

EGYPT: MINISTER APPEALS TO TRAVELERS TO HELP THE STRUGGLING TOURISM



The tourism industry of Egypt is fading fast. It is the common tourism worker that is suffering the most.

Mohammed Serag Eldin used to fill the boats that tourists rode up and down the Nile River with 50 or 60 passengers, but today, he would be relieved to take even one. He says he doesn't care much for politics and just wants things to get better.

"I don't have a political opinion," Mohammed explains. "I just want the situation to be better. Most of the people on the streets . . . want a better environment to make a living - that's it." Eldin is certainly not alone.

Saeed Abdul Hamid and his horse Bunny have hardly had any customers either. They've been giving rides to customers on the banks of the Nile for twenty years, but he says that today, even local customers are afraid of the curfew, martial law forcing business to stop when the sun sets.

"If a customer comes, and the curfew's about to start, they prefer not to take the cart," Hamid laments. "If someone stops us during the curfew, it might be a problem."

The Egyptian tourism industry used to account for 11 percent of Egypt's GDP, roughly eight billion euros per year, which is 20% of the country's foreign currency revenues. **But unrest that followed after Egypt overthrew the 30-year regime of Hosni Mubarak in 2011 immediately slowed down the tourism industry.**

A rebound seemed to be within sight in 2012 when Egypt welcomed 11.5 million foreign visitors, an impressive 17% increase from the 9.8 million in 2011. However, the uptrend was quickly halted when violent riots broke out after Muslim Brotherhood president Mohamed Morsi was ousted on July 3, just one year after he had been elected. In fact, earlier in August, fighting in the streets claimed over a thousand lives.

Since then, Egyptian airport arrivals have dropped by more than 40%, and the United States government, as well as most governments in Europe, has issued travel advisories warning of the return of unrest in Egypt. The travel advisories are devastating for Egypt's struggling tourism industry as Europe is a major source of visitors, the sun-hungry tourists eager to bathe in the Red Sea beaches.

In a desperate plea posted on YouTube at the end of August, Egypt's Minister of Tourism, Hisham Zaazou, appealed to the international travel industry to lobby their governments to ease travel advisories and assist in Egypt's recovery.

"The Red Sea area in Southern Sinai is quite safe and sound," Zaazou assured. **"The curfew . . . does not include the Red Sea area. That is a reflection that the government is comfortable for any guest to come and enjoy his or her time."**

The minister added: "We accordingly ask these different governments particularly in Europe, our partners, to lift, even on a gradual basis, the negative travel advisories, not to include the Red Sea areas, and accordingly to enable you as our partners to continue to do business with us."

Egyptian officials are hopeful that the tourism industry will experience a significant rebound when stability returns. "I'm sure and confident with the stabilization of the situation on ground in Egypt, the violence that you have been seeing on your television screens, I assure you, that level of violence is going and dwindling down very fast," Zaazou guaranteed.

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