
Development of Domestic Tourism in Benin: Strengths and Prospects

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doi.org/10.51505/ijaemr.2026.11223

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.51505/ijaemr.2026.11223>

Received: Jan 27, 2026

Accepted: Feb 09, 2026

Online Published: Apr 09, 2026

Abstract

Tourism is a powerful driver of a country's socioeconomic development. This development hinges on the strong performance of domestic tourism. Benin possesses numerous natural and cultural resources conducive to its tourism development. From North to South, from East to West, it offers ample opportunities to captivate its residents and foreign visitors alike. This research, entitled "Development of Domestic Tourism in Benin: Strengths and Prospects," aims to analyze the challenges associated with the development of domestic tourism in Benin. The methodological approach relied on documentary research, interviews, observation, and questionnaires. The collected data were analyzed through the lens of the development approach of P. Aydalot (1985) and B. Pecqueur (2001), combined with P. Nora's (1984) theory of heritage valuation and the economic theory of tourism inspired by the work of JM Keynes (1936). The results of our investigations show that Benin possesses significant and attractive potential in terms of resources representing its tourism heritage (natural, tangible, and intangible). This potential is distributed throughout the national territory in terms of the tourism offerings available to tourists. These include Pendjari National Park, W National Park, the Bouche du Roy (King's Mouth), the Atypical Hills, the Lakeside City of Ganvié, the Gate of No Return, the Royal Palaces, several museums, the Notre Dame Arigbo Cave, and more. However, the current state of these sites reveals that 80% are undeveloped and 20% are in poor condition. It is noted that 95% of the sites have tourist guides. Furthermore, 20% of those surveyed expressed an interest in domestic tourism, while 80% did not.

Keywords: Domestic tourism, potential, tourism offerings_ Benin.

1. Introduction

Tourism is now a strategic sector for the economic and social development of nations. According to Labri T., it represents an active lever for achieving the objectives of sustainable growth, reducing unemployment, and alleviating poverty. Indeed, tourism contributes to boosting the economy by promoting job creation, diversifying economic activities, and improving living conditions. It also contributes to the enhancement and protection of national cultural and natural heritage while ensuring the empowerment of local communities. From this perspective, tourism appears as an important instrument of sustainable development (United Nations Conference on

Trade and Development , 2017). The World Tourism Organization distinguishes several forms of tourism based on the origin and destination of visitors. It notably recognizes *domestic tourism, which includes internal tourism corresponding to travel by residents within their own country, and inbound tourism, which concerns visits made by non-residents to a given country.* In addition to this, there is domestic tourism, which combines internal tourism and outbound tourism, the latter referring to travel by residents of a country to foreign destinations. Finally, *international tourism* encompasses both inbound and outbound tourism.

Globally, tourism represents a major economic sector. In 2019, it contributed approximately 10% to global gross domestic product (GDP) and generated nearly one in eleven jobs worldwide. Furthermore, it accounted for about 7% of international trade and nearly 30% of global service exports (World Tourism Organization). These figures demonstrate the growing importance of this activity in contemporary economies. In this context, domestic tourism occupies a particularly strategic position. It refers to all tourist travel undertaken by residents of a country within its national borders. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), domestic tourism is a key driver for supporting the recovery of the tourism sector, particularly in countries, regions, and cities where this sector represents a significant share of employment and economic activity. *During crises, whether health-related, security-related, or economic, it also plays a stabilizing role by helping to maintain a certain level of tourism activity despite the decline in international travel.*

International statistics illustrate the importance of this form of tourism. In 2018, the World Tourism Organization estimated that there were approximately nine billion domestic trips worldwide, more than six times the volume of international tourism, which totaled around 1.4 billion travelers that same year. This predominance of domestic tourism demonstrates its considerable potential for generating revenue and supporting national economies. For example, in the European Union, spending on domestic tourism is estimated to be about 1.85 times greater than that generated by inbound tourism. Thus, when properly planned, structured, and integrated into public development policies, domestic tourism can be a powerful driver of economic growth, the development of local resources, and the strengthening of the economic resilience of regions.

I-Presentation of the study environment

In its official form, the Republic of Benin is a [country](#) in [West Africa](#), covering an area of 114,764 km² and stretching 700 km from the [Niger](#) River in the north to the Atlantic coast in the south. Benin has a population of 12,506,347 and enjoys a tropical climate. The country is a member of [ECOWAS](#) and is bordered by [Togo](#) to the west, [Nigeria to the east, and Niger](#) and [Burkina Faso](#) to the north. [French](#) is the official language of Benin, and the [CFA franc](#) is its currency. Benin has a presidential system of government. Its capital is Porto-Novo. The country is relatively flat and is divided into five natural regions.

