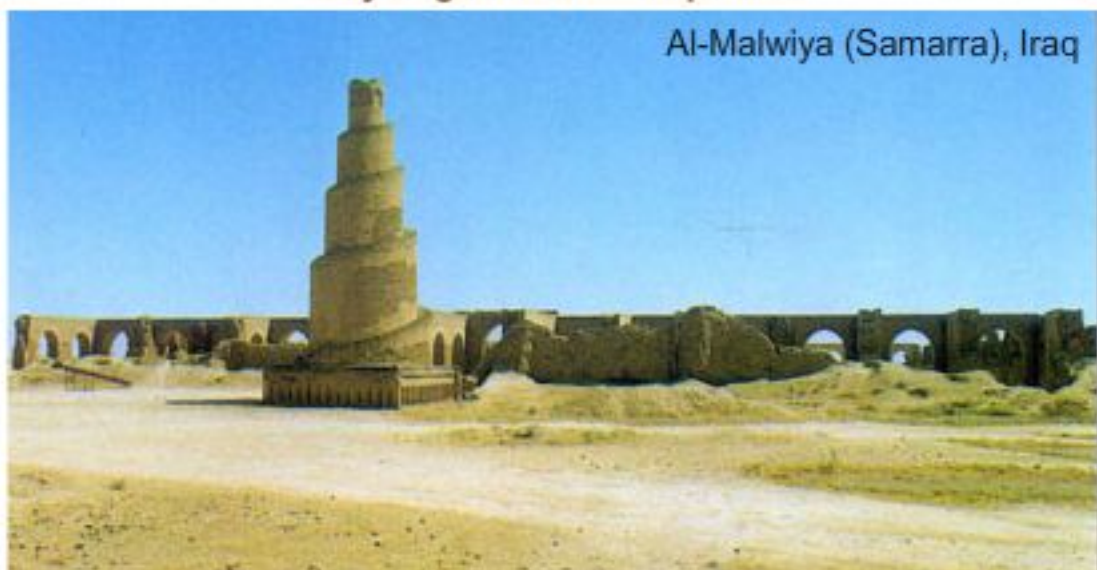


The importance of tourism

By: Aliaa Ismail Abdul-Hamid

Tourism is the world's largest industry, which has grown rapidly during the last two decades and it is the main economy of several countries across the globe. In some parts of the world, dependence on the tourism sector is increasing as a way to gain economic power.

