



An Evaluation Study on the Role of Tourist Agencies in Promoting Mountain Tourism in Algeria

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Abstract :

Despite the fact that Algeria has attractive mountains along the Tell and the Saharan Atlas series, and the economic benefits of tourism at both macro and micro levels, one generally can see how mountain tourism is missed in tourism programs and projects in Algeria. This study attempts to analyze mountain tourism in Algeria through an electronic questionnaire addressed to the main important tourist agencies in Algeria; we evaluated the activities of these agencies in promoting mountain tourism, as they are a key player in revitalizing this very sector. The analysis of the data indicated the poor performance of these agencies in promoting mountain tourism in Algeria since they are more interested in promoting foreign destinations. In brief, they ignored the national tourism products. They attributed that to the absence of basic infrastructure and lack of security in mountainous regions, in addition to the high costs of hotel accommodation and the lack of government incentives.

Key Words: Mountain, Mountain Tourism, Tourist Agencies, Promoting, Algeria.

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Introduction

Nowadays, tourism becomes the most important and growing sector in the International Trade, with modern humans searching for innovative spaces for tourism practices. Mountain regions became a favorite destination for calm nature seekers. Mountains are an attractive destination particularly for expedition and outdoor recreation for they offer a wide range of options such as downhill skiing, ski, exploration trips, mountaineering, mountain biking, boating, and rowing.

Mountain tourism is not just a source of meditation and comfort for the human being, but rather becomes in recent years a primordial element of development and an important economic resource. Moreover, the revitalization of mountain tourism provides the advantage of linking investment and productivity projects of society with the protection of the environment and preservation of ecological and cultural diversity of Mountain tourist regions.



Tourism agencies are one of the most important mediums between a tourist and a tourist destination, as they contribute to defining and marketing that destination.

Accordingly, the following problematic can be raised

What role do tourism agencies play in promoting mountain tourism in Algeria?

Under which we, ask these sub-questions:

- What is mountain tourism and what importance does it present?
- What is tourism and travel agencies and what tasks they do?
- How can the role of travel and tourism agencies be brought into full play to promote mountain tourism in Algeria?
- What obstacles hinder mountain tourism in Algeria?
- How can travel and tourist agencies activate the role of mountain tourism in Algeria?

Objectives of the study: This research, in overall, attempts to tackle the following:

- Discover the strengths of mountain tourism in Algeria.
- To check the reality of mountain tourism in Algeria.
- To fully identify the requirements to promoting the role of tourism agencies in developing this tourism sector.
- To highlight the most critical obstacles and challenges facing it in this regard.

Methodology: In order to analyze the data collected, we adopted an analytic descriptive method, theoretically, to investigate all what has to do cognitively with mountain tourism and tourist agencies, and analytically through discussing the practical part with the help of a questionnaire administered to a number of tourism agencies.

I.The Theoretical Framework Of Mountain Tourism and Travel Agencies :

1. Definition of mountain tourism

Mountains cover about 24% of the world's land surfaces, are found in every continent, exist in 139 countries and in all major types of ecosystems, from deserts and tropical forests to polar icepacks (Richins & Hull, 2016, p. 2) ,Mountain regions in most cases, are inaccessible, fragile, marginal to political and economic decision-making and home to some of the poorest people in the world (Nepal & Chipeniuk, 2006) When considering the mountain context, several authors define a mountain tourism destination as a geographical, economic and social unit specifically designed for tourists in terms of mountain infrastructures. (Stefano & Marilisa, 2019, p. 1675) Mountain tourism is a type of tourism that exists with mountainous regions and hence, it is not available to all countries. It is also frequently associated to extraordinary, dramatic and exotic landscapes, nature and culture features (Silva, Kastenholz, & Abrantes, 2012). Mountain tourism dates from its origins early in the twentieth century, since mountains were taken as spaces for rest and practice of various sports. This type of tourism emerged in Europe, with the first collective tourism resorts in the United Kingdom, as Southend, Margaret and Blackpool resorts, mountain tourism at the very beginning was confined to Aristocrats and wealthy



tourists then spread since the 1970s (Mutanaa & Mukwadaa, 2018), amongst ordinary people to take its today global dimension.

