



Towards a Sustainable Future: Policy Changes and Recommendations for Jordan's Tourism Sector

Introduction

Jordan, a Middle Eastern country, has been a popular tourist destination for many years, but the rapid growth of the tourism industry has raised concerns about its impact on the economy, environment, and society. In response, the Jordanian government has developed various tourism strategies and policies to promote sustainable tourism development. These policies have been influenced by several factors, including the country's natural and cultural resources, its economic and political situation, and global trends towards sustainable development.

To implement these policies, the government has established institutions and initiatives such as the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, the Jordan Tourism Board, and the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature. These bodies work together to promote tourism development and ensure the effectiveness of the policies. The government also regularly reviews and evaluates the policies, monitoring their implementation and assessing their impact on the economy, environment, and local communities. This review process involves consulting with stakeholders, such as local communities, tourism operators, and non-governmental organizations.



However, despite progress in protecting the environment, there are still concerns that Jordan's natural assets and resources are being exploited for economic gain rather than being preserved. Thus, more ethical approaches to tourism are needed, including legislation, education, and community engagement. The Tourism Sector Green Growth Action National Action Plan 2021-2025 is the first formal plan that emphasizes sustainability and community engagement to guide providers along the tourism value chain. But there is still work to be done on sustainable tourism development in Jordan.

To address this issue, the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, along with the Ministry of Environment, are working to reduce the environmental footprint of tourism through initiatives in energy use, water, and waste reduction, as well as by coordinating with donor agencies and other government entities. Jordan has also developed policies and plans to address climate change, including the National Climate Change Adaptation Plan. The country's priority sectors include water, agriculture, energy, land use, and desertification. Despite a lack of unified policies hindering efforts to tackle climate change, Jordan has committed to implementing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and the UNWTO professional Code of Ethics in Tourism.

The development and review of sustainable tourism policies in Jordan is an ongoing process that requires continuous attention and commitment from the government, the tourism industry, and all other stakeholders to ensure that tourism development in Jordan is sustainable, responsible, and beneficial for all.

Jordan's Journey: A Look at the Development of Tourism Policies and Strategies

Jordan's tourism industry has experienced significant growth over the past few decades, contributing significantly to the country's economy. The government has implemented various policies and strategies over the years to promote and develop the tourism sector, with a focus on attracting more foreign investment, diversifying tourism products, and improving infrastructure and transportation.

In the 1990s, Jordan's government focused on attracting more foreign investment to tourism sector, particularly after wadi araba peace treaty. The government implemented a range of incentives to encourage investment, such as tax exemptions and streamlined procedures for permits and licenses. The government also worked to promote Jordan's cultural and historical attractions, such as Petra as major tourist destination. The country's tourism sector experienced rapid growth during this period.

In the 2000s, Jordan government has recognized the significance of the tourism sector in Jordan's economy and has been working on a coherent strategy through The Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MoTA). The focus is on attracting medium to high-end customers to increase total daily revenue per tourist. The MoTA has identified potential niche tourism markets such as eco-tourism, adventure tourism, health tourism, leisure and wellness tourism, religious tourism, and volunteer tourism. The MoTA believes that targeting the low-end mass market is unsustainable due to the lack of infrastructure to support large volumes and the low revenue generated.



To develop the tourism industry, **the MoTA developed a four-pronged strategy in 2004 for the first time.** This strategy includes strengthening tourism marketing, supporting product development, developing human resources, and providing an effective institutional and regulatory framework. The GoJ has allocated resources for international marketing, product development, and human resources development through 2010.

The National Tourism Strategy for the period of 2011-2015 aims to capitalize on the solid foundation established since 2004 and provide clear direction for stakeholders in the tourism industry to support future growth. The strategy is guided by a vision and mission adapted from the previous strategy, with an emphasis on developing a unique and competitive tourism industry. While retaining the successful four-pillar framework, the strategic objectives have been slightly amended to prioritize increased competitiveness in all activities. Implementation of the identified measures under the four pillars is expected to secure past achievements and contribute significantly to the overall competitiveness of Jordan's tourism industry, supporting long-term growth and sustainability.

The strategic vision for the 2011-2015 period aims to position Jordan as a distinctive destination offering diverse and year-round visitor experiences that enrich the lives of Jordanians and their guests. The strategic mission for the period is to plan and implement necessary changes and actions to enhance the competitiveness of Jordan's tourism industry, improve the visitor experience through



innovation in product development, promote the tourism offering to global markets to attract higher-yield customers throughout the year, and create a regulatory and operating environment that drives better business performance and unleashes the full energy of the private sector as the engine of growth.

In 2018-2020 MoTA tourism strategy, The Ministry has aligned its institutional objectives with Jordan's 2025 strategic vision for the tourism sector and linked them to the Jordanian economic growth stimulus plan 2018-2022, the Executive Development Program, and the National Tourism Strategy 2018-2022. The Ministry has developed strategic pillars for the years 2018-2020 and translated them into basic objectives with identified priorities. To achieve these objectives, the Ministry has established various programs and projects that aim to implement specific directives for the strategy.

