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Tourism in Algerian Border Regions: A Case Study of El Tarf Province (Northeastern Algeria)

Dr. Farah Mohamed Ikkal^{1,2}, Dr. Alliouche Ahmed^{1,2}, Dr. Benzagouta Yasser Nassim¹, Dr. Seghiri Meriem¹, Dr. Harkat Imane¹, Dr. Allioua Meriem¹, Mr. Boursas Nabil¹.

¹Centre de Recherche en Aménagement du Territoire (CRAT), Campus Zouaghi Slimane, Route de Ain El Bey, 25000 Constantine (Algeria).

²University Constantine 1, Faculty of Earth Sciences, Geography and Spatial Planning, Constantine (Algeria).

Corresponding author: mohamed.ikkal25@gmail.com

Abstract:

This article aims to discuss the topic of tourism in the Algerian border regions, with a case study of El Tarf Province (Northeastern Algeria). Border regions are of great importance as they are gateways to countries and areas of attraction for foreign tourists if their assets are better exploited. El Tarf Province in Algeria is one of these border regions, which also overlooks the Mediterranean Sea. In this article, we will try to highlight the tourist assets of this province and the type of prevailing tourism, in addition to diagnosing the tourist reality in it. Finally, we will provide some solutions to stimulate tourism in this border region to make it more attractive to the inhabitants of the neighboring countries.

Keywords: Border regions, Tourism, Tourist assets, Tourist reality, El Tarf Province.

Introduction:

Border regions are of utmost importance, especially in the present time, due to their sensitivity and also as they are the first gateway to neighboring countries. They can be a point of strength for any country, especially if they are given priority in development, particularly in the tourism sector (they can be relied upon to attract foreigners neighboring the country) if they also have several tourist assets that qualify them for this. El Tarf Province is one of these border regions (a border province in

northeastern Algeria) which is rich in various tourist assets and can be relied upon to be an attraction for foreign tourists.

Objective of the study:

Through this study, we aim to:

- Identify and highlight the tourist assets that the border region of El Tarf Province possesses and the type of prevailing tourism.
- Diagnose the tourist reality in this region.
- Provide a set of solutions to stimulate tourism in this border region to make it more attractive to the inhabitants of neighboring countries.

Problem statement:

To reach the desired goal, we posed the following questions:

- What are the tourist assets that El Tarf Province enjoys? And what is the type of prevailing tourism?
- What is the reality of tourism in this border province?
- What are the main solutions to stimulate tourism in this border region and make it attractive to the inhabitants of neighboring countries considering it as their gateway?

Research hypotheses:

- The province has enormous tourist assets rich in tourism requirements and all its types, especially environmental and coastal tourism.
- The type of prevailing tourism in this region is environmental tourism.
- Tourism at the level of this border region is not active (stagnation of tourist development in it) and its tourist assets are not exploited, with almost total absence of international tourism, which is the case of tourism in general at the level of all Algerian national territory in general and its border regions in particular (Algerian border regions are generally neglected in terms of development in all fields, not just tourism).

Methodological approach:

To answer the problem posed and to reach the goal we seek through this research, we first set a set of general concepts related to border regions and tourism, moving on to present the border regions of Algeria and reaching the study area which is El Tarf Province (defining it through its location and administrative divisions then highlighting various tourist assets to diagnose the tourist reality in it) moving from the general to the specific, following two methods: the descriptive and analytical method (the descriptive

method in highlighting various tourist assets of the province and the analytical method in diagnosing the tourist reality at the level of this border region starting from a set of maps and tables) and in the end, we gave a set of solutions that we see in our view capable of stimulating the field in this region in particular and in various Algerian border regions in general.

1. General Concepts:

1.1 Definition of Tourism:

Tourism is an activity practiced by humans for the purpose of recreation, in accordance with their desires over a period exceeding one day that requires overnight stay, such as visiting monuments or staying in forest areas, mountains, seashores, or deserts, as well as visiting sacred places or those of special religious significance⁽¹⁾.