Tourism in mountain regions is defined as an instrument that brings tourists closer to the mountain world. Take advantage of all of the socio-cultural, historical, natural and historical assets of mountain regions, which vary from region to region. Hence, mountain tourism is a set of mountain-related tourism activities, which in turn represent various tourism sub-categories such as ecotourism, scientific tourism and sports tourism, both practiced in the mountainous areas. The mountains are the places of escape that offer sensations and possible adventures. (Icoz, Gunlu & Icoz, 2009, p. 2) In addition, peace and quiet, clean air and sun in the mountains, which makes them places of relaxation. This type of tourism has something to do with winter, ie it is called “white tourism”, the color of which is similar to snow.

Today mountains are an important asset for the global tourism industry. With their clean air, unique landscapes and wildlife, scenic beauty, rich cultural heritage and recreational opportunities, mountains are now attractive for escaping our stressful urban world and attracting many tourists. (Panov, Taleska, & Dimeska, 2013, p. 547) The mountainous tourism presents the following characteristics: (Slusariuc & Petruța BÎCĂ, 2015, p. 120)

- fructifying the mountainous touristic resources (natural, cultural, human);
- fructifying the touristic over structure (access ways and means, resorts, board and lodging and agro
- touristic farms);
- uses varied accommodation spaces (inns, rural hotels, holiday houses).

Mountain tourism includes all the conventional and/or alternative forms of tourism activities, for which mountainous regions are placed in a relatively advantageous position (Maroudas, Kyriakaki, & Gouvis, 2011, p. 7) ., in the term of mountain tourism, the following forms are included :

- Mountaineering, paragliding, skiing. Where there is a link between many sports activities and mountains.
- Hunting & fishing.
- Mountain Hiking. (Bonadonna, Giachino, & Trua , 2017, p. 3)
- Resorting in peaceful quite places practicing birding and skiing.
- Cultural experiences in natural areas. (Richins & Hull, 2016)
- Landscape and archeological sites discovering trips.
- Camping in forests and mountainous areas as well as in summer and scouting sites.
- Medical tourism in mountains where there is mineral water, breeze and fresh air, which has, according to scientific studies, a lot of curative potentials.
- Events and festivals in natural settings.

2.Mountain tourism and the local community

Mountain communities live in isolation, mainly due to natural factors, the spread of poverty, marginalization, poor infrastructure and poor services. The mountain is a place with a strong tourist flow. Its use through a targeted tourism modality leads



to the development of a sustainable activity that can help improve the economic conditions of these places. (Rama, Maldonado-Erazo, Durán-Sánchez, & Álvarez García, 2019, p. 131) Hence, the importance of mountain tourism has emerged at all levels economically socially, and humanitarian as well:

- create jobs and promote local culture and products (Mutanaa & Mukwadaa, 2018, p. 2)
- Mountain tourism is the basic motivation behind the construction of a number of mountain resorts and spas, from which the rural communities in these areas benefit through the provision of infrastructure such as water supply. Plumbing, electricity, roads, transport and telecommunications. which in turn improves the way of life in the mountain communities (Bouacheche, 2013, p. 54).
- Opening up mountainous and rural villages to integrate those regions into development schemes.
- leads to a relative break in the isolation of mountain regions by improving their accessibility and consequently promoting their economic development. (Maroudas, Kyriakaki, & Gouvis, 2011, p. 7)
- Stemming rural migration.
- Tourist groups flow creates permanent as well as temporary jobs for the locals; this raises awareness to preserve their environment for more gains. In addition to deepening a sense of belonging and developing endangered handicrafts and traditional industries.
- Valorization of the material and immaterial heritage, whereby mountain tourism contributes to identifying and introducing this very heritage to the world.
- Protection and development of historical archaeological sites through tourism development programs.

Although the tourism industry is essential for mountainous regions but, if the tourist flow exceeds the available capacity, this will put pressure on the mountainous region and cause irreparable damage, in particular, with respect to the restriction on ecosystems, which may threaten the tourism future. Thus, environmental aspect must be taken into account when expanding tourist investments in mountain regions.

Among the negative effects of tourism we find: (Maroudas, Kyriakaki, & Gouvis, 2011, pp. 9 -11)

- The excessive dependence of the local economy on tourism and the flight of a significant part of the economic benefits from the local community to external development interests is particularly reflected in the case of changes and / or decline in tourism demand due to the abandonment of local communities. with exhausted resources and inflated local prices.
- The creation of tourist infrastructures and equipment as well as the rapid increase in tourist activities in fragile mountain ecosystems lead to deterioration of the natural environment, changes in soil morphology, depletion of non-renewable natural .
- The dependence of the mountain communities on the tourism industry is gradually worsening their comparative advantage, as efforts to meet the growing tourist



demand contribute directly or indirectly to the abandonment of traditional production systems due to monoculture tourism, the change in local traditions and customs.

