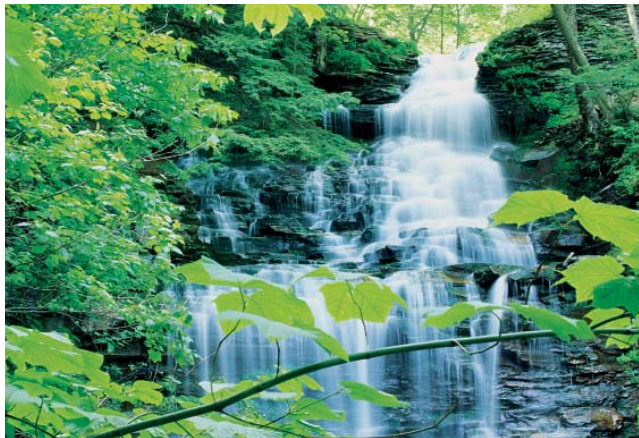




Second Beirut Water Week



Ahead of the Mediterranean Session of the 5th World Water Forum, Beirut convened its 2nd Water Week (4-7 February 2009) as an indication of the firm commitment of the Mediterranean water community to work in a peaceful and constructive way for the benefit of the entire sub-region.

Along 4 days of debates, 240 participants from different organisations and sectors of water management in the region, including UN-ESCWA, discussed issues emerging from the Ministerial Declaration at the recent Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference on Water (December 2008, Dead Sea), including contributions to developing the new Strategy for Water in the Mediterranean as well as in assisting to identify criteria for future technical projects in such a context.

Water Issues and Climate Change

The 2nd "Beirut Water

Week" served as a platform of dialogue that addressed key Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) issues questions in the region, particularly in the context of developing the new Strategy on Water in the Mediterranean. It dealt with specific questions such as: how to achieve good water governance at national and local levels around the Mediterranean Basin; how to sufficiently finance the water sector; and how to substantially promote education and public awareness on water issues; and others.



Tackling the subject of potential impacts of climate change on water resources

and adaptation measures at the meeting, UN-ESCWA noted that climate change will have significant impacts on fresh water, affecting both its availability and the frequency of droughts and floods in UN-ESCWA countries. More generally, the impacts of climate change on water resources might affect a wide range of socio-economic and environmental sectors including agriculture, health, public safety, biodiversity, tourism and others. Adaptation of the water sector to climate change requires a vulnerability assessment, to know how dangerous climate change is to the water sector in UN-ESCWA countries, and subsequently determine steps to counter it.

The Beirut Declaration

The participants of the Beirut Water Week agreed with the Tunis Input (15 January 2009), which they adopted in its totality, strengthening some of its angles. The Tunis input decided to elaborate a new Strategy for

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Water in the Mediterranean consolidating and using already existing relevant initiatives and to implement concrete projects in line with the demand of the populations.



The 2nd "Beirut Water Week" was an initiative of the Lebanese Ministry of Energy and Water and the Global Water Partnership - Mediterranean (GWP-Med), with the support of the Mediterranean Component of the EU Water Initiative (MED EUWI), the French Government, the MEDA Water Programme and other donors. ■

Facts and Figures:

The Tourism Sector in the Arab Region

Tourism in Arab Countries

In comparison with the other regions of the world, the Arab region witnessed a drop in the number of tourist arrivals, although its countries present a variety of tourist attractions: historic, civilizational and cultural sites as well as conference, religious, environmental and recreational tourism. While international tourist arrivals in 2006 reached almost 842 million, (including 458 million, or 54.4 % in Europe), the share of the Arab region approximated 40.7 million or 4.8 % of total global arrivals, a modest performance in view of the tourism potential of Arab countries.