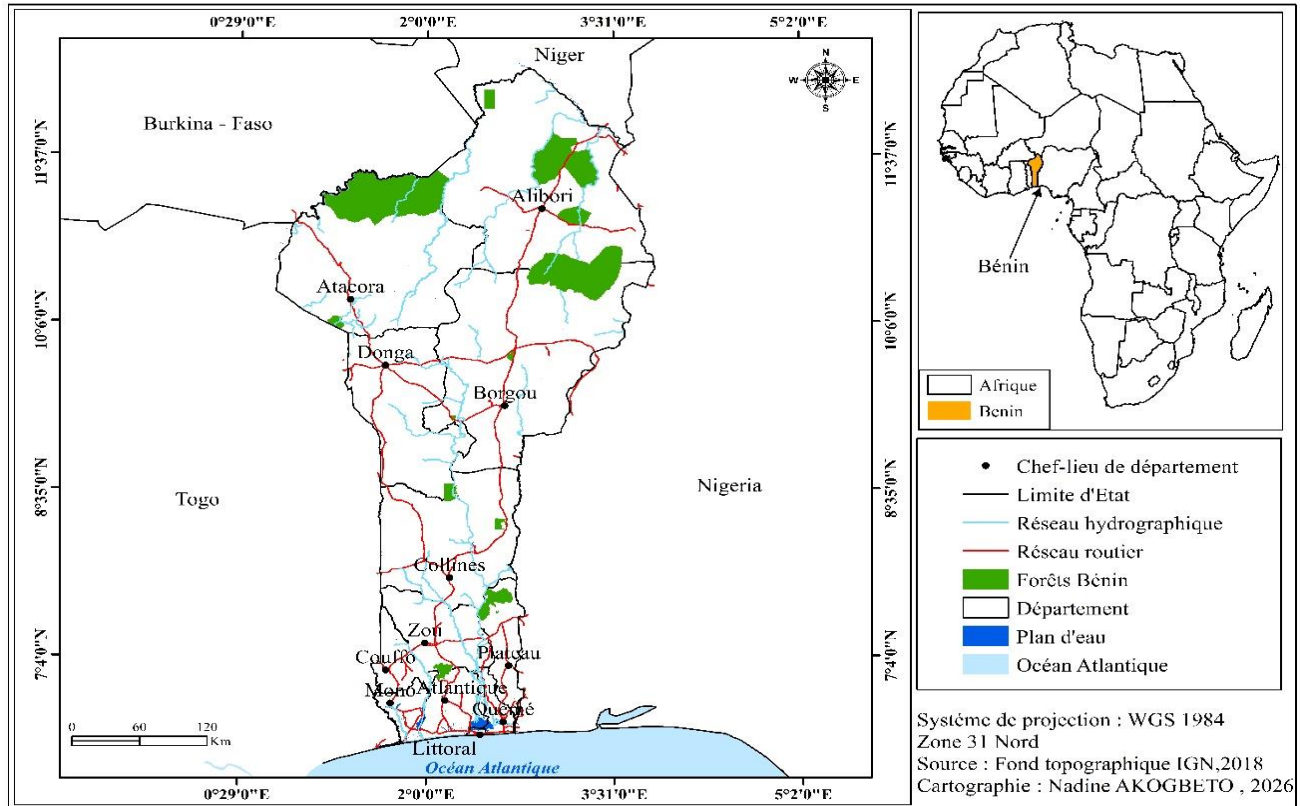


Figure 1: Geographic map of Benin
 Source: Nadine AKOGBETO, March 2026

II-Methodological Approach

In this study, the methodological approach was essentially based on documentary research, data collection, data processing and results analysis.

2.1. Method

The method used in this research is analytical and based on a quantitative and qualitative approach. It is a non-probabilistic method employing purposive selection and convenience sampling techniques.

2.2. Documentary research

It was a preliminary step to the study and continued throughout the entire process. It consisted of consulting study reports, dissertations, and other published documents related to our research framework.

2.3. Field Survey

Two types of questionnaires were administered to tourism professionals and the general public for data collection purposes, based on a representative sample. Individuals were selected according to four criteria:

- to be of legal age;
- have at least 5 years of experience in one of the sectors of the tourism industry;
- be visitor;
- to be a member of the tourism administration.