3.Travel Agencies:

The traveler in ancient times relied on himself in his journey, because tourism was not an important activity at that time. Tourism and travel agencies have emerged with the rapid technological development, global lifestyle and tourism development. Today, tourism agencies have become one of the important tourism economic sectors, made up of overlapping dimensions.

Defined as a place that offers advisory and technical information, makes travel arrangements by land, sea, or by air to anywhere in the world. The size of the agency is often small with a limited number of staff ranging between 2 and 12 persons (Maher , 2008, p. 9). Besides, it is generally a medium between the providers of the various tourist services (hotels, accommodation, transportation, and tourist facilities) and tourists (Addad , 2012, p. 296). Thus, the tourist agency is defined as the link between the tourist and the tourist destination, as it provides the tourist with information and advice about the tourist product, and it also offers various alternatives with a salary called commission. 7The main tasks of tourist agencies are the following:

- Selling airline tickets to domestic and foreign destinations.
- Selling boat tickets.
- Organization of Haj and Umrah trips with all the necessary various procedures.
- Making hotel reservations via electronic media (reservation systems) Or direct hotel reservation.
- Electronic visas and other visa files processing.
- Domestic and outdoor trips organization.
- Receive and organize trips for foreign tourists.

It is also possible to add the following: (Al-Rahbi, 2014, p. 20)

- Providing saloon cars and specialized tourist transport cars.
- Tickets for various festivals and tourist activities.
- Covering tourists and passengers' insurance and their luggage in the local insurance companies according to the applicable laws and regulations.
- Promoting tourist areas.

II- Mountain tourism in Algeria :

Algeria is the largest African country, enjoys a variety of plains, mountains, plateaus and a vast desert, as well as a civilizational and cultural diversity that is deeply rooted in history. It is difficult to find such richness in another country in the world.

The mountains in Algeria form three mountain ranges, there are two chains in the north that almost form two parallels from east to west, a mountain range in the South, and the Hoggar region as well we can divide them as follows: (Bouacheche, 2013, pp. 86-87) .



1. Tell Atlas Mountain Range ;

This chain extends from the Souk Ahras Mountains in the east to the Tlemcen Mountains in the west, and forms a barrier

Naturally, the Mediterranean influences the rest of the country, its mountains are more coherent and bordered

For the coast, it is characterized by its steep peaks, as well as dense vegetation.

Among the most important mountains in this chain we find:

- Tsala Mountain Range: Tsala Mountain 1061 m
- Al-Wonshris mountain range: Jabal Sidi Ammar 1985 m, Ashaoun mountain 1850 m, Sidi Abdul Qadir Mountain.
- Dahra mountain range.
- Djurjuara mountain range: Lalla Khadija Mountain, 2304 m.
- Biban mountain range: Mansoura 1862 m, Shoukchout Mountain 1832m.
- Al-Tatar mountain range: El Kef Al Akhdhar Mountain 1416m, Kaf Afoul 1400m, Deira Mountain 1485m, Qarn Al Adhaoura Mountain 1423m.

2. Saharan Atlas Mountains range :

The Atlas Desert Mountain range extends from the Nemmach Mountains and Tebessa in the east to the Kousour Mountains , In the southwest of the country, the height of its peaks ranges between 1200 m and 2000 m, this forms the chain is a double barrier to stop desert influences in the south and Mediterranean influences in the south.

The most important mountains that distinguish this chain are:

- Al-Qusour Mountain Range: Aissa Mountain 1600 m, Mukhtar Mountain 2060m.
- Al-Amour Mountain Range: Qarn Arif Mountain 1721m, Umm Qaddour 1686m, Sidi Oukba 1707 m, kourou 1606, Kaf Sidi Bouzid 1583 m.
- Awlad Nile mountain range: Al-Azraq Mountain 1491 m.
- Aures Mountain Range: Shalala` about 2000 m , Shelia Mountain 2328 m, Belezema 2178 m.

3. The Hoggar Mountain Range:

It is a group of barren volcanic mountains, located in the southeast corner of the homeland, and it has the highest peak in Algeria, the summit of Tahat Atakur Mountain which reaches a height of 3303 m.