The identified strategic institutional objectives fall under two main pillars. The first is "A tourism product that reflects Jordan's identity," which aims to create diverse and unique local tourism experiences that cater to different target groups. The Ministry intends to design integrated tourism experiences that include various sites and patterns on different paths, covering different governorates, cities, and villages. These experiences will encourage tourism investment, empower the local community, provide job opportunities, and enrich visitors' tourism experience with distinct events and activities that reflect the identity of different parts of the Kingdom.



The second pillar is "An enabling environment," which aims to organize the legislative environment to ensure the rule of law, transparency, and accountability. This includes considering new legislation that the sector needs to keep up with modern global developments. Additionally, the Ministry aims to create an investment-stimulating environment that supports the growth of the tourism sector. This involves partnerships with the private sector and local community, adopting various initiatives such as outsourcing to operate and manage tourist and archaeological sites by the private sector, creating awareness about the tourism sector's importance to the Jordanian economy, and implementing a national program for training and employment in the tourism sector.

The Ministry's strategic objectives also focus on building and developing institutional capacities, including structure, systems, procedures, skills, and institutional culture, to increase the satisfaction of service recipients of products. In the strategy, The Ministry also aims to improve the decision-making and policy-making process, transfer knowledge, and enhance tourism research in Jordan by developing a work unit that deals with data, research, and studies related to the tourism sector in Jordan. This unit will cooperate with local and foreign universities and the business community to publish scientific papers and information, arrange seminars, host conferences, and give lectures on tourism studies.



The National Green Growth Plan (2017) for Jordan aims to guide green growth projects and align green policies and investments to work towards national development goals, including in the tourism sector. The plan identifies green growth opportunities and key performance indicators, and designs a cross-sector policy framework and implementation roadmap. It focuses on six sectors, including tourism, and proposes priority projects that require large investments. The plan also establishes a governance structure to fast-track project implementation. The plan's driving principles include transparent governance, incentivizing green growth, integrated planning, and capacity building. Implementation of these actions will contribute to the Tourism Sector Green Growth Sub Objective, increasing coordination and collaboration between the public and private sectors, increasing sector profitability, mainstreaming sustainability and resilience, and presenting investment opportunities in ecotourism and sustainability in key touristic locations. The plan aims to achieve an expanding yet sustainable and resilient economy that ensures the creation of green jobs and increased investment in green projects.

The Tourism Sector Green Growth Action National Action Plan 2021-2025 (GG-NAP) is a framework and set of actions aimed at promoting environmentally sustainable and socially inclusive economic growth within Jordan's tourism sector. It aligns with national green growth objectives, such as enhancing natural capital, resource efficiency, and climate change adaptation and mitigation. The plan identifies 18 sub-objectives to mainstream these goals into tourism sector policies and



investments. Despite the short-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism is expected to continue to attract tourists in the medium-to-long term, offering significant livelihood opportunities for Jordanians and attracting private sector investments. The plan includes 12 priority actions that require an estimated investment of USD 172,700,000 to accelerate green growth through the tourism sector. These actions include investment preparation, demonstration, enabling policy and institutional reform, and innovation programs.

The Jordan National Tourism Strategy 2021-2025. This Strategy comprehensively addresses the challenges and gaps facing the country, and aligns them with the strengths and opportunities that can be leveraged to enhance national economic growth and job creation.

Stakeholders and beneficiaries from across the tourism sector value chain, including various Tourism Associations and other key private sector stakeholders, provided input for this Strategy through consultative workshops led by distinguished private sector figures. Such engagement fostered a sense of involvement among sector stakeholders in the development of the Strategy, leading to their buy-in. The Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MoTA) played a key role in facilitating these workshops.

Furthermore, MoTA/JTB and DoA will spearhead the coordination of activities, efforts, projects, policies, and strategies with counterparts in ASEZA, PDTRA, the Baptism Site Commission, and



other relevant entities. This coordination will be facilitated by the re-constituted National Tourism Council and representation on the Jordan Tourism Board.

This Strategy embodies several important initiatives, such as the protection of Jordan's abundant cultural heritage, development of human resources, and design/marketing of rich products, services, and experiences. It will also address necessary reforms to overcome inhibitors that are hindering growth, investment, and efficiency in the industry, thereby enhancing its competitiveness in the face of major regional players in the tourism domain.

Challenges for Jordan Sustainable Tourism

Despite the numerous benefits that the tourism industry can bring to a country, it also poses a variety of challenges, particularly in terms of sustainability. This is especially true in Jordan, where the government has recognized the need to balance tourism growth with sustainability and diversify tourism products as highlighted in the Tourism Sector Green Growth Action National Action Plan 2021-2025, developing human resources, and providing an effective institutional and regulatory framework. However, achieving these goals requires significant investment and effort, as well as overcoming the challenges associated with ensuring sustainable practices in the tourism sector.