Arab Tourism: Causes of Weakness

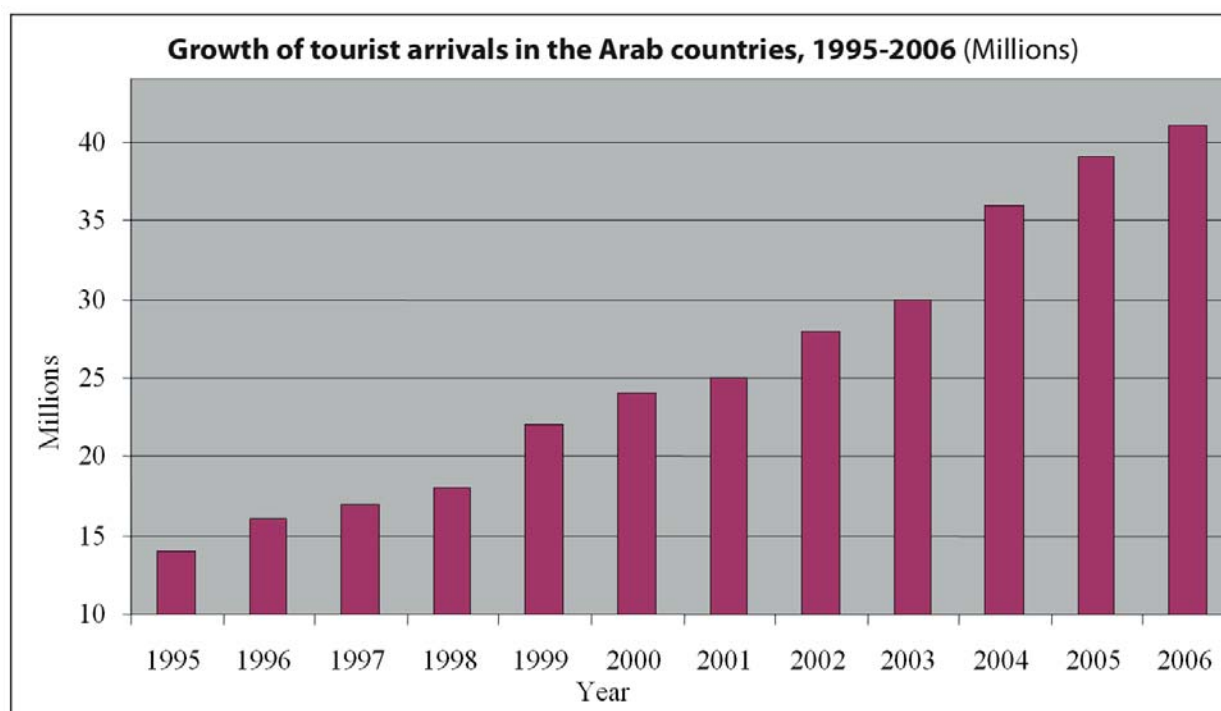
Several factors contributed to the insignificant performance of Arab tourism such as the lack of regional stability resulting from war, border disputes, and destruction in some countries as Iraq and Palestine, and political disturbances. Other factors relate to the tourism industry, which suffers from inadequate investment in tourism infrastructure such as hotels, restaurants, and means of transportation by air, sea and land, not to mention the lack of awareness of the significance of tourism.

In addition, there is weak Arabic cooperation in tourism, such as coordination to attract groups of tourists to visit several

Arab countries. Moreover, there is inadequate provision of tourism products and services.

In numbers

In 2006, the number of tourist arrivals in the Arab countries grew by 2.5% from that of 2005, notwithstanding the geopolitical conditions of the region. World Tourism Organization figures show that the number of tourist arrivals in Lebanon dropped by 6.7% from 2005 to 2006. In 2005, Egypt received 8,200, 000 tourists, while Saudi Arabia received 9,100, 000 tourists. Historical, Civilizational and religious sites are popular with tourists, which may give Arab countries a comparative advantage over other regions of the world. ■



Source: Annual Review of Developments in Globalization and Regional Integration in the Arab Countries, 2007, UN-ESCWA.

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