

# New Tourism Trends in the Arab World

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Ecological tourism in Quseir - South Red Sea Coast - Egypt

سياحة البيئة في قويسر، جنوب ساحل البحر الأحمر، مصر.

Tourism industries in Arab countries are booming once again. The negative effects of the global crisis in international tourism after 9/11 were indeed of a short-term character in the Arab markets. The deconstructive influences of the war in Iraq and the terror attacks in Djerba (2002), Casablanca (2003) and Taba (2004) were limited as well. The history, resources, types, development and crisis-action strategies and infrastructures of tourism industries are in fact very different in the Arab countries. Nevertheless, general

trends in tourism industries in the Arab World are to be noticed, although we talk about Arab markets rather than one regional market. The new trends, on the one hand, contributed massively to successful crises management; on the other hand, these trends were strengthened and re-shaped by the same crises.

The first trend is the increase of intra-regional tourism in the Arab World. The share of intra-regional tourism in the Arab Middle East has reached 40% of all

international arrivals in the 2003/2004 season. Syria and Lebanon are the major destinations of intra-Arab tourism. Bahrain is a key destination for Saudi tourists. The UAE, mainly Dubai, is the focal point of the flourishing intra-Gulf-countries tourism. Egypt and Jordan were able to compensate the loss of the European tourist by increasing considerably the number of Arab tourists.

The second trend is the innovative new types of tourism: medical and spa tourism, MICE (conferences and incentives tourism), ➤



Hotel in the Oasis of Hatta - UAE

فندق في واحة حطة بالإمارات.



The Old City of Bizert - Tunisia

مدينة بزرت القديمة في تونس.



Tourism developments in Dubai

تطويرات سياحية في دبي

ecological and sport tourism. Medical tourism occupies a special position in intra-Arab tourism. Jordan, Tunisia and Egypt are gaining from the numerous Arab patients (and their families) who are seeking highly-qualified medical services outside their own home countries. More and more Libyans are being treated at Tunisian clinics, while Yemenis, Syrians and Gulf-Arabs are checking in at Jordanian and Egyptian clinics. The spa centers on the Dead Sea and the centers of thalassic therapy in Tunisia are attracting numerous European tourists. A first-class infrastructure for international conferences and meetings has been established in many Arab countries. Dubai, Sharm el-Sheikh, Doha and the Dead Sea are new sites for international meetings in addition to the well-known venues of Cairo, Beirut, Damascus and Casablanca. Trekking

tours, Golf courses and desert safaris, combined with the Formula One car races in Bahrain and the Formula One speed boat races in Sharjah as well as the Qatar Tennis Open are putting new marks on the Arab tourism map.

The third trend is the new interpretation of pilgrimage and other religious spots in a "touristy" context. Saudi Arabia is promoting the so-called "Summer Umrah". The first "Haj and Umrah Exhibition" in Dubai will be opened on the 6th of March 2005. Other Arab countries are promoting re-discovered sites of Islamic religious heritage. Jordan and Egypt are advertising "Islamic Tourism" worldwide to attract more Arab and Muslim tourists. In particular Jordan is promoting, among others, the shrines of Mu'tah, and Iraq is hoping to attract numerous tourists to the holy sites of Najaf and Karbala in the peaceful future.

The fourth trend deals with the newly emerging tourist markets. The Arab tourism industries are strongly invading the central and eastern European markets as well as the markets of the neighboring countries that were practically ignored in the past. Poland, Hungary, Russia, the Czech Republic, Turkey, Spain, Iran and even China and Korea have been addressed by many Arab marketing strategies and promotion campaigns. More and more Arab countries are taking part in tourist fairs and exhibitions in the newly emerging markets and vice versa. The Iranian Trade and Tourism Week in Sharjah (December, 2004) demonstrated how MICE tourism, too, may reap advantages from such development.

The fifth trend is connected to the spatial organization of new tourist destinations and hotel capacities. The trend is moving ➤

towards construction of fully-integrated tourist complexes and tourist gated communities. Elgouna, Makadi Bay, Taba Heights, Marina and Port Ghalib in Egypt, Yasmine Hammamet in Tunisia, Tala Bay in Jordan, Al-Aqah in the UAE, Mogador and Plage Blanche in Morocco serve as examples of such development. The huge projects of the artificial islands in Dubai (the three Palm Islands and the World Island) and in Qatar (Pearl and West Bay Islands), where various combinations of tourism development and housing projects are implemented, present another model of this trend.

The sixth trend is linked with the enlargement and the enrichment of the tourism support infrastructure: entertainment parks, shopping malls, cultural events and festivals, new flight destinations, apartment hotels etc. Carthage Film festival, Dubai Shopping Festival and Jerash Festival of Culture and Arts are the archetypes of currently flourishing events that support tourism. Especially for the increasing numbers of international Arab tourists and domestic tourists, such activities are of great importance. The well-established tourism support infrastructures are, to a great extent, "western-oriented" and aim to satisfy "European" demands. Arab tourism is mainly family, long-term and very seasonal tourism that has its own dynamism of supply and demand. The extension of the intra-Arab charter flights and the boom of residence hotels are to be understood in this context.

The seventh trend focuses on the activities of international and local hotel management companies. In the up and coming destinations like Libya, Algeria, Qatar and Oman, international hotel management companies are showing a huge interest in directly managing properties in these countries: Sheraton in Algeria, Hyatt and Intercontinental in Oman, Marriott in Qatar and Corinthia in Libya. In well-established destinations, on the one hand, the local experienced hotel management companies are expanding regionally (Rotana Hotels, Sefir Hotels and Cham Hotels) and new management companies have been founded (Golden Yasmine in Tunisia, Red Sea Hotels and Tropicana in Egypt, Metropolitan in the UAE). On the other hand, property-renting contracts present a new form of cooperation



Golf Courts in the Sahara - Tozuer

ملعب الغولف بصحراء توزر.



Hotel Kempinski Abu Dhabi

فندق كيمبسنكي أبو ظبي.

with the international management companies that is becoming popular in the destinations of mass tourism (Djerba).

The eighth trend covers intra-Arab cooperation in the tourism sector on various public and private levels. Joint tourist programs, workshops and meetings on Arab tourism issues, cooperation and coordination efforts between Arab governmental bodies and organizations have been noticeably more intensive in the last years. The Arab World Travel and Tourism Exchange (AWTTE), which has been taking place yearly since 2002 in

Beirut, and this magazine "Islamic Tourism" are examples of the initiatives of the Arab private sector.

Some of the above-mentioned trends could have a long-term effect on the form, structure and organization of Arab tourism markets. Like any other industry, tourism is subject to continuing changes and adjustments. The principal attribute which differentiates tourism from other industries is that tourism presents the only possible mass face-to-face inter-cultural and inter-ethnic dialogue. This, however, is a topic for discussion in a later issue. ■