Fig. 1 : « Map of mountains in Algeria »



Source: <https://www.freeworldmaps.net/africa/algeria/map.html/>

Fig. 2 : « Tell Atlas and the Saharan Atlas »



Source:

https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&url=https%3A%2F%2Fen.wikipedia.org%2Fwiki%2FGeography_of_Algeria&psig=AOvVaw03WjGBz-xnOr9N4PVPXncq&ust=1621114837973000&source=images&cd=vfe&ved=0CAIQjRxqFwoTCJcj_cqRyvACFQAAAAAdAAAAABAU

Algeria has two major mountain ranges, the Tell and Saharan Atlas which enjoy important tourist resources such as caves caverns and a variety of charming landscapes .We can also meet with various species of animals, rare species of avifauna , and even cold freshwater springs in summer. All these resources stand as ones of the most elements of mountain tourism.

Here are the most mountainous regions in Algeria:

- Chrea Mountains :



Source: <https://www.urtrips.com/chrea-mountains-blida/>

Chrea mountains are located in Blida, 50 kms Southern Algeria. It is the highest peak in the Beledian Atlas 19 kilometers far of the city; more than 1,600 meters above sea level. The Chrea forest is the richest ecologically diverse in the Algerian central region. It covers more than 380 plant species and more than 800 species of animals. It consists of a huge stock of pine trees, high cedar trees and cypress as well. This place attracts a lot of visitors being an enjoyable tourist and natural destination. Thousands of families flock to this area, taking advantage of the snowfall in the whole forests to have fun, play, skate, take pictures and enjoy the natural charming, where there are wood chalets, cafes, restaurants, spaces, ample seating and tables Outdoor.

- Tikjda Mountains :



Source: <http://tourismalgeria.blogspot.com/2014/08/tikjda-algeria.html>

Is located in the Atlas series the most famous mountain regions in Algeria. It was classified in 1983 as “national hangars” to protect these endangered species. Tourists can easily practice skydiving, along with several other sports such as skiing on the “Acoker” track which is 2,000 meters above sea level. There are also deep caverns in the Assol region, like a “Al Namer nozzle” the deepest nozzle in Africa about 1007 meters deep. Not so far is the “ice-cavern” that keeps snowy all year round even in the hot summer . Besides, one can also enjoy watching wild animals such as monkeys jumping up & down the cedar trees. Least but not the least Mountain hiking is also available. According to **UNISCO** , Aglomm is the longest Lake in Africa , located at an altitude of 1745 meters above the Djurdjura series, and it is a more than three-hectare area for skiing.

- Babour Mountains



Source: <https://www.afrik21.africa/en/algeria-djebel-babor-forest-reverts-to-national-park-status/>

The Babour Mountains in Setif, or the forgotten Paradise; this park at the top of the Atlas Mountains is more than 2004 meters above sea level, where the pine, cedar, and oak trees meet the mountains above. It attracts hundreds of foreigners; intellectuals and photographers from all around the globe. The charming topography



of the Babour Mountains creates a tie of a special feature linking forests, mountains with fresh air. The place attracts dozens of foreigners and thousands of Algerians throughout the four seasons. It is classified as the richest regions in flora and fauna in Algeria. They contain rare species with more than (416) plants, as well as rare trees; the foam trees, sell in European and Asian markets, are favored for their good quality, as well as Atlas cedar trees. The Babour is famous for sheltering more than 15 wild animals out of the 47 making the national source. It enjoys as well more than 800 species of birds such as woodpecker, partridge and the stork. Besides, some wild animals as: wolves, foxes, pigs, rabbits and hedgehogs. There are also two species of monkeys, reptiles and amphibians. The barn is famous for having: 32 protected birds, the most important is” Quabilian nutcracker”.

- Theneit El Had



Source: <https://steemit.com/travel/@capetcha/theniet-el-had-national-park-algeria>

One of the 10 national parks in Algeria ; it is located in Tismessilt. It is seen at the top of the Ouarsenis Mountains with 1985 meters high. It is a home for a distinguished species of plants However, it is a perfect home for animal diversity; combination between cedar trees and pistachio. The only area in the Mediterranean basin where the foam trees grow to 1,600 meters and is considered as a tourist pole in Algeria; it is a destination for thousands of families in summer and winter.

III . The role of tourism and travel agencies in promoting mountain tourism in Algeria:

It is estimated that more than 50 million people visit mountains each year, and according to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), Mountain tourism accounts for 15 - 20% of worldwide tourism, or US\$ 70 - 90 billion per year (Panov, Taleska, & Dimeska, 2013, p. 547). This increasing demand for mountain tourism – which is expected to grow even further, is a great opportunity for the Algeria.