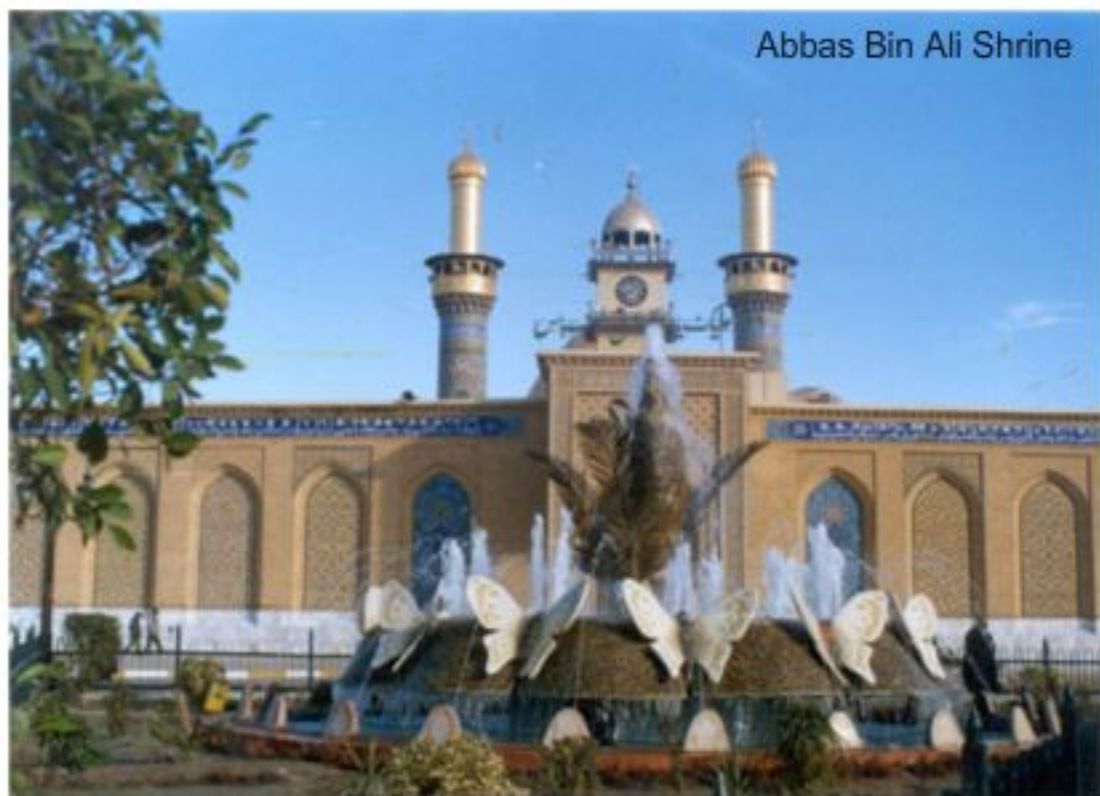


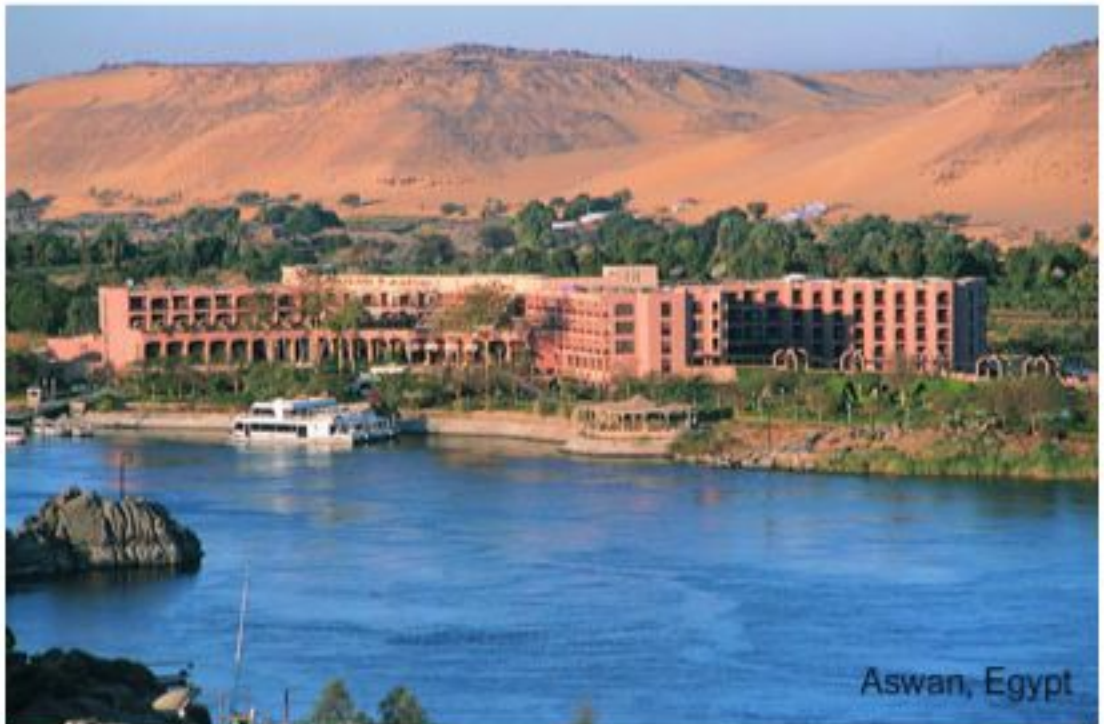
Al-Malwiya (Samarra), Iraq

<p>The UK Organisation for Tourism Concern estimates that tourism is the main money earner for one third of developing nations and is the primary source of foreign exchange for 49 of the less developed countries (LDCs), with 14 of the top 20 long-haul destinations being</p>	<p>located in developing countries. WWF International and WTTC organizations announced that tourism industry market accounts for more than 10% of total employment and 11% of global GDP; by 2010, travel and tourism are estimated to grow to 11.6% .</p>
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Tourism is benefiting local economies considerably by increasing foreign exchange earnings, creating employment and investment opportunities and infrastructure growth, increasing public revenues, contributing to the nation's image, and benefiting all sectors of the economy as well as local communities. Any sort of responsible tourism can generate awareness and support for conservation and culture at the basic level and can generate economic opportunities. Personal living standards and disposable income are continuing to improve worldwide, along with fewer restrictions on travel and more convenient and cheaper transport, and is contributing much to the world economy, thereby resulting in the overall growth in tourists, which is expected to grow further.

Abbas Bin Ali Shrine





The number of tourist trips are expected to increase to 1.6 billion by 2020 with an estimated worth of US\$ 2 trillion annually, thereby bringing with it a tremendous socio-cultural and economic impact on people and nature (WWF International 2001). The expansion of international tourism continues to generate an imbalanced and unstable demand for overseas travel because, at a global level, urban centres, mainly mega-cities, dominate much of the demand for tourism and travel between regions. Rapid tourism development and changes in lifestyle and values have affected consumers' demand for travel and taste, which has prompted them to seek new opportunities to satisfy their imbalanced and unstable expectations.

This tendency seems to be a blessed situation for new destinations such as Iraq, which have the opportunity amidst challenges. Modern tourism is very dynamic, changing according to the needs of tourists, and successful tourist destinations are those that offer tourists something unique and different from their competitors.