1.2 Definition of Tourist:

A tourist is a person who travels outside his original or usual place of residence for any reason other than material gain or study, whether within his country (domestic tourist) or within a foreign country (foreign tourist) for a period exceeding 24 hours⁽²⁾.

1.3 Types of Tourism:

There are several types of tourism, some of which are according to the geographical area and some are according to the purpose:

• Tourism according to the geographical area:

Tourism is divided according to the geographical area criterion into⁽³⁾:

- Domestic tourism: It means the travel of the country's citizens within their countries' borders and also includes the internal movement of tourists and the local currency is spent.
- Regional tourism: It is travel and movement between neighboring countries that form a single tourist area such as Arab countries, African countries, Arab Maghreb countries, South Asian countries.
- Foreign tourism: It is the temporary movement of individuals or tourists from one country to another for tourism and getting to know new countries, their customs, and their thinking...etc.

• **Tourism according to the purpose:**

Tourism is divided according to the purpose into⁽⁴⁾:

- Religious tourism: It is considered one of the oldest types of tourism and is represented in visiting religious sites and among the most famous religious sites in the world we find Mecca and Medina, and it is a mixture of religious and cultural contemplation.
- Therapeutic tourism: It is visiting tourist resorts that have been allocated for this purpose, relying on natural elements in treating patients and healing them such as mineral springs, sand, and sun.
- Environmental tourism: It is travel and movement from one place to another for the purpose of enjoying the spirit of responsibility for natural areas, which all aim to preserve the cultural, archaeological, environmental, and natural tourist heritages.
- Historical tourism: It is the best type of tourism as it attracts large groups of tourists especially if these historical monuments are available on rest and entertainment centers and on all necessities to preserve them.
- Cultural tourism: This type of tourism is interested in a certain segment of tourists at different levels of culture and education, based on visiting countries that have many historical and urban assets.
- Recreational tourism: It is one of the oldest types of tourism and the most widespread, where the Mediterranean Sea is considered one of the most attractive areas for recreational tourism movement due to its beautiful beaches, and recreational tourism is for the purpose of enjoyment and self-entertainment.
- Sports tourism: It is the movement from the place of residence to another place temporarily for the purpose of practicing various sports activities or enjoying watching them like the Olympic Games and various world championships.

1.4 Definition of Border Regions:

Border regions are areas located on the political borders of a state between countries, equipped with most of the necessities of life. A group of individuals working as their permanent headquarters are present in them. They are defined according to the administrative division of each country on its borders with the state or countries neighboring it⁽⁵⁾.

1.5 General Features of Border Regions:

Border regions are generally characterized by the following features⁽⁶⁾:

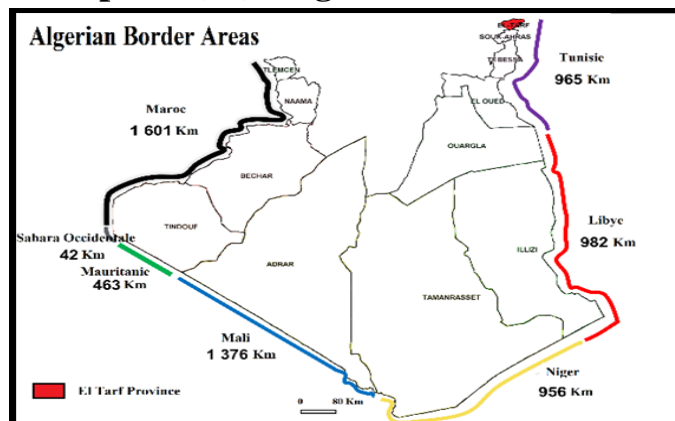
- It is not necessary to be between only two countries, but it can be between more than two countries, as is the case in the border region between Algeria, Libya, and Tunisia.

- Low levels of development in them.
- Decrease in population density and expansion of its geographical area.
- Weakness in maintaining security control over them.
- Of great importance as they are the entrance gate to the country.

