

Global travel body urges Kenya to reassure future tourists

NAIROBI, KENYA: The head of the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) has urged the Kenyan government and tour operators to reassure potential visitors about coming to the country given the deadly Nairobi mall attack.



A cornerstone of Kenya's economy, the billion-dollar tourism industry accounts for 12.5% of the economy and provides one in 10 jobs. There is concern the bloody siege of a Nairobi mall by Al-Qaeda-linked Islamist militants could lead to a drop in visitors.

"The government in Kenya and the private sector need to communicate very clearly that it is a specific incident in one shopping mall in Nairobi and that it has been contained," said David Scowsill, head of the WTTC, a global forum for business leaders in the industry.

"It has no impact on the wider travel and tourism in Kenya, most of which is outside the main city," Scowsill, who by coincidence is in Nairobi for a hotel investment conference, said by phone.

Kenya is East Africa's richest country, but more than half of its population still lives on less than US\$1 a day and tourism is its most precious industry.

The largely peaceful country has been rocked by several major terrorist attacks in the past, such as in August 1998 when a car bomb at the US embassy in Nairobi left 213 dead.

Popular Westgate Mall

The latest attack began on Saturday (21 September) when Somalia's al-Shabaab insurgents stormed the upmarket Westgate shopping centre in the Kenyan capital, shooting at will and killing 67 shoppers, staff and security forces.

The insurgents, who claim the carnage is in retaliation for Nairobi's two-year fight against their bases in southern Somalia, battled Kenyan troops in the mall for more than three days.

Early on Tuesday evening (24 September), Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta declared the siege finally over.

Scowsill acknowledged that tourism to Kenya may be affected in the coming months. He said previous examples of major attacks or natural disasters in other countries gave a rough idea of what could happen to the tourism market.

"With these kinds of incidents, it does take a dip, typically for two or three months, then it starts to return again," he said.

"I would expect within six months, it will be back to normal again, assuming all the communications are right and of course there is no further incident," he added.

Source: AFP via I-Net Bridge

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>