Tourists today are more experienced, demanding and ready to complain about faulty goods or misleading claims. Furthermore, types of tourists are likely to be different at different stages so the marketing strategy should consider that a destination is a product, which has a life cycle like any other product.

Dubai Burj Al-Arab and Jumeirah Beach Hotel - Credit Dubai Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing



Dubai Creek



Dubai Creek Old Town



Tourists have different needs, want and desires for their visits to any destination and not all tourism destinations will attract all types of tourists, nor are all types of tourists attracted to similar destinations, as tourists come in different shapes and sizes. Tourism relies on preconceived definitions of places and people, and the marketing arm of government and private companies creates these definitions in order to induce tourists to visit a specific

region. Tourism must be sustainable economically, socially and environmentally to succeed and so it must be carefully planned and managed.

Advertising produces images of places, which create expectations on the part of the tourist and later on pushes the destination to adapt to such expectations; therefore, 'tourism policies' should be designed to redefine the social realities at the destination.

Dubai Dhow Along Dubai Creek



The UNWTO in 2008 announced that developing countries witnessed tremendous increases of 32% over the period of 2000-2007, at a growth rate of 6% per year compared to the 4% growth rate in the international tourism sector. Worldwide, in 2007, international arrivals reached 900 million, which exceeded expectations and figures are expected to hit 1.1 billion in 2010 after a slowdown from a 6% rise in tourism traffic in the year 2007. The slowdown in the growth is due to high fuel prices and greater uncertainty of the credit crunch, even though tourists worldwide will still travel.

According to the World Travel Market and UNWTO in 2008, due to the global economic problems, the growth will be 0-2% in international tourists against long-term average growth of 4.2% annually. Furthermore, the World Travel and Tourism Council predict 1% contraction in tourist traffic worldwide in 2009; even though oil prices have fallen, this was not enough to counterbalance the drop in demand.