Ultimately, the sample comprises 104 tourism stakeholders, organized as follows:

Table I: Sampling characteristics

No.	STRUCTURES	NUMBERS
01	Travel Agents	08
02	Departmental Directorate of Tourism, Culture and the Arts	11
03	Tourist guides	15
04	Cultural actors	16
05	Visitors	54
TOTAL		104

Source: Survey results, November 2025

2.4. Theoretical Approach

The data analysis is situated within a theoretical framework that combines several complementary approaches. The territorial development approach developed by P. Aydalot (1985) and further refined in 2001 by B. Pecqueur allows us to understand domestic tourism as a lever for enhancing local resources and boosting the economic vitality of territories. It highlights the role of local stakeholders and territorial specificities in building sustainable tourism. P. Nora's (1984) theory of heritage valorization emphasizes the importance of historical, cultural, and symbolic sites as tourism resources capable of strengthening national attractiveness. Finally, the economics of tourism theory, inspired by the work of John Maynard Keynes, allows us to analyze the economic impact of domestic tourism through its multiplier effects on employment, income, and local activities, such as Vodun Days. Thus, the combination of these approaches makes it possible to understand how domestic tourism can contribute to economic development and the enhancement of heritage in Benin.

II I- Results

3.1. Some Tourism Potential of Benin

Pendjari National Park (PNJ): 282,635 ha

Pendjari National Park (PNP) is a protected area in Benin, located in the far northwest of the country, in the Atacora department, in the municipalities of Tanguiéta, Matéri and Kérou, on the border with Burkina Faso (Plate 1). It is also part of the WAP transboundary reserve, inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2017.



Plate 1: Photos 1, 2, 3 and 4 of Pendjari Park
Source: Image of Pendjari Park in Benin.jpeg

The images testify to the touristic richness of Pendjari Park and all its allure in attracting tourists and how much this contributes to the development of the sector.

3.1.1. Bird Island of Grand Popo

Covering approximately two hectares, Bird Island in Grand Popo is one of the wonders of the Bouche du Roy Biosphere Reserve. Located in the municipality of Grand-Popo, Bird Island is an exceptional natural site within the Bouche du Roy Biosphere Reserve. Enclosed by dense mangrove vegetation, this island provides a privileged habitat for numerous bird species, both resident and migratory. Its ecological richness makes it an important area for biodiversity conservation and a particularly attractive birdwatching site. Bird Island thus represents a major asset for the development of ecotourism in the region, contributing to the enhancement of natural heritage and the promotion of domestic tourism in Benin.

3.1.2. The 41 hills of Dassa



Photo 1: View from one angle of the Dassa hills

Photo taken by: Dimitri AÏSSI, July 2025

This image showcases the lush vegetation and distinctive hilly landscape of Dassa-Zoumé. This area is renowned for its natural setting, comprised of granite hills and a lush canopy of vegetation that enhances the landscape and lends it a unique tourist appeal. These natural formations are an important element of the region's landscape heritage and contribute to the tourist appeal of central Benin, particularly for exploration, hiking, and ecotourism.

3.1.3. The Somba aunts

Benin's architectural heritage is characterized by a diversity of housing types, the most famous of which is the two-story house in the Atacora department, commonly known as "Tata Somba." The Betiobé, Otammari, and Bésorbé ethnic groups adopted this architectural form, each with its own distinctive features.

