adapted to the Algerian context and includes the following elements (Anoune & Habbache, 2019):

- The need to enhance cooperation, dialogue, and partnerships between the public and private sectors, as collaboration among different parties facilitates successful tourism planning, management, marketing, product development, training, and education;
- The necessity of establishing partnerships between local and regional communities, as well as between the public and private sectors and local populations, since these partnerships are crucial for the success of sustainable tourism experiences;
- Developing a national tourism policy that respects sustainable development, particularly in the use of natural and cultural resources;
- Respecting the local customs of desert inhabitants and tourist sites;
- Generating stable income and ensuring its distribution across various entities to promote inclusivity, decent work, and poverty eradication.

The need for the Algerian state to:

- Establish standards and regulations for assessing environmental and cultural impacts, and auditing various tourism development projects;
- Develop appropriate technologies and tools to analyze the impact of tourism development projects on heritage sites and ancient relics;
- Delegate the rights to natural assets with high added value to local communities;
- Improve the accessibility, sustainability, and quality of physical transportation by enforcing strict regulations in central areas and promoting traditional transportation methods specific to the Algerian desert, such as camel transport.

5. Conclusions

The Algerian desert holds numerous potentials and capabilities that position it as a significant tourist hub both regionally and globally. These potentials include natural resources, climate, wildlife, and diverse tourism activities. In this study, we have presented the overall features of desert tourism in Algeria, following a similar approach to previous studies (Aroub, 2015; Zourdani, 2019; Fontaine, 2005). While many other studies have focused on revealing the potential of desert tourism in specific regions, as seen in the works of Ferguene & Idir (2012), Chaoui (2017), Merabet (2021), Khouidat & Chadli (2021) and Benaissa et al. (2022), these studies analyzed the realities and components of desert tourism in well-known areas of Algeria, such as Tassili N'Ajjer, Béni Abbes, or Timimoun.

Despite Algeria's considerable potential, it has not been sufficient to attract tourists, especially foreigners. Although the Algerian state has made efforts within the framework of the Tourism Development Plan 2030, many challenges and obstacles continue to hinder tourism activity, particularly those related to the country's past security issues, which still linger in the minds of foreign visitors despite the progress made in this area. This study has

identified numerous barriers to the success of desert tourism in Algeria, most of which are linked to inadequate infrastructure, an inefficient human element, and the generally low quality of tourism services, consistent with the findings of most previous studies, particularly those by Chaoui (2017), Zourdani (2019) and Anoune and Habbache (2019).

In conclusion, the success of desert tourism in Algeria hinges on adopting a well-structured strategy that promotes partnership and cooperation among various stakeholders, while respecting and preserving the country's natural and cultural resources.

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