

