2. Algerian Border Regions:

Algeria is located in the north of the African continent bordered by a group of countries: from the east Tunisia and Libya, from the south Niger and Mali, and from the west Mauritania, Western Sahara, and Morocco all this with a border line length of 6385 km⁽⁷⁾. It includes a group of provinces located in this border strip, which represent the border regions of this country represented in Map No. (01) and summarized in Table No. (01), and among these regions is El Tarf Province (the chosen study area).

Map No. (01): Algerian Land Borders



Source: General Directorate for Territorial Development and Attractiveness, Algeria 2023

Table No. (01): Algerian Border Provinces

Provinces	Neighboring Country	Length of Borders (km)
El Tarf	Tunisia	965
Souk Ahras		
Tebessa		
El Oued		
Ouargla	Libya	982
Illizi		
Tamanrasset	Niger	956
Adrar	Mali	1376
Tindouf	Mauritania	463
	Western Sahara	42
	Morocco	525
Bechar		

Naama	Morocco	1076
Tlemcen		
Total	7 Border Countries	6385

Source: General Directorate for Territorial Development and Attractiveness, Algeria 2023

3. Presentation of the Study Area:

3.1 Location and Area:

The province of El Tarf is located at the far northeast of Algeria (Map No. (02)) and borders Tunisia to the east. To the west, it is bordered by the province of Annaba, and to the south, it is bordered by the provinces of Souk Ahras and Guelma. To the north of the province is the Mediterranean Sea. Its area is 2905.05 km²(8).

Map No. (02): Location of El Tarf Province



Source: Directorate of Tourism for the Province of El Tarf, 2023

3.2 Administrative Division:

The province of El Tarf is administratively divided into 7 districts and 24 municipalities⁽⁹⁾, as shown in Table No. (02) and Map No. (03):

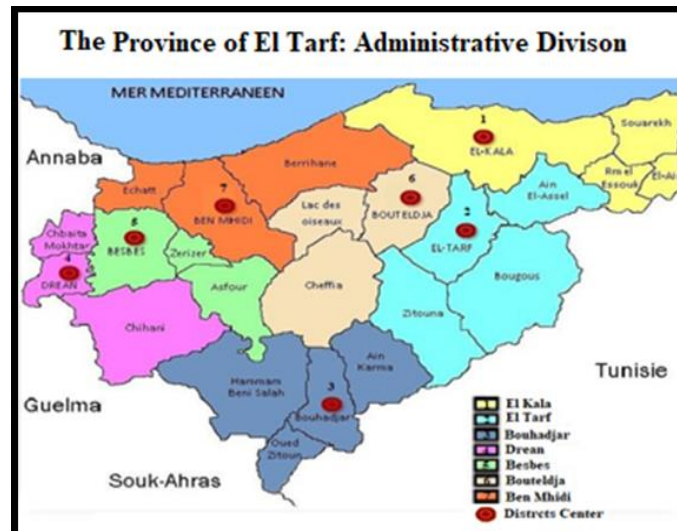
Table No. (02): Administrative Division of the Province of El Tarf

No	Districts	Municipalities
1	El Kala	El Kala - El Souarekh - Raml El Souk - El Ayoune
2	El Tarf	El Tarf - Ain El Assel - Bougous - El Zitouna
3	Bouhadjar	Bouhadjar - Ain El Karma - Wadi El Zitoun - Hammam Beni Salah
4	El Derrane	El Derrane - Chebaita Mokhtar - El Chihani
5	Besbas	Besbas - Asfour - Zerizer

