



Sahara Desert Tourism Drives Morocco's Tourism Growth as Berber-Led Cultural Experiences Expand Travel Options

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Demand for private guided desert expeditions and cultural immersion tours continues to grow as Morocco's tourism infrastructure develops ahead of the 2030 FIFA World Cup.

Morocco's Sahara Desert regions are seeing a steady increase in international visitors, with private tour operators such as Morocco Countryside Tours reporting growing demand for multi-day desert expeditions led by native Berber guides. The trend reflects a broader shift in how travelers engage with the country's interior regions beyond the coastal and imperial city circuits.

Morocco's tourism sector reached a record 17.4 million visitors in 2024, a 20 percent increase from the previous year, according to data from the Ministry of Tourism. The government has set a target of 35 million annual foreign visitors by 2030, a goal tied to infrastructure investments that include new airport terminals in Casablanca and Marrakech, expanded rail links through the Al Boraq network, and a hotel development program estimated at approximately USD 4 billion. The National Tourist Office has reported that tourism revenue reached approximately USD 10.5 billion in 2024, reflecting higher visitor numbers and increased

per-visitor spending.

Said, founder and head guide of Morocco Countryside Tours, said that interest in private desert experiences has expanded beyond the traditional short overnight camel treks to include multi-day itineraries combining Erg Chebbi sand dunes, the Atlas Mountains, and historic kasbah routes. The company operates private guided tours departing from Fes, Marrakech, Casablanca, Tangier, Agadir, and Erg Chebbi, with itineraries ranging from two to seventeen days. Berber guides accompany each trip and provide historical and cultural context at archaeological sites, mountain passes, and desert camps. The company has expanded its departure cities over the past two years to include Agadir and Casablanca, responding to increased demand from travelers arriving through those international gateways.

Morocco's 2030 World Cup preparations include new road connections linking southern regions to the national highway network, which are expected to improve access to desert gateway towns such as Merzouga and Zagora. The national tourist office has launched programs specifically promoting the Sahara and pre-Saharan regions to international travelers, including new marketing campaigns targeting North America and Asia. Visitor arrivals from the United States increased by roughly 35 percent in 2024 compared with the previous year, according to data from the National Tourist Office. New terminal construction at Casablanca's Mohammed V International Airport and Marrakech Menara Airport is expected to increase airlift capacity for long-haul routes into southern Morocco.

For desert tourism operators, the combination of improved infrastructure and growing international awareness of Morocco's interior regions is expected to support further growth in multi-region itineraries that combine Saharan destinations with coastal and mountain stops. Morocco's position as a year-round destination, with mild winter temperatures in the desert south and cooler summer conditions along the Atlantic coast, allows the Sahara tourism sector to operate through all four seasons. The expansion of highway and rail links connecting the coast to the interior has made it feasible for travelers to combine desert experiences with visits to imperial cities such as Fes and Marrakech in a single itinerary.

The growing interest in Berber-led cultural tourism reflects a broader shift among international travelers toward experiences that include direct engagement with local guides and communities. Private tour operators offering small-group or individual itineraries have seen sustained demand as visitors increasingly favor flexible schedules and personalized routes over fixed-group tours. Morocco's tourism authorities have noted that the Sahara and pre-Saharan regions represent a growing share of the country's cultural tourism segment, supported by the expansion of accommodations and guiding services in the Erg Chebbi and Dades Valley areas.

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Morocco Countryside Tours

Morocco Countryside Tours is a Moroccan travel company specializing in private, custom tours across the country. Led by experienced local guides, they offer cultural, desert, mountain, coastal, and city tours designed to provide authentic experiences

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