Relevance of peace in tourism

Geoffrey Lipman, the UNWTO secretary General's special adviser and past president of the World Travel and Tourism Council, said of the relationship between tourism and peace, Tourism is an important factor in the peaceful development of society. In a post conflict or post disaster situation, one of the best ways to promote recovery in the region is the recovery of the tourism economy.

People-to-people interactions make a good case for peace. Economic development makes a good case for peace and the growth of tourism is important for both. Opening borders and minds are a way of recovery and interacting between people can help create peace. In Europe, after the Second World War, the impact of tourism was a major factor in contributing to peace and stability.

Dubai Emirates Twin Towers
Credit Dubai Department of
Tourism and Commerce
Marketing





The world suffers, nowadays, from many problems but most of all is the loss of security and the lack of peace in many parts of the world. What increases the seriousness of this situation and contributes to its continuation is the mistrust between world powers, civilisations and people and the lack of understanding between them, as tourism plays an important role in creating space for understanding and consolidating the basis of peace in the world. Tourism activity and its substantial increase is one of the most extraordinary

economic and social phenomena and it is seen by many as an activity to help alleviate the poverty in the world and contribute to international understanding and world peace.

The World Travel and Tourism Council (2003) states in their version of a new tourism in the twenty-first century that "New Tourism is a force capable of dramatically improving economic and social well-being right across the globe, waiting to be unleashed"

Tourism in the Middle East and Iraq

According to WTO reports in 2008, international tourism arrivals in 2007 exceeded by approximately 6% those in the previous year, with an extra 52 million worldwide arrivals. The Middle East had a good share in this increase in tourism as it received five million from the 52 million, despite the threats and problems of war, and terrorism and tension in the region. The WTO predicts that Middle East

countries will be the second fastest growing in-bound region after East Asia by 2010, anticipating 36million visitors, and increasing to 69 million international arrivals by 2020. The Middle East travel and tourism industry is estimated to have generated \$108.5 billion of economic activity in 2004 and it is forecasted to rise to 193 billion by 2014, at a growth rate of about 4% per annum, in real terms, between 2005 and 2014 (Wells 2006).



Kerbala is full with visitors all the year round

Sheikh Zayed Mosque Abu-Dhabi



However, tourism and the number of tourists is clearly not evenly distributed worldwide, as substantial differentiation occurs on a diversity of international, regional and local scales because, in 2003, there was zero international tourism growth in Europe. For example, the Americas recorded a decline in international tourists by 1% and Asia and the Pacific experienced a massive decrease in arrivals by 9%; however, despite the security concerns, the Middle

East witnessed an increase of 10% in international tourist arrivals.

The advantage of building links through travel can be utilised as a means to re-build the country and position it in the normal world, according to ITT director Neil Herbert (Holiday Taxis). He said "travel plays a huge role in recovering economies as long as there is a clearly defined period of peace and infrastructure to support tourism".

Mecca Gate visitors all the year round



Rauf Al-Ansari, Coordinator General of Iraq's tourism office, announced in summer 2003 that Iraq will attract 10 million tourists a year in future. Religious tourism is booming in Iraq despite the security situation and nearly nine million people visit Iraq annually. The Eastern Bloc of the country has been deserted for the past 10 years but it is now covered by holiday programmes and British tourists are travelling there in sizeable numbers, which indicates that there is a confidence factor for Iraq.

