

TOURISM HIT AGAIN BY UNRESTS IN EGYPT



or just give away cash.

The tourism industry in Egypt has been hurt by the new unrest as well as the Islamists. Vendors have become so desperate to sell their wares, that they are frightening tourists visiting the pyramids. They descend on vehicles with travelers and bang on the doors and hoods demanding that the tourists take a ride on their camels, shop

Ashraf Ibrahim is a tour operator who recently got threatened to steer business along the way of some horse carriage drivers operating in Aswan city, otherwise they would burn his tour buses if he fails. This happened after being trapped in a historic mosque where he had taken some tourists.

Tourism is a major pillar of Egypt's economy and after almost two years of devastation, people are getting more desperate. December is usually the peak season but many foreign tourists opted for other destinations after protests broke out over the controversial constitution. Sources at the airport report that arrivals at December were 40% short of November's.

The situation could get worse as the controversial constitution was passed. This worries travel companies who anticipate more unrests as power struggle between the opposition and Islamist President Morsi threatens to erupt.

In addition, the Islamists could burn alcohol and swimsuits on Egyptian beaches which will further drive away the tourists. The uncertainty of the future has made it very difficult to plan in advance as Magda Fawzi, Sabena Management's head, admits.

Magda Fawzi has been forced to lay off approximately 250 employees since the revolution began. She further plans to shut down her company running 4 luxury cruise boats on the Nile River between Aswan and Luxor ancient cities. The company also runs two hotels at Sharm el-Sheikh, a Red Sea resort town. Only 10 out of the 300 rooms in one of the hotels are booked and only one of the four ships is operating.

Since the uprising that toppled the then president, Hosni Mubarak, tourism has really struggled. **In 2011, tourist numbers fell to 9.8 million from 14.7 million in 2010. Revenues dropped by 30%.** However, last year saw a comeback in the industry and it is expected to have outdone 2011 but considerably lower than 2010's figure.

In 2010, one out of eight Egyptians got direct or indirect employment from tourism. However, with the uprising against Mubarak, 39% of Luxor province residents, where there are monumental temples as well as the tombs of many pharaohs including King Tutankamun, lived on less than \$1 a day in 2011 compared to 2009's 18% of the residents. The turmoil in the tourism industry has also forced the government to talk with the IMF over a \$4.8 billion loan.

Even with Morsi's promises to revive the tourism industry, tour operators and hotel owners are yet to see any clear plans from the president on how he intends to expand tourism. Similarly, fear is there that the Islamists might ban alcohol and restrict on dress codes on Egyptian beaches. Some party officials have made comments about tourists bringing their own alcohol to drink in their own rooms and wearing conservative dress as a way of respecting the country's traditions and beliefs.

However, there is some optimism that once the Islamists realize how important tourism is to the country, they will not ultimately destroy the industry. On the other hand, attempts to draw tourists back have been crippled by the lawlessness in most parts of Egypt. The situation is worsened by police joining in to tout tourists. However, some tourists find the chaos as part of normal experience with others enjoying it.

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