

Euromonitor International: Travel and Tourism in Yemen

Huge potential starting to be rediscovered

Yemen is a potential tourist paradise, with many unique historical, cultural, landscape, beach, desert and mountain attractions. However, it has remained off the beaten track for many years due to its tribal instability and harsh geography, with few visitors except backpackers and exclusive tour groups. However, Arab visitors have recently become more numerous and European, Asian and American visitor numbers are also growing, albeit somewhat sporadically due to the ongoing security situation, with numbers dropping after bombs and tourist kidnappings. In April 2009 the Tourism Promotion Council published a 6-year plan to develop tourism, and it is evident that the government has finally embraced tourism as a path for future development.



But security remains a major challenge

Security for tourists is an increasingly challenging issue in Yemen, a country which has long been renowned for the kidnapping of foreign nationals. Since 2007, 13 foreign tourists have been killed in bomb attacks and a number have been kidnapped, but fortunately released unharmed. There are areas of the country which are off limits to tourists as tribal disagreements have become violent. It goes without saying that these events are proving disastrous for Yemen's tourist industry, which suffered greatly after the events of 11 September 2001 and was showing strong signs of recovery.

Infrastructure remains poor and in need of investment

According to Euromonitor International, Yemen is the poorest country in the Middle East, with small oil reserves and a weak economy. Despite the potential that the tourism industry has long shown, the infrastructure remains poor and requires funding. Many of the hotels and restaurants are below international standards, and land transportation is difficult due to many roads being unpaved, as well as numerous police checkpoints. The continued security issues have deterred many investors from putting money into infrastructure projects, and it is likely that the worldwide economic downturn will prevent others from contributing.



Internet is not yet a viable booking channel

According to Euromonitor International data, on-line services in Yemen remain nearly non-existent and cannot be considered to make any significant contribution to booking channels in the country. With less than 2% of the country having access to the internet, and 45% of the population considered as living in poverty, the internet is not yet an important feature of life in Yemen. Yet, some travel retailers have realised the potential of the internet as a means of providing information and are developing websites, as are hoteliers, particularly those who cater for backpackers.

Eco and medical tourism have many prospects

The worldwide growth of eco-tourism will be positive for Yemen, particularly as the undeveloped nature of many of its regions is ideal for responsible and sustainable tourism. It is extremely positive for the long-term future of tourism in Yemen that eco-tourism is a practical choice for communities, and should help maintain the country's unique environmental attractions. Incentives provided to local residents will also help to educate the population as to the importance of sustainable development.



A further future niche for Yemen could be medical tourism, with the development of its first medical tourism destination at Damt. The city has an abundance of natural mineral springs, which are believed to have medicinal properties and attract visitors seeking cures for illnesses such as skin complaints, rheumatism and digestive problems. There are a number of hotels in the area, but facilities remain quite basic, and more investment is required to cater for international patients. Medical tourism currently accounts for 5% of international tourism and visitors travelling for treatment abroad tend to stay for longer than leisure travellers.

Yemen Inbound Tourism ('000 people)

Arrivals from:

2008

Saudi Arabia

226,8

USA

16,4

Syria

13,4

Egypt

12,9

United Kingdom

11,1

Jordan

7,3

France

6,5

Iraq

4,1

Sudan

3,3

Germany

3,3

Italy

2,9

Japan

2,9

Netherlands

1,9

Australia

1,2

Switzerland

0,7

Other countries of origin

153,4

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Forecast

2008

2009

2011

2013

Health & Wellness Tourism Sales (€ mn)

7,2

6,9

10,2

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