6	Boutheldja	Boutheldja - Bird Lake - El Chafia
7	Ben M'Hidi	Ben M'Hidi - El Chatt - Berrahal

Source: National Statistics Office, Algeria 2023

Map No. (03): Administrative Division of the Province of El Tarf



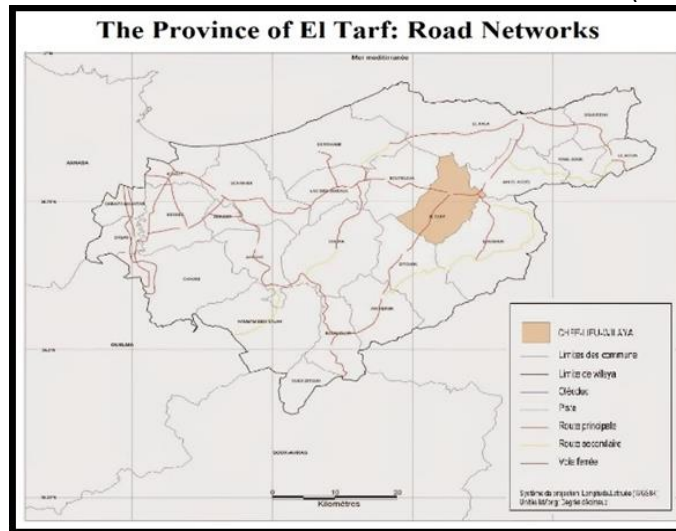
Source: Directorate of Tourism for the Province of El Tarf, 2023

3.3 Road Network:

The province of El Tarf has a diverse network of roads (Map No. (04)) that radiate from the center of the province and decrease in concentration across the rest of the municipalities. They are distributed in three directions: northeast, west, and south. This network consists of ⁽¹⁰⁾:

- National roads: 297.618 km.
- Provincial roads: 286.92 km.
- Municipal roads: 968.55 km.
- Lighthouses: 01.
- Fishing ports: 02.
- Railway: 03 passenger transport stations + launch of works to complete the train line connecting El Kala and Annaba.

Map No. (04): Road Network of the Province of El Tarf

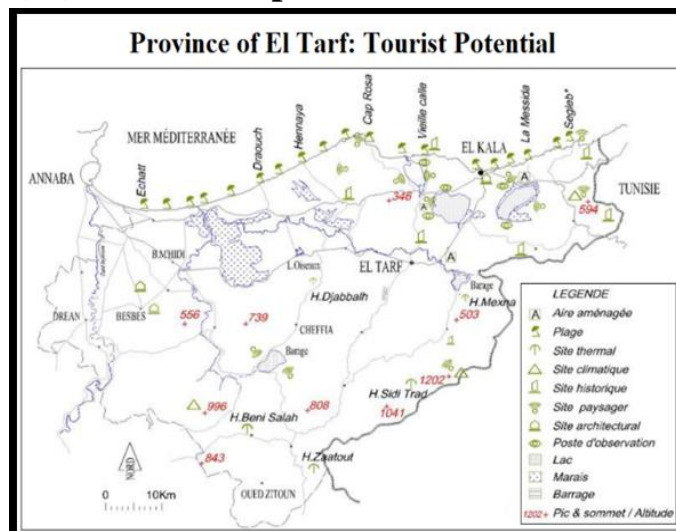


Source: Directorate of Road Use and Maintenance, Algeria 2023

4. Tourist Components of the Study Area:

The province has enormous tourist components thanks to the diversity of its ecological systems: protected wetlands, dense forests, a coastal strip, green plains and meadows, therapeutic hot springs, archaeological sites, and historical landmarks...etc (Map No. (05)), which are as follows⁽¹¹⁾:

Map No. (05): Tourist Capabilities of the Province of El Tarf



Source: Directorate of Tourism for the Province of El Tarf, 2023

- A coastal strip 90 km long, comprising 25 beaches with a total area of 976.250 hectares, 15 of which are allowed for swimming. The most famous are: Cap Rosa Beach, Old Kala Beach, Messida Beach, and Hnaya Beach.