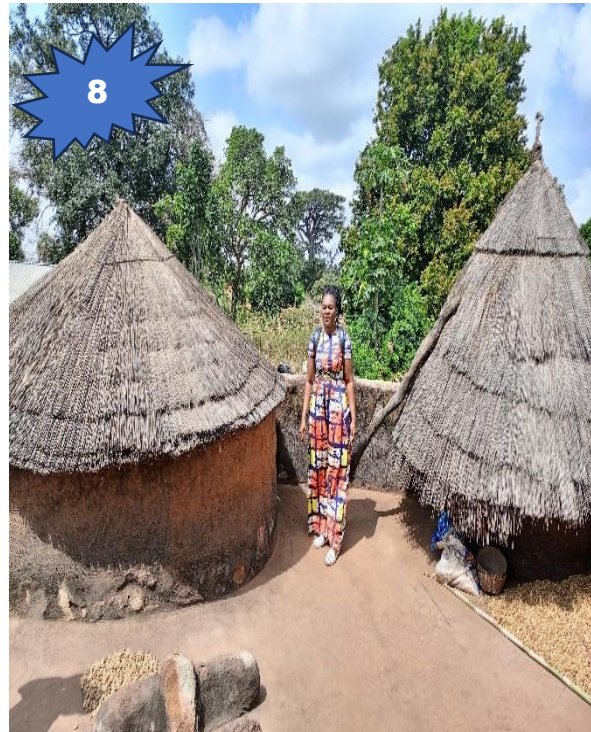
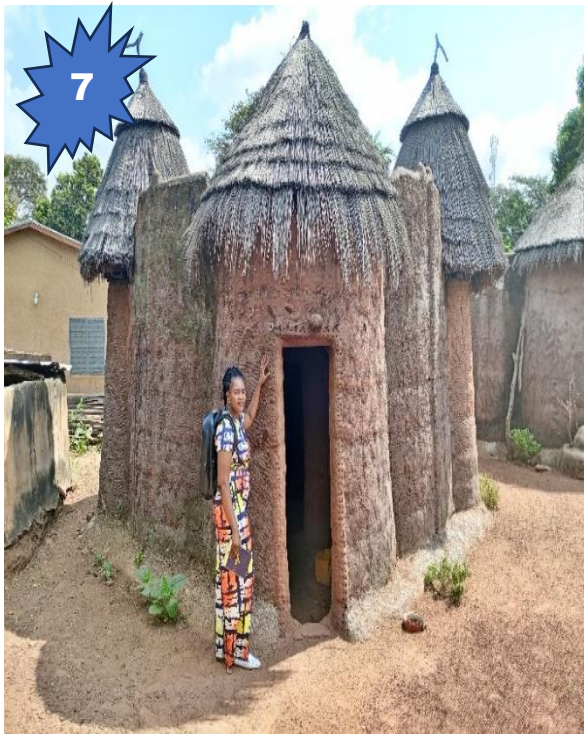


Plate 2: Photo a.) shows a facade view of Tata Ossori and photo b.) its roof
Photo taken by: Dimitri AÏSSI, September 2025

3.1.4. Goho Square

Goho Square marks the site of the final battle in 1892 between the French colonial army and Dahomey troops. It was in this square that King Béhanzin surrendered to General Dodds in 1894. It is also the site of the proclamation of Marxism-Leninism on November 30, 1974, by the Revolutionary Military Government (GMR) of Benin. The square has since been home to the tall and proud statue of King Béhanzin.

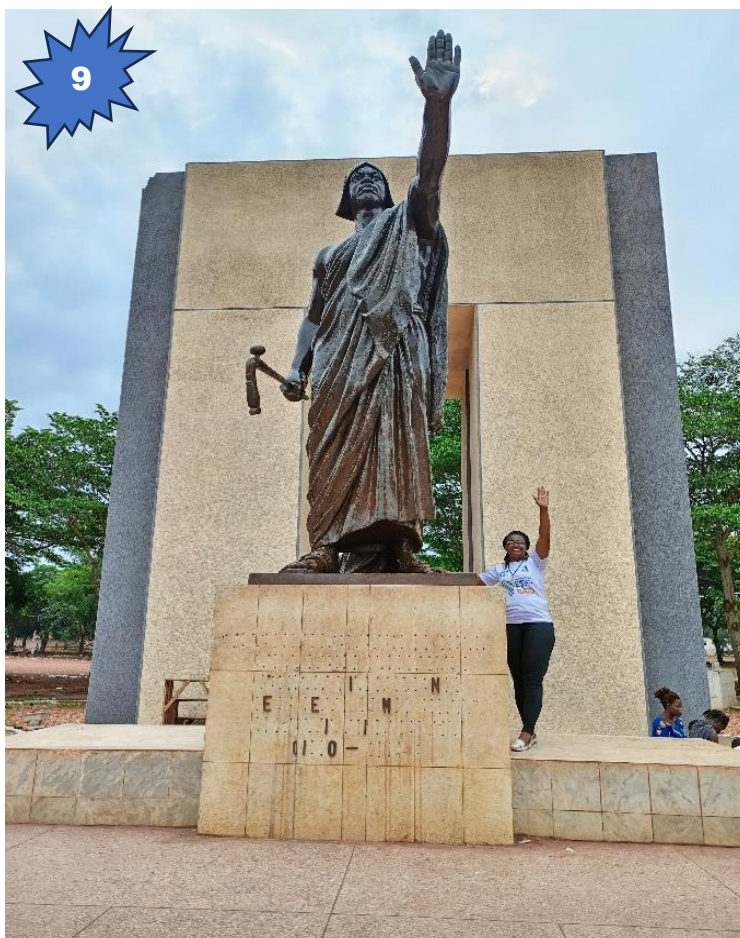


Photo 2 Goho Square
Filming Dimitri AÏSSI, August 2025

3.1.5. The Place of the Amazon

Amazon Square is a public square that was erected in June 2022 by President Patrice Talon. This 30-meter monument was built in honor of the all-female military regime that Benin experienced from the 16th century onwards.



