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## TRAVEL NEWS

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### Kenya Official, Tour Operators Reassure Travelers on Safety

By **David Cogswell**  
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The attack on the Westgate Mall in Kenya was still unresolved on Monday evening, though the government said it was in control of the building and none of the attackers would be able to escape. A Kenya government official sought to assure tourists that the country is safe. U.S. tour operators, who quickly contacted clients traveling in Kenya and their travel agents after the attacks on Saturday, noted that the site of the attack is far off the touristic path for most American travelers.

Phyllis Kandie, the Kenya government cabinet secretary of EAC Affairs, said in a statement: "Normal activities are going on in all parts of the country despite this grave and enormous challenge... We wish to assure tourists that Kenya is peaceful and our security agencies are doing everything possible to ensure that everyone is safe." The government has heightened its security operations around the country in the wake of the attack.

American tour operators went into emergency mode, contacting clients en route, but they noted that most tour programs are far from the site of the terrorist attack.

"In our case we had 15-plus people specifically in Nairobi," said Laudie Hanou, vice president of SITA World Tours. "Our Africa team moved swiftly to connect all together to decide how to move forward. From there, each of us had our specific job to do and requirements. This is where training and experience comes together. Clients were individually contacted and all accounted for, as well as their travel agents to advise of the current situation and that guests were safe."

According to Hanou, "As unfortunate as the incidents were, our clients were very pleased to hear from us so early on. It provided them a comfort level during a time of crisis and underscored the importance of booking through a legitimate, professional agency."

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Austin Adventures President Dan Austin said, "For us, 99.9999 percent of our travelers would not visit a mall in the city, and the fact is the camps remain safe and are not nor have been a target. Travelers typically fly in and head straight to the bush (where it's safer than any city in the U.S.). We don't see that changing, at least not at this time."

Anastasia's Africa is suggesting other options to people who are not comfortable going to Kenya now, said Karin Jones, managing director. The suggested alternatives include Botswana, Zambia and South Africa, as well as East Africa options with Tanzania.

"For others who are more set on Kenya, the sightseeing we normally arrange is in the Karen area including the Giraffe Center and Sheldrick's Elephant Orphanage," said Jones. "There are also great hotel options in that area, including two actually within Nairobi National Park, all almost an hour away from the parts of the city where the locals shop etc., such as the Westgate mall, which is not on the tourist route. The safety of our clients remains paramount to all decisions we make."

For African tour operators, arranging travel to Africa is always a consummate passion. Africa isn't a destination where people operate tours casually. Beyond the immediate concerns of their own personal spheres of operations, the reaction from the community of African tour operators is one of sadness and compassion for the innocent victims of the attack.

Typical of those reactions was that of Marcia Gordon, president of Extraordinary Journeys. "We are deeply saddened by this savage and senseless terrorist attack," she said. "We are in touch with our teams, as well as our many friends in Kenya, and it seems as though the Kenya authorities are handling this as well as they possibly can. Our clients stay in small hotels away from the city center and all are safe. We have reached out to each and every one of them and will continue to monitor the situation and adjust programs as necessary for their well being."


Though officials claim to have recovered most of the hostages, an undetermined number were still being held by the attackers late Monday. The death toll rose to 62, and 170 people were injured. The dead included British, French, Canadians, Indians, a Ghanaian, a South African and a Chinese.

Kenya Defense Forces claimed to have killed three of the terrorists. Ten suspects were arrested. Eleven Kenyan soldiers were wounded. Witnesses said there were approximately 10 to 15 attackers in the group, identified as members of the Somali Islamist al-Shabab movement.




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