Although Algeria has such a unique and rich mountain regions, mountain tourism in Algeria do not compete at least regionally in neighboring countries. Thus, we designed a questionnaire to find out the reasons. It consists of eleven questions,



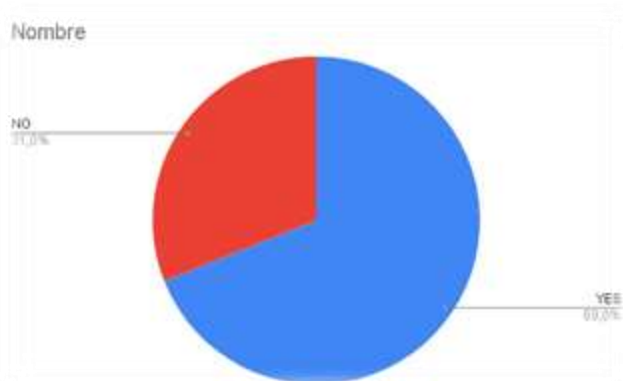
seven open-ended for some Tourist agencies active in the field in order to identify the reality of mountain tourism, growth and development of this tourism pattern in Algeria. We addressed an electronic questionnaire between 05 th and 22 nd April 2020 relying upon prior knowledge of the main tourist agencies in Algeria. We sent it via email and WhatsApp, the answers were rich and various; the following ideas were raised:

-Question 2: The aim of this question is to know what is the most promoting mountainous destination by the tourist agencies in Algeria. It is found that the Tikijda and Chrea mountains which are the most favored destinations which Tourist agencies have organized trips for, especially for the agencies in Algiers the capital and its suburbs where regular trips in winter are organized due to the great popularity for these two areas. In addition to other destinations such as the Ouarsenis (Theneit El Had), Jijel (Iraguen Souici and Takesna) , and to a lesser extent in Bijaia mountains (Yemma Guraya , Okfaudo).

-Question 5 : The aim of this question is to investigate to what extent are the agencies aware about the mountain tourism in Algeria. Hence, here are some important areas deemed nominated to be the most charming mountainous regions: Tikajda in (Bouira and Tizi Ouzou) and Chrea in Blida , in addition to other regions like Theneit El Had in Tissimssilet, Brizenah in Al Baid, Yemma Guraya in Bijaia, Takesna and Aouana in Jijel and the Babour mountains in Setif.

-Question 6: 69% of the agencies consider lack of security as a hinder to the mountain tourism in Algeria, when the mountainous areas suffered from terrorism for decades. However, the restoration of security in these areas, stereotyped still fixed about mountains in Algeria. However, The others (31%) believed that the lack of security is not the only obstacle, but there are other factors that still affect it.

Fig. 3 : « Question 6 »

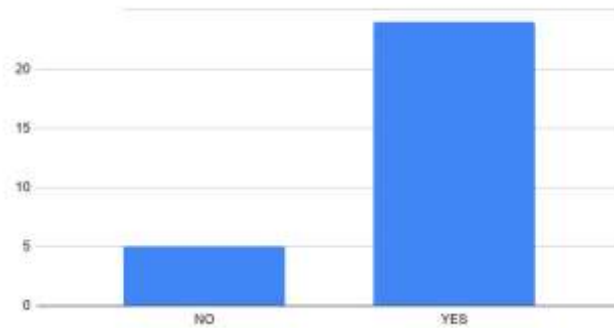


Source: Prepared by the researchers



-Question 7: 82.10% of the agencies confirmed that tourist agencies are capable of attracting foreign tourists owing to the charming areas as the animal variety and the beautiful high mountains. The Tell and Saharan mountains make it an opportunity to fulfill the international standards at the international tourist market. The answers mostly emphasized on the necessity for the infrastructure and services promotion, as well as setting a national strategy for the development of this sector. Moreover, Offering facilities for foreigners to get a tourist visa to visit Algeria is required.