Photo 4: the Amazon square
Filming Dimitri AISSI, August 2025

3.2. Presentation of the figures

3.2.1. Condition of tourist sites

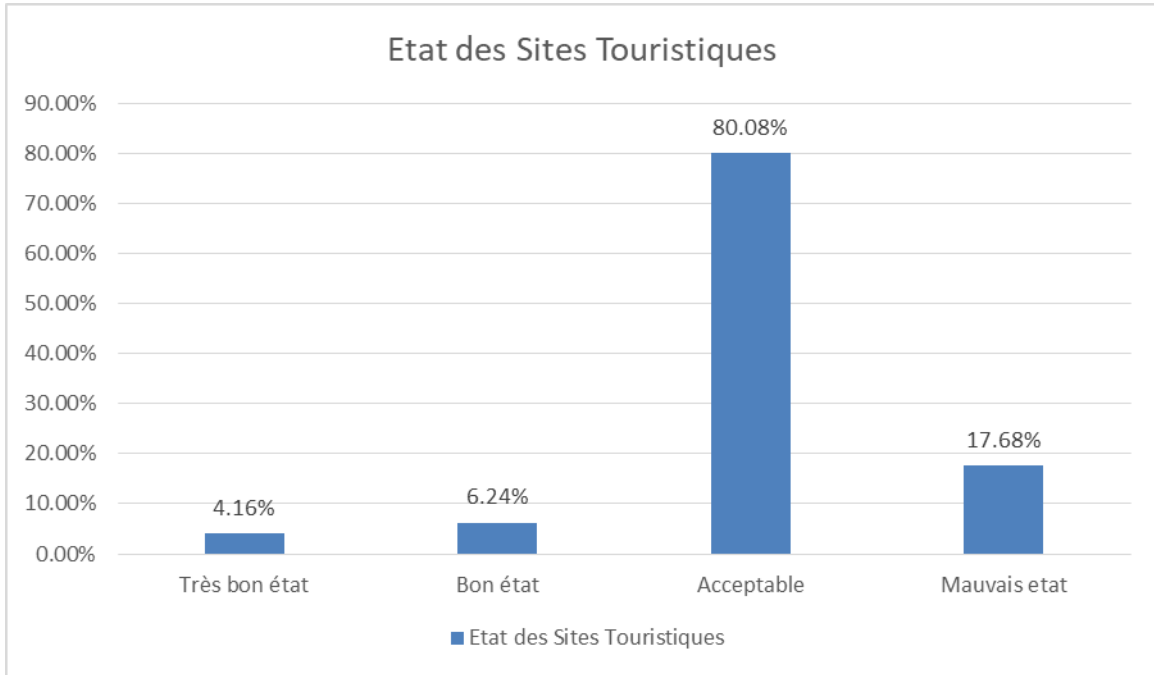


Figure 2 Status of sites visited in Benin

Source: Field survey, August 2025

Figure 1 illustrates the condition of tourist sites in Benin. According to respondents, 4.16% are in very good condition, 6.24% in good condition, 80.08% in acceptable condition, and 17.68% in poor condition. Therefore, it can be concluded that developing domestic tourism requires prioritizing the improvement of tourist sites to attract more Beninese visitors.

