

Tourism Industry

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**GSTA/PD (Global Sustainable Tourism Alliance/Pays Dogon)
Bandiagara, Mali**

Pays Dogon (PD) is among the most visited sites in Mali. In 2007, the region welcomed over 63,000 visitors according to OMATHO arrival statistics, more than double the number of visitors in 2002. A unique cultural and natural environment comprises the UNESCO World Heritage Site, classified in 1989 as “mixed” to emphasize the value of its combined cultural and natural aspects. It covers a 4,000km² area, home to over 289 villages and approximately 350,000 inhabitants.

The opportunity exists to further develop the region’s competitive advantage as a tourist destination by emphasizing the unique character of the region, improving the tourism experience and stimulating local enterprise. Tourists come to PD in search of an authentic experience: they seek local products and activities. Development, however, is hindered by the shortage and quality of accommodations, its remote location and lack of organization among local stakeholders.

THE MARKET

Worldwide trends indicate an increasing level of interest in ecotourism and philanthropic travel, and the unspoiled nature of PD provides a rich tableau for sustainable development while meeting the demands of these market segments. Opportunities exist to create tourism products to attract additional market segments to the region: ecotourism, philanthropic tourism and luxury adventure travel. Also, geographic market segments previously unexploited offer promising opportunity: Germany, the US and the UK are countries with high rates of international tourism but constitute a small proportion of visitors to Mali.

The potential of these market segments offers the opportunity for businesses in the travel industry to target their marketing efforts in response to customers’ demands. Additionally, there is opportunity in PD for higher quality lodging and services: tourist accommodations presently available in PD are uniformly simple and basic.

THE EXPERIENCE

The tourist season in PD runs from November through February (known locally as the “cold season”), with a mini-season in July and August. Group sizes are small, generally 12 people or fewer. The typical tourist experience involves a 3-4 day trek, from village to village along the escarpment, spending the night at village *campements*. Despite the low level of comfort provided during their trek, clients express satisfaction with their visit to PD.

Opportunities & Challenges

Presently, only basic tourist accommodations are available in PD. There is evidence that upscale accommodations are desired by visitors and that this demand will increase. This presents an opportunity to provide accommodations that meet travelers' quality standards while also providing an authentic Dogon experience. Local crafts used in interior design, introduction of Dogon cuisine and emphasis on local cultural entertainment combined with a high level of service and comfort can contribute the intrinsic value that adventure tourists and luxury travelers seek from their travel experience.

Constructing, furnishing, staffing and supplying a modern upscale hotel in PD present many challenges to the developer. The site's designation as a UNESCO World Heritage site necessitates special architectural considerations. Natural resources such as wood and water are scarce and/or endangered. The local population is largely uneducated and unskilled in hospitality services. Infrastructure is lacking, including transport, communications, power and waste management.

TOURISM AND DEVELOPMENT

In PD, as in Mali, the economy is agriculture-based. 90% of residents work in agriculture and most are subsistence farmers. Tourism has increasingly provided an alternative source of employment and cash income for local residents. Construction and operation of an eco-lodge in PD would provide employment, training and development opportunities for many local skilled and unskilled workers, reaching across age and gender. Conservation efforts to protect the natural environment can be instituted. Also, putting an extrinsic value on local products will contribute to local appreciation of these products.

Summary

Because of the challenges presented to development in Pays Dogon, innovation is required to create a truly sustainable enterprise addressing social, environmental and economic concerns. The creation of an eco-lodge in PD is an opportunity to develop an international showcase property incorporating environmentally sensitive practices, advanced technologies and a sustainable business model while ensuring full endorsement by the local community and preservation of cultural heritage. Locally, an eco-lodge development in PD could serve as a model for responsible business, demonstrating protection of the natural and cultural environment as well as development of economic opportunities for and support of local communities.

Contact information

Brenda Adelson, Business Advisor
GSTA/PD (Global Sustainable Tourism Alliance/Pays Dogon)
Bandiagara, Mali
www.GSTAlliance.net
brenda.adelson@gmail.com
mobile: (223) 78 94 54 76
office: (223) 42 14 42 10