

Future tourism plans in Iraq

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The tourism organisation in Iraq was established in 1965, in the 1970's and 1980's Iraq's tourism was at its best as an international holiday destination. In 1976, nearly 60,000 international tourists visited Iraq which rose to 2,153,000 in 1985; even in recent years, tourists have visited Iraq for religious reasons with most coming from Iran.

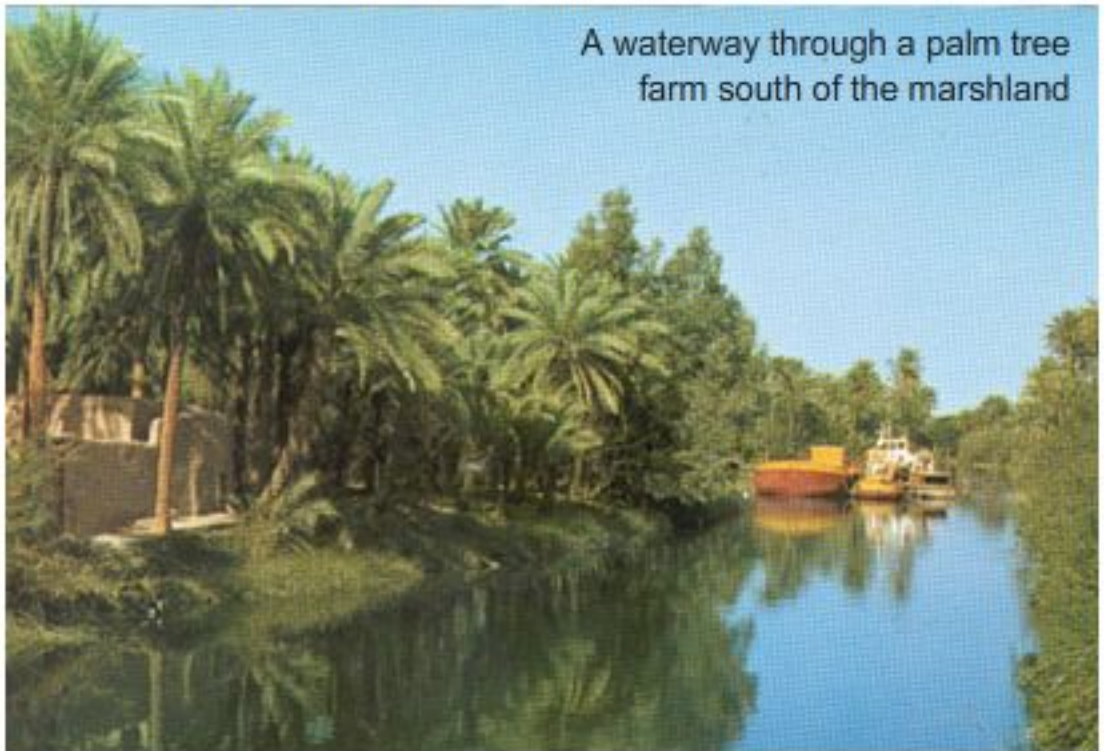


A group of water buffalo forages among the reed belt

However, Iraq also received most of them were from London tourists from European countries and visited the country as part of with about 5,000 tourists from religious tourism. A United Britain and groups from Nations official, Philippe Germany and the Ukraine; but Delanghe, said, "Cultural tourism

There have been improvements in the infrastructure in Iraq in the last few years due to the stable security situation. Despite the whole situation in Iraq, many people are still travelling to the country, especially to the religious sites. The northern part of Iraq, the Kurdistan region, is attracting European travellers and the leading company is British, Hinterland Travel, which is run by Geoff Hann; and recently a French company has added Iraq to its brochure, and

people have signed up to travel to Iraq. Geoff Hann said 150 people have been on tours to northern Iraq over the past few years; the French firm, which is seeking to share in the market of northern Iraq, is called Terre Entiere. Recently, Hinterland Travel (UK), made a tour programme in Iraq for 17 days with international tourists, travelling across Iraq from Irbil in the north to Basra in the south; they stayed in the Sheraton hotel, located in the capital,



A waterway through a palm tree farm south of the marshland



Baghdad. In 2009, over 137,000 its natural richness are foreign tourists visited Karbala (a appealing to tourism, even famous religious destination in Iraq) in one day during a though the war has torn the nation apart. The Northern Iraq government is focused on the development of the tourism industry from the initial phase and then elevating it to become an international tourist destination. As Iraq has innumerable tourism resources, many investors have come forward to share in rebuilding the country and gaining benefit.

The tourism potential and future prospects are high in Iraq, as the richness in cultural heritage and historical monuments along with

Published reports say that the Pentagon is backing a five-year \$5 billion plan to build a luxury hotel and many shopping malls inside Baghdad and Marriott have agreed to build the 7-star hotel. Robert Kelly, Chief Executive of the US based Summit Global Group, which is building the 7 star hotel, announced in July 2008 that the security situation in Iraq is good for investment, as this hotel was the first business proposal to be licensed by Iraq's new National investment Commission.

