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Cape Verde

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Tourism is an important component of the economy of Cape Verde, given the geographic constraints on other activities and the scarcity of economic resources. Cape Verde is one of the fastest growing tourism destinations in the world. The political stability of the country, improvements in accessibility, and investment in infrastructure have all contributed to increase the competitiveness of the country in the global tourism market. The growth of the tourism sector has had an overall positive economic impact but has also caused concerns about possible social and environmental effects.

Cape Verde is an archipelago of 10 islands located 500 kilometers off the Western African coast, near Senegal. The majority of the population of around half a million people is of mixed race. An estimated half a million to one million ethnic Cape Verdeans live in other countries. The archipelago is located in the sub-Saharan region, so the weather is hot and dry, droughts are frequent, and vegetation is sparse. Only some of the islands support agriculture. There are few other natural resources. The economy of the country is largely dependent on tourism and remittances from Cape Verdeans working abroad.

The archipelago has a mix of natural and cultural attractions. The islands of Sal and Boavista are known for their long sandy beaches. The “Cape Verde seven natural wonders,” chosen by the local population in 2013 in an initiative promoted by several public institutions, include the dramatic landscape of the island of Fogo, formed by the eruption of the Pico do Fogo volcano (see [Image 1](#)) in 1995, and the Monte Gordo natural park on São Nicolau Island. Mindelo, on São Vicente Island, is the most important city destination, in part due to the cultural scene associated with the late singer Cesária Évora, who rose to international fame through her performances of morna, a Cape Verdean music genre. The capital city, Praia, on Santiago Island, has few attractions but is close to the country’s only UNESCO World Heritage site: the Historic Centre of Ribeira Grande, known as Cidade Velha (“old town”), the oldest European colonial outpost established in the tropical zone.

Image 1 Pico do Fogo, Cape Verde.



According to the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), the travel and tourism sector represents 43% of the gross domestic product (GDP) and 38% of the employment in Cape Verde. The number of visitors has increased rapidly and reached 510,000 in 2013. The WTTC has also placed Cape Verde on the list of the 10 countries with the highest expected growth in the tourism sector in the period 2014–2024.

The number of visitors is not distributed equally among the islands. According to the National Statistics Office, the islands of Sal and Boavista receive 74% of the visitors to the country. The distribution of the origins of the visitors is also uneven, with 72% of the visitors coming from just five European countries: United Kingdom, France, Portugal, Germany, and Italy. Ethnic Cape Verdeans living abroad represent an important market. Geographic proximity and cultural ties with Brazil also make Cape Verde an attractive destination for the growing Brazilian tourism market.

The growth of the tourism industry has been aided by political stability and a lack of ethnic conflicts, offering the country a competitive advantage over other African countries for attracting investors and visitors. The government has also implemented policies to attract investment in the tourism industry, both from large multinational companies and from the Cape Verdean diaspora. The number of hotel beds almost doubled between 2005 and 2011. Most of the investment has been directed to the islands of Sal and Boavista. Initiatives to promote the country as a tourism destination have also contributed to the growth in the number of visitors.

The main international airport is located on the island of Sal; Praia, the capital city, did not have an international airport until 2005. The existence of direct flight connections with countries representing major markets, such as the United Kingdom, has facilitated the development of tourism. The number of cruise ships calling at Praia and Mindelo has also been growing. On the other hand, travel between islands remains problematic. All the inhabited islands except Brava have an airport, but flights are infrequent. As of late 2014, there were plans to privatize the national airline, TACV Cabo Verde Airlines. Ferry services are infrequent and unreliable, and apart from an overnight service linking the two main islands, they only connect the islands within each of the three clusters of islands that make up the archipelago.

The road network is made up of paved and unpaved roads, but a large upgrade program has been under way for several years. The majority of the roads on the two most populated islands (Santiago and São Vicente) and on the most touristic island (Sal) are now paved. Shared vans are the only public transportation between towns. Praia and Mindelo have formal bus networks, but they do not reach all the neighborhoods in these cities.

The growth of the tourism industry has contributed to the economic vitality of Cape Verde during this century. However, questions have been raised regarding the increased dependence of the country on a single industry and the ability of tourism to improve the lives of the poor. The impact of mass tourism in environmentally sensitive areas is also a cause for concern. Alternatives such as ecotourism and community-based tourism are starting to develop. A number of natural parks and protected areas have been established, most notably the Fogo Natural Park, which includes Pico do Fogo, also known as the Fogo volcano.

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See also [Environmental Impacts of Tourism](#); [Gross Domestic Product \(GDP\) and Tourism](#);

[Transportation and Infrastructure Issues in the Developing World](#); [Travel Trends in Africa](#)

Further Readings

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