3.2.2. Frequency of visits to tourist sites by nationals

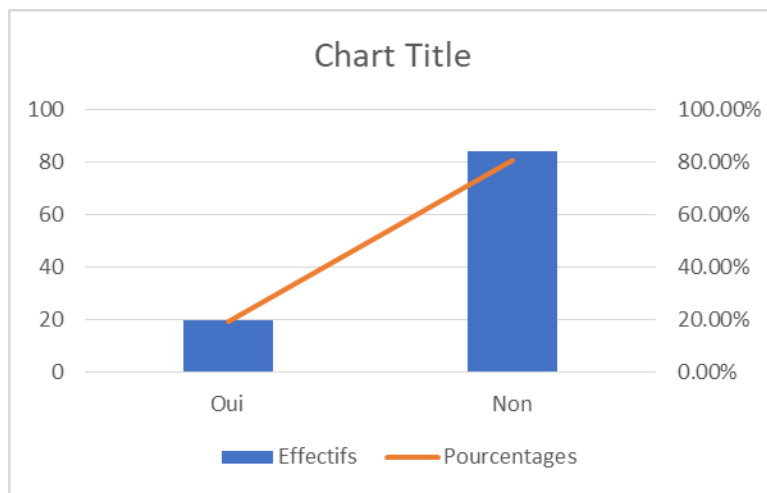


Figure 3 Frequency of visits

Source Field survey, August 2025

Figure 2 shows the rate of tourist site visits by Beninese citizens. Of the 104 individuals surveyed, only 20 (19.23%) had visited a tourist site at least once, while the remaining 84 (80.77%) had never visited one. We can deduce that Beninese citizens are not taking advantage of tourist offerings, and consequently, domestic tourism is declining, even though it represents the potential for future tourism development.

III-2-2- Presence of tourist guides on the sites

7-Existent-ils des guides professionnels de tourisme au Bénin ?
111 réponses

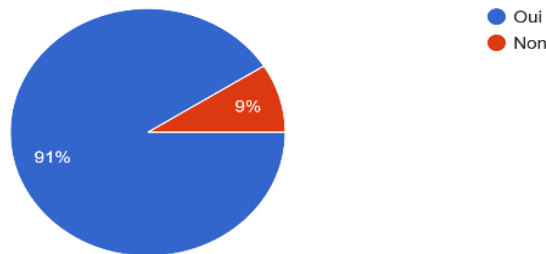


Figure 4 Presence of tourist guides at tourist sites; **Incontinence**
Source: Field survey, January 2025

Analysis of the results in Figure 3 shows that 91% of sites have tourist guides available, while only 5% have virtually none. We can conclude that the majority of sites have tourist guides. Indeed, for the development of domestic tourism, it is essential that local guides be available at tourist sites.

III-2-2- Security conditions on the national territory

8- Les conditions sécuritaires sont-elles garanties au Bénin ?
111 réponses

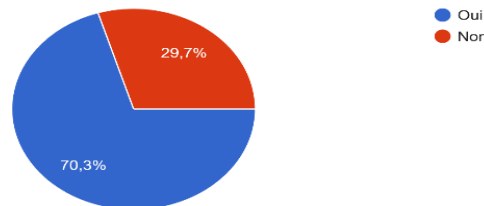


Figure 5: security conditions
Source: Field survey, January 2025

Figure 4 provides information on security conditions across the country, particularly in cities with many tourist sites. 70.3% of respondents stated that security conditions were stable, compared to 29.7% who disagreed. This suggests that security does not currently deter Beninese citizens from participating in tourism activities.

Suggestions

To the State

Develop a development plan that integrates domestic tourism development projects.

Make annual leave mandatory for public and private sector workers

Decree the mandatory subscription of all state structures or large private companies to a travel agency of their choice for the discovery of the country's tourist heritage.

To Tourism Industry Professionals

To propose payment methods that would allow Beninese people to consume tourist products;

Adapting products to the domestic market;

Improve communication and promotion of domestic tourism;

To the Beninese

Give leisure activities a prominent place;

Going on tourist outings as a family;

Purchase tours near your usual residence.

Conclusion

Ultimately, domestic tourism is now seen as a strategic lever for the economic, social, and cultural development of nations, whether developed or developing. By facilitating the movement of people within the national territory, it contributes not only to the promotion of the local economy but also to job creation, the enhancement of cultural and natural heritage, and the strengthening of national cohesion. As F. Zemrani emphasized, domestic tourism should be considered a right accessible to all, on par with education or healthcare, due to its role in improving the well-being of populations. From this perspective, the role of the State remains crucial in the promotion and development of domestic tourism. Through appropriate public policies, investments in tourism infrastructure, incentives, and awareness campaigns, public authorities can encourage citizens to discover the riches of their own country. Such a dynamic would not only foster the consolidation of the tourism sector but also the increased involvement of local stakeholders and tourism professionals. Thus, by enhancing its natural, cultural and heritage resources, domestic tourism can become a true driver of sustainable development and national influence.

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