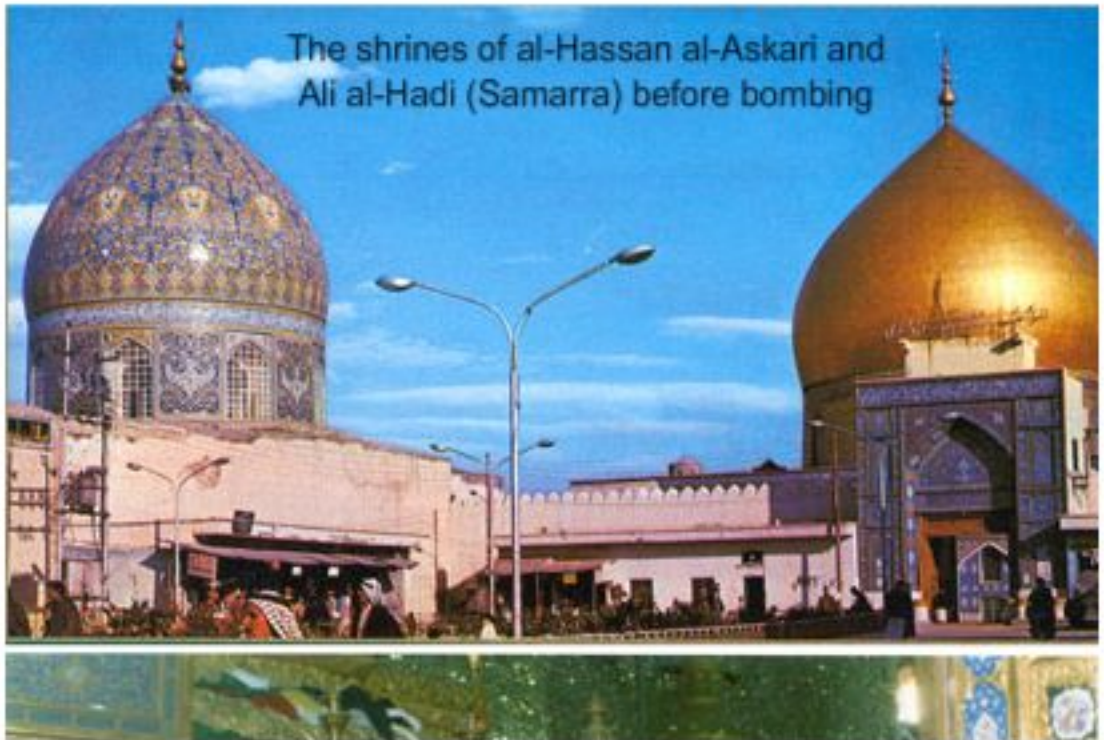
The Ministry of Planning and Development Corporation in Iraq has put forward plans to diversify the economy from oil and gas for three reasons. Firstly, it fears exploitation of these natural resources and needs to protect them; secondly, the tourism sector in Iraq has huge potential as a tourist destination for it has many important and famous attractions. Thirdly, it needs to tackle the problem of unemployment, which is a major problem in Iraq.

Due to depleting oil reserves, not a desirable strategy in the global warming and long term because Iraq's environmental awareness drives revenue depends mostly on oil for alternative energy sources, prices, which are tumbling, and the Planning Minister of Iraq, Ali Baban, said that Iraq has to diversify its economy; away from being oil based, in order to develop the country.

Due to global warming and environmental awareness, oil and fuel has been replaced by either electricity or bio fuel. Sole dependence on the oil sector is

not a desirable strategy in the long term because Iraq's revenue depends mostly on oil prices, which are tumbling, and this decline in oil income and revenue might last for a long time, as industrial countries change to using renewable and clean energy. Moreover, the economy worldwide is failing under the force of record debts and rising unemployment and Iraq is one of the most affected, even before these problems occurred, due to decades of war.

The shrines of al-Hassan al-Askari and Ali al-Hadi (Samarra) before bombing





Visitors
seeking
the
blessing
of
Hussein

Thus, Iraq needs to develop the ~~sector~~, and this will demand tourism ~~sector~~ and the good governance, sound policies and capable institutions. government now are trying to strengthen the power of the private sector, as it plays a critical role in the reconstruction and development. Investment should be a partnership between government and the private

Not all the references include this article, for more information please contact the writer on: aliasheik@hotmail.com