The UNESCO (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation) is pumping millions of dollars into protecting and restoring Babylon and a handful of other ancient ruins in Iraq. Iraqi Airways, the Iraqi national carrier that stopped operating nearly three decades ago, used to operate flights from Baghdad to worldwide destinations. Recently the Iraqi government funded one of its largest projects to date, which is the expansion of a colossal \$5.5 billion contract between Iraqi



Candel lit (Tigris)



Airways and Boeing to buy 50 new and second hand jets from Boeing and Canadian aircraft manufacturer Bombardier. This includes 10 Boeing 787 Dreamliners, starting from August 2008 and arriving by 2018, to give a much-needed improvement for Iraqi Airways to start again; Boeing will also help in improving Iraqi airports to national standards. Moreover, the National carrier Iraqi Airways has started operating and it's most popular daily route service is to Dubai, as it is 98-100% sold out.

The north region of Kurdistan has put up strategies to give all projects to local and foreign private sectors and to supervise, evaluate, and observe them to promote the tourism sector by attracting local and foreign investors; also information technology, oil, energy, manufacturing, and tourism industries, in which the private sector can play a major role. In the north region, near Erbil International Airport, a large complex is going to open in 2009 consisting of shopping malls,

stores, markets and a family-friendly amusement park. It is a joint venture between the public and private sector which is expected to be a popular tourist attraction and a modern entertainment centre.

There are plans to convert the palace complex of Saddam Hussain in his hometown, Tikrit, into a themed tourist destination and there are plans to refurbish the famous cornice of Basra (The Independent 2008). In the agricultural sector, there are

plans to restore this sector like the replanting projects of palm trees in Basra.

Basra has five commercial ports and this indicates that waterway transport is on its way to recovery and will soon carry passengers. Iraq has become a key region for investment, especially for Chinese companies, as China is participating in the 4th Iraq International Fair which was held on 21-24 May 2009.



Desert activities



The Iraqi-British Chamber of Commerce has opened a branch in the city of Falluja with the aim of offering facilities and advice to investors and businessmen. The Chamber's Director, Sami Kashkoul, said that there is strong cooperation with the US and Japanese organisations in the urban and economic development sphere in addition to large support by Iraqi business to expand projects in the area.

People like an undiscovered destination which is why new countries are ideal for tourism;

moreover, post-conflict destinations on the list of 'must see' cities are Beirut in Lebanon, Gabon in West Africa, central Bulgaria and Turkmenistan and New Orleans, Iraq can be one of the must see destinations in the future.

What Type of tourism can Iraq create and develop?

Below are some of the new kinds of tourism, which must be addressed in the future by the government, as well as the private sector, in order to participate in the tourism of Iraq:

Dark Tourism: This is “tourism of sites of tragedy and disaster”, which may be a recent growth area in the travel industry but it is not a new phenomenon; pilgrims were travelling to tombs and sites of religious martyrdom in the Dark Ages (Lennon 2005). Professor John Lennon added, in another article by Atkinson (2005) that this kind of tourism has recently been included in the tourism degree curriculum to reflect the growing demand for tourist attractions such as sites associated with war, genocide, assassination and other tragic events. Therefore, as Iraq has witnessed many years of war and genocides in many places such as Abu Ghraib (the largest prison in Iraq and one of the most infamous) it is associated with the atrocities committed under Saddam’s regime and the US occupation troops may be suited to this. Grief tourism is a kind of dark tourism of places that are war-related such as visiting battle sites and seeing cemeteries, when visitors come to see where tragic crimes or events occurred.

Marshy_lowlands surrounding
Shatt Al Arab area





River tourism: Iraq has great potential for investment by the private sector in river tourism because it has canals of about 5,275km and three large rivers, the Tigris at 1,895km, the Euphrates at 2,815km and a third river of 565km, are principal waterways. Pleasure boats and tradecrafts can be imported or constructed in the country itself. Tourist villages can be developed next to the riverbanks which are also idyllic locations for restaurants, parks and clubs for river sports such as fishing. Wildlife, particularly endangered

species, must be protected and the purity of the water restored and maintained; proper environmental protection laws will have to be passed and enforced. As Iraq has lakes, rivers and coastal resorts, all these places for river tourism are profitable for trade, which can make an important and major contribution to the economy. Basra used to be called "The Venice of the Middle East" because it has a network of canals flowing through the city, which will make it a good spot for river tourism.