- **Balancing tourism growth with sustainability:** While Jordan has experienced significant growth in its tourism industry, there is a need to balance this growth with sustainability. This requires careful



RESTART MED!

planning and management to ensure that tourism development does not negatively impact the natural and cultural environment or the local community.

- **Diversifying tourism products:** The Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities in Jordan has recognized the importance of diversifying tourism products, targeting medium to high-end customers, and identifying potential niche tourism markets such as eco-tourism, adventure tourism, health tourism, leisure and wellness tourism, religious tourism, and volunteer tourism. However, diversification is a challenge as it requires significant investment in infrastructure and development of new products.
- **Developing human resources:** The Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities has identified the development of human resources as a key strategy for the development of the tourism industry. However, this requires investment in education and training, as well as attracting and retaining skilled workers.
- **Providing an effective institutional and regulatory framework:** Jordan's government has implemented policies and strategies to promote and develop the tourism sector. However, effective implementation requires an institutional and regulatory framework that supports the development of the sector and ensures the rule of law, transparency, and accountability.
- **Ensuring sustainable practices:** Sustainable tourism requires the adoption of environmentally and socially responsible practices. This includes reducing waste, conserving natural resources, and supporting the local community. However, ensuring sustainable practices can be challenging, particularly in areas with limited resources and infrastructure.



- Balancing public and private sector interests: The development of the tourism industry involves a balance between public and private sector interests. While the government plays a crucial role in developing the infrastructure and regulatory framework, the private sector drives innovation and investment. Balancing these interests can be a challenge, particularly in areas where the tourism industry is dominated by large multinational corporations.

Towards Sustainable Tourism: Recommendations for Jordan's Journey to 2030

Jordan's tourism industry has experienced significant growth over the years, but it is imperative for the government to recognize the importance of preserving the country's natural and cultural heritage and implementing policies to promote sustainable tourism practices. In this regard, the government must shift its tourism strategy towards sustainability and responsible tourism to promote eco-friendly and socially responsible practices in the industry. The establishment of more protected areas, launching the "Jordan Responsible Tourism Initiative," and promoting eco-tourism activities are some of the policies that should be adopted to achieve sustainable tourism.

To transition towards sustainable tourism, some policy recommendations are proposed:

- Focus on sustainability: While Jordan's tourism industry has experienced significant growth, there is a need to promote sustainability in the sector. The government should create policies and



RESTART MED!

incentives to encourage the adoption of sustainable tourism practices, including reducing energy consumption, promoting eco-tourism, and ensuring that local communities benefit from tourism.

- **Diversify tourism products:** Jordan should continue to diversify its tourism products and promote niche markets such as eco-tourism, adventure tourism, health tourism, leisure and wellness tourism, religious tourism, and volunteer tourism. This will help to attract higher-yield customers and reduce the reliance on low-end mass markets.
- **Develop institutional and regulatory frameworks:** The government should continue to develop institutional and regulatory frameworks to support the tourism industry's growth and sustainability. This includes creating an investment-stimulating environment that supports the growth of the tourism sector, establishing partnerships with the private sector and local communities, and considering new legislation to keep up with modern global developments.
- **Enhance human resources development:** The government should continue to allocate resources for the development of human resources in the tourism sector. This includes providing training and employment opportunities for locals, creating awareness about the tourism sector's importance to the Jordanian economy, and enhancing institutional capacities, including structure, systems, procedures, skills, and institutional culture.
- **Implement the National Green Growth Plan:** Jordan should implement the National Green Growth Plan to guide green growth projects and align green policies and investments to work towards national



RESTART MED!

development goals. The plan focuses on six sectors, including tourism, and proposes priority projects that require large investments to promote sustainability and reduce carbon footprint.

- Establishing environmental impact systems is essential to regularly measure the impact of various tourism activities on different environmental aspects, such as soil, water, waste, and air. These systems can help identify areas where tourism activities may be causing harm, allowing for proactive measures to minimize negative impacts and promote sustainable tourism practices. By monitoring and analyzing data on environmental impacts, stakeholders can make informed decisions about tourism development and work towards mitigating any negative effects on the environment.
- Improving social sustainability in tourism, particularly with regards to identity, culture, and regionalism, is crucial for promoting responsible and sustainable tourism practices. This can involve supporting local communities and promoting their cultural heritage, as well as engaging with tourists to raise awareness and respect for local customs and traditions. By prioritizing social sustainability in tourism, stakeholders can help ensure that local communities benefit from tourism development, while also promoting cross-cultural understanding and preserving cultural identities.
- Enhancing sustainable economic growth and job creation is critical to address the challenges posed by high rates of population growth. Sustainable tourism development can provide significant opportunities for economic growth and job creation, particularly in rural areas where alternative employment opportunities may be limited. By investing in sustainable tourism practices and promoting local entrepreneurship, stakeholders can help ensure that tourism development benefits local communities and supports long-term economic growth. This can include initiatives to support local businesses, such as microfinance programs and training opportunities, as well as policies to promote sustainable tourism development and ensure that economic benefits are distributed fairly across communities.