



Battling Ebola

to 27.4 million in 2013. All of which is to say, there's hope for Africa.

As of press time, the Ebola outbreak had not been contained, but most travel companies that operate in Africa are optimistic that the industry will bounce back. "The innate desire for travelers to experience Africa, especially a safari, is something that will never go away," says Justin Huff, Mountain Travel Sobek's Africa program director. "The only good news with Ebola," adds Cherri Briggs, founder of Explore Africa, "is that it gives us a chance to begin to educate people and address a massive geographic ignorance." To that end, Briggs and her staff prepared a seven-page document that speaks to travelers' fears about the virus. The education is doing the trick: not a single Explore Africa client has canceled a trip.

For astute travelers, booking a safari or another African adventure now may mean fewer tourists and added perks like upgrades and private vehicles. But don't expect deep discounts—many of the best tour operators work closely with tribal groups and have a complicated business model that involves revenue sharing. Price cuts would erode the very things that conservancies are meant to protect: locals' trust and income.

Many travelers polled informally by *Outside* have no plans to cancel or delay their adventures in Africa. "It never crossed my mind not to go," says Barbara Hollweg, a 70-year-old Explore Africa client from Dallas, who is spending two weeks in the Tanzanian Serengeti followed by two weeks in Morocco in February. "I do my homework and don't take undue chances. There's just so much to see in Africa that I have to go back. It can't be soon enough."



Africa is a once-in-a-lifetime destination, and a trip to see the lions of the Serengeti in Tanzania with Micato Safaris won't bring you any closer to the Ebola virus than a trip to London. Don't miss out. From \$7,450 for ten days; micato.com

## Viral Fear

THE EBOLA VIRUS HAS DEVASTATED A TINY CORNER OF WEST AFRICA, BUT THE ENTIRE CONTINENT IS FEELING THE ECONOMIC FALLOUT

by Stephanie Pearson

IT WAS HARD to miss the "No Ebola" map on social media, which juxtaposes the tiny cluster of Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea, where more than 8,000 people have died since December 6, 2013, against the rest of Africa, a continent larger than China, Europe, and the U.S. combined. Designed by a British chemist named Anthony England, the map was meant to curb an outbreak of fear that has caused an industry-crushing drop in travel to Africa. Many countries whose economies rely on tourism are suffering huge losses in foreign visitors, despite being completely free of Ebola and thousands of miles from the nearest affected areas. Kenya and Tanzania, two popular safari destinations in East Africa, are more than 3,000 miles from Liberia—farther away than Seattle from Miami.

But no statistic, it seems, is powerful enough to override the human psyche as it grapples with the thought of an extremely infectious and often fatal virus. In a September poll by SafariBookings, the majority of the 500 companies surveyed had seen a 20 to 70 percent drop in business, compared with

this time last year, for travel six months to a year out. According to Guy Ellis, CEO of Completely Unique Safaris, as of late November, tourism companies in Africa were losing an average \$800 per day.

It's not just the travel companies that are feeling the decline. "Each safari guide traditionally supports seven to ten people in his family through tips and wages," says Runit Mehta, founder of Immersion Journeys, whose Africa business has dropped 25 percent since last summer. "If I can't give any business to the guide, it goes down the food chain from there."

The Ebola crisis has had an eerily similar effect to a cholera outbreak in Peru in 1991. When the acute intestinal bacterial disease killed 66 people in less than three weeks, travelers simply stopped going to South America. But once the disease was under control, recovery happened quickly. Cholera is no longer listed on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's health-information page for Peru, and the number of international tourists in South America has skyrocketed from 11.7 million in 1995

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