Health Tourism: As Iraq has waterways, mineral spas and baths, it can attract many people and therapeutic treatments have particularly experienced wide expansion recently. There is big promise in this sector and, as the population ages, it is facilitated by rising demand for health care and services for the elderly. As Kofi Anan, the previous UN Secretary General said, by 2050, the number of people over 60 will hit 2 billion more than the number of under 15s in the world.

Desert and safari tourism: This kind of tourism is becoming popular because it has the elements of traditional Middle Eastern culture and offers a taste of the true heartland of the Arabian Desert. Dubai, which has become a major tourist destination in recent years, has developed desert safari tourism and involved many activities and unusual excursions offered by local inbound tour operators. The activities include taking the tourists to remote camel and goat farms and isolated Bedouin

Palm trees in Iraq



Sand Buggy



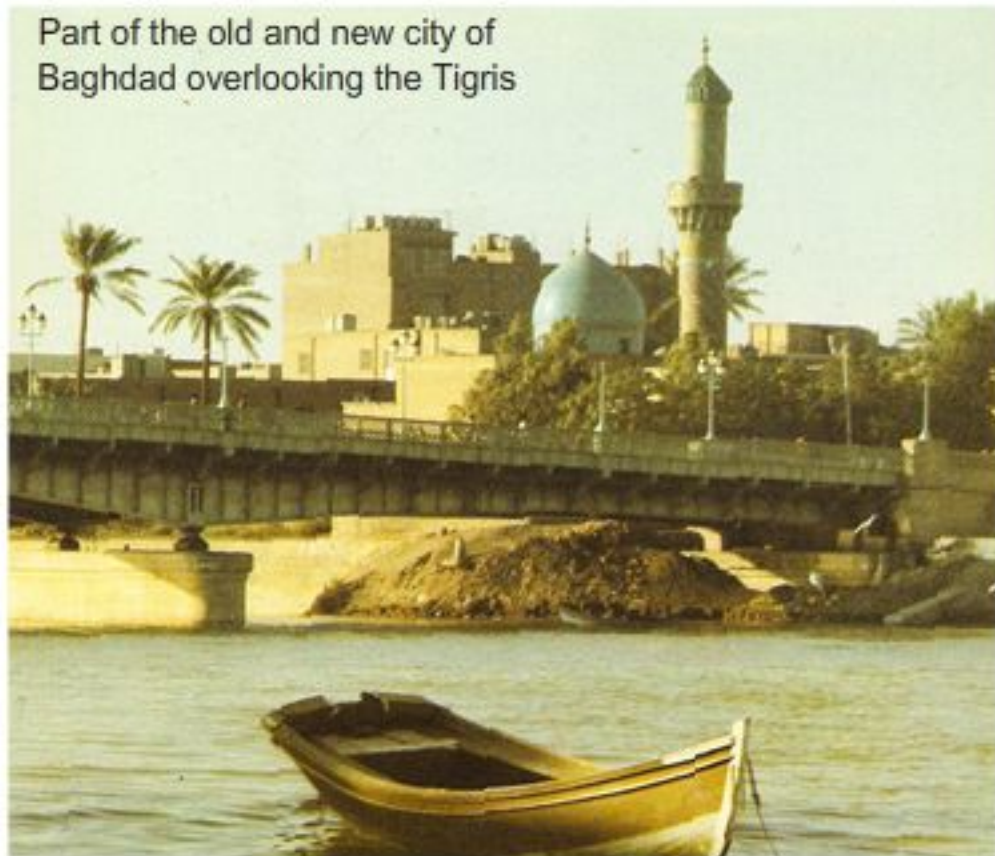
villages, dune driving in four-wheel drive vehicles, camel riding, as the camel is a symbol of Arabia, sand skiing and horseracing.

Eco-Tourism: Iraq could be the perfect destination for ecotourism, as it has magnificent old cities and sites, which can compete with any in the world. The country can satisfy all tastes from mountains to deserts, such as the Arab marshes, oases and old cities; many traditional handicrafts like cooper curving

and deep cultural history provide an attractive ethnographic background.

Ecotourism improves the quality of life for both the host and guest, provides a quality experience for visitors, and protects the natural and human environment including cultural, social and political dimensions. In all these zones, tourists get an opportunity to interact in an ecologically friendly manner with the environment while the local community benefits from the generated revenue.

Part of the old and new city of Baghdad overlooking the Tigris



The Al-Maha resort in the UAE is the first eco-tourism project in the Arab gulf area, which uses eco-friendly measures and is concerned with the conservation of heritage, ecological and natural environment as the role of eco-tourism. In addition, the Dhofar area in Oman in the Arab gulf is promoting eco tourism.

Thus, the core features of eco-tourism are achieved; tourism is

based on natural attractions that incorporate cultural heritage components; provision of learning opportunities and experiences; and are planning and management oriented to maximise the likelihood of environmentally and socio-culturally sustainable outcomes. However, the feasibility of eco-tourism depends upon financial sustainability and high levels of tourist satisfaction.