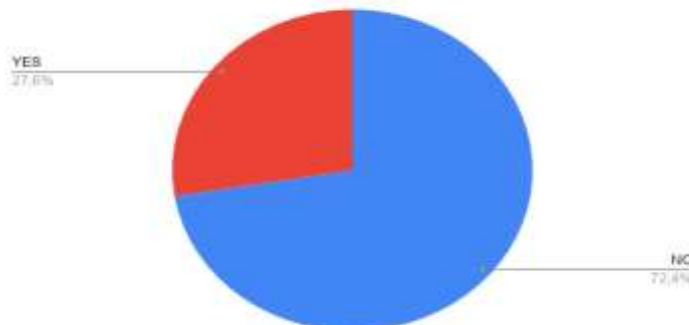
Fig. 4 : « Question 7 »



Source: Prepared by the researchers

-Question 8: 72.4% confirmed that tourist agencies do not play their role in promoting tourism in Algeria since almost all of them just promote foreign tourist destinations: Tunisia, Turkey, Dubai...ect other than national destinations. Therefore, we can confirm the lake of agencies that are activating in local mountain tourism, which do not consider it as the main activity for them but as only a winter activity in the Chrea and Tikajda mountains.

Fig. 5 : « Question 8 »



Source: Prepared by the researchers



Mrs.Hager.H the manager of Marianas Agency in Algiers (Hanek, 2020) explained the why the agencies overlook the government's weak plans in promoting this sector, and the non-availability of any infrastructure in terms of transportations, hotels, and other various services. She indicated that tourism agencies in Algeria do not adopt on mountain tourism as their main activity, due to the weak financial profits for them compared to other tourism products such as Hajj and Umrah due to the high cost of staying in mountain hotels. Furthermore, she pointed out that some youth associations do greater efforts to promote this type of tourism in Algeria because they use modern technology such as social media to reach mountain tourism fans. These efforts helped to promote and advertize for tourist resources of the mountain areas in Algeria.

-Question 9: To identify the most important obstacles to mountain tourism according to the tourism agencies in the questionnaire, we tried to collect the most important responses as follows:

- Lack of necessary facilities and infrastructure in the mountainous areas for the development of this tourist activity, such as roads, water, electricity, telecommunication and medical aids.
- The disinterest of the state to develop mountain tourism and tourism in general as there is a kind of disequilibrium between the parties involved in the tourism development process (National Tourism Office, Airlines, Hotel Managers, Tourist agencies).
- Weak private and public tourism investment in mountain areas, and lack of basic tourist facilities: resorts, hotels, restaurants.
- Lack of legal procedures relative to other tourism activities.
- The inefficiency of local communities in mountainous regions to develop mountain tourism and making it a development potential.
- The absence of tourism marketing for mountainous regions by relevant tourism bodies whereas some youth associations promote mountain tourism more than the government themselves through social media platforms and regularly organizing tours for mountainous regions for hiking and mountain sports activities: Skiing, mountaineering.
- Weak of Algerian tourism education
- 51% of the responses to the questionnaire confirm that tourism in Algeria only takes place on the beaches and that mountain tourism is only associated with winter.

**Conclusion:**

We have concluded from our study the following:

- Algeria has attractive mountainous areas for the practice of mountain tourism along the Atlas plateau and the desert, which has recently become safe.
- Mountain areas are isolated and marginalized, which makes tourism an opportunity to carry out the development process in those areas and to benefit from the profit of this type of tourism to the locals and furthermore break the barrier of isolation.
- Despite the poor infra-structure necessary in those areas , the absence of government initiatives for tourism agencies to develop this sector, and the expensive price of accommodation in hotels .
- The efforts of tourism and youth associations, attracting researchers and mountain tourism enthusiasts through social media, and organizing group trips.
- mountain tourism in Algeria continues to be only seasonal and domestic one because of the disinterest by people in this very kind of activities.
- The poor performance of these agencies in promoting mountain tourism in Algeria since they are more interested in promoting foreign destinations.

We finally recommend some suggestions as follow:

- Encourage interest in mountain tourism locally and classify it as a national heritage that needs to take care of.
- Expand the current tourism development programs, and motivate interest in the domestic tourism development in general and mountain tourism in particular.
- Formulate a clearly defined strategy to develop mountain tourism in Algeria, and elaborate tourism programs for mountain tourism.
- Motivate tourism investment in mountain regions.
- Establish strong infrastructure for mountainous regions and hence expand local development programs.
- Provide tourist agencies with all the potentials to promote tourism in mountain regions in Algeria.
- Raise the awareness for tourism education and mountain tourism.
- Create plans to promoting mountain areas in Algeria, and advertize them nationally and internationally.
- Formulate a full-featured tourist cards animated with photos , maps, data, posters and full information about mountain tourism destinations in Algeria to attract foreign tourists.
- Achieve balance between economic outcome and the preservation of the eco-system in mountainous regions.

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Questionnaire link : <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1TU7psrbojA-y6YhIkmwR7aNPx6lSLtAFE6gKW7BSLX8/edit>