- Three large lakes classified within the list of wetlands of global importance: Malah Lake (connected to the sea) with an area of 860 hectares, Oubeira Lake with an area of 2200 hectares, and Tonga Lake with an area of 2600 hectares.
- Six thermal springs: Hammam Sidi Trad, Hammam Sidi Jab Allah, Hammam Beni Salah, Hammam Ztout, Hammam Sidi Zid, and Hammam Maxa.
- A forest wealth of 167.311 hectares, which is about 57% of the total area of the province. Among the exploited trees from this wealth are: cork, camphor, medicinal herbs...etc.
- A unique environmental heritage represented in the Kala National Park, which is an ecosystem of great richness and diversity. The area is rich in rare to very rare biological diversity (plant and animal) that is protected and globally classified.
- Hills with an average height of 300 m and sand dunes along the coast for a distance of approximately 10 km with a height ranging from 20 to 120 m.
- Its proximity to the province of Annaba as an urban and economic center enabled the state of El Tarf to exploit the road infrastructure (national roads 44, 82, 84) in addition to Rabah Bitat International Airport and the railway line.
- The province is considered a transit area towards Tunisia, so it is characterized by the constant movement of people and goods.
- The province is rich in a group of historical sites and landmarks, the most important of which are: Fort France, Lalla Fatima Palace, the old church in Kala, Chali lines, and Maurice...etc. It can be said that all these mentioned tourist capabilities constitute strengths for this border state and make it an attractive area for tourists par excellence (rich in requirements of tourism of all kinds, especially environmental tourism), especially through the stunning natural landscapes and the mild climate that allows the practice of any tourist activity throughout the year and not just seasonally. However, in reality, it is not fully exploited and has not yet reached the level of tourism development, so it must be developed and exploited.

5. The reality of tourism in the study area:

5.1 Evolution of the number of tourists:

The province has witnessed a slight decline in the number of tourists from 2015 to 2023, as shown in Table No. (03):

Table No. (03): Evolution of the number of tourists in the province of El Tarf 2015-2023

Years	2015			2018			2023		
	Algerians	Foreigners	Total	Algerians	Foreigners	Total	Algerians	Foreigners	Total
Number of tourists	26740	746	27486	25552	741	26293	24253	693	24946
Number of nights	36075	881	36956	30214	2086	32300	28521	966	29487

Source: Directorate of Tourism for El Tarf Province, 2023

The number of tourists decreased from 27,486 (746 foreigners and 26740 Algerians) in 2015 to 24946 (693 foreigners and 24253 Algerians)⁽¹²⁾ in 2023. Along with this, the number of overnight stays also decreased (from 36956 nights in 2015 to 29487 nights in 2023). This slight decrease over a full 8 years reflects that this province attracts a similar number of tourists each year (around 25000 tourists annually). This decrease in the number of tourists during this period reflects the stagnation of tourism development in this region (due to the authorities' neglect of this region and its tourism development during this period) despite its possession of huge tourist components that we mentioned earlier. It also confirms that border regions are known to have low levels of development.

5.2 Dynamics of Tourist Structures:

• Hotels:

El Tarf province has 23 hotels (19 classified and 4 unclassified) with a total capacity of 662 rooms and 1753 beds, most of which are concentrated in the municipality of El Kala. They are represented in the following table:

Table No. (04): Hotels in El Tarf Province and their tourist movement for the year 2023.

Municipality	Hotel Name	Capacity	Number of Tourists	Municipality	Hotel Name
		Rooms	Beds	Algerians	Foreigners
Classified					
	EL MANAR	44	100	463	16
	TAREK	15	30	1650	42
	LE MOULIN	63	130	7567	323
	BOUCHRA	21	44	1517	38
	EL DJAZIRA	15	75	418	0

El Kala	EL NOUR	19	48	94	0
	LES JARDINS	15	60	293	0
	ESSAHEL	25	60	1559	132
	SARA	13	50	561	10
	BOULIF	23	66	721	14
	SABLE DOR	24	80	713	0
	NASSIM EL KIMAM	10	30	143	9
	EL MARSA	32	80	0	0
	EL AMIR	25	70	1518	0
	BOUMALEK	13	26	479	0
	LALA FATMA	19	68	1362	18
Bouteldja	EL DJADID	22	38	521	17
Lac des Oiseaux	EL BOUHAIRA	26	52	2215	64
	SIDI DJABALAH	30	60	2459	10
Not classified					
El Kala	EL MORDJANE	103	206	0	0
	YOUNGOURTA	60	200	0	0
	ESSAADA	15	30	0	0
	DIAR ALI	30	150	0	0
Total	23	662	1753	24253	693

Source: Directorate of Tourism for El Tarf Province, 2023

These hotels received 24946 tourists (693 foreigners and 24253 Algerians). This is a very small number compared to what another non-border Algerian province receives (for example, Constantine with about 90000 tourists in 2023) or compared to what a neighboring Tunisian border province receives (for example, Tabarka). Also, the number of overnight stays is low: 29487 nights (966 for foreigners and 28521 for Algerians), i.e., an average of 1.2 nights per tourist. This reflects that this province is only a transit area where tourists spend a night to go to Tunisia or vice versa, and it shows the weak contribution to the tourism economy in it. As for international tourism in it, it is also very weak as only 2.78% of the total tourists in the region are foreigners (dominated by domestic tourism).

• **Campsites:**

The province also includes 4 campsites, all concentrated on the beaches of the municipality of El Kala, with a total capacity of 2500 as shown in the following table:

Table No. (05): Campsites in El Tarf Province and their tourist movement for the year 2023.

Municipality	Campsite Name	Capacity	Number of Tourists	
			Foreigners	Algerians
El Kala	Camp AFRICAIN	750	0	520
	Camp EL DJOUSSOUR	250	0	970
	Camp AGENCE FONCIERE	750	0	270
	Camp COOPERATIF PPT	750	0	450
Total	04	2500	0	2210

Source: Directorate of Tourism for El Tarf Province, 2023

These campsites received 2210 tourists in 2023, all of whom were Algerians (complete absence of international tourism in these campsites). This is a very small number because these campsites are only visited in the summer by Algerians, especially the residents of the region. The problem with these campsites is that they are only open during the summer season and are located on the beach, with a complete absence of camping in the forests or mountains throughout the year, in addition to being concentrated only on the beaches of El Kala without the other beaches.

6. Proposed solutions to stimulate tourism in the region:

- Focus on such regions and give them priority in projects and development, especially in the tourism aspect, which can be relied upon to attract a large number of foreigners (tourists from neighboring countries) and thus bring in hard currency.
- Develop short, medium, and long-term tourism planning and strategies for the region's tourism development, follow them periodically, and implement them (not just ink on paper).
- Encourage private individuals to invest in tourism in this region and support them financially, tax-wise, etc.
- Reduce the price of accommodation at various hotel establishments in the province and make it cheaper than accommodation in hotels in the municipalities of neighboring

countries, while improving the service in them, in order to keep tourists there for several days and not just as a transit area (become competitive with hotels in neighboring countries and better than them).

- Pay attention to various tourism potentials (natural, historical, etc.) and develop them more and focus on them (exploit them to the fullest) as basic attractions for tourists in the region.

- Organize a series of exhibitions, especially international ones, and focus on the tourism aspect in them in order to advertise the various tourism components of the region, introduce them, and encourage their visit and discovery.

- Increase the number of tourism structures of various types and across different municipalities of the province, not just in El Kala (tourism potentials distributed across the entire region, which requires tourism structures with them so that the entire province becomes exploited for tourism, not just focusing on one municipality and neglecting the rest).

- Work on exploiting the province's campsites throughout the year and not just in the summer season, with an increase in their number across the various beaches of the province as well as through its forests and mountains.

- Educate the residents of the region with media campaigns to show the economic, social, and political importance of tourism, etc., and thus they will have a tourism culture, encouraging and urging them to work and trade and manufacture tourism products specific to the region instead of smuggling and so on.

Conclusion:

By shedding light on one of the border regions, which is El Tarf Province in northeastern Algeria, it is clear that this region is rich in several tourism components, and it is one of the most beautiful and richest provinces in Algeria (rich in tourism requirements and all its types, especially environmental tourism) but it is not fully exploited, which is reflected by the tourism reality in it (the tourism movement in it is weak due to the neglect of these components that should be a factor or attraction point for the region) with the stagnation of tourism development in it, and the almost complete absence of international tourism, which is the same problem in general at the level of all

Algerian territory and its border regions in particular (Algerian border regions in general are neglected in terms of development in all fields, not just tourism), therefore, it is necessary for the higher authorities to pay attention and give priority in development to such regions due to their sensitivity and their great importance, as they are a gateway for foreigners and must be invested in to develop them and exploit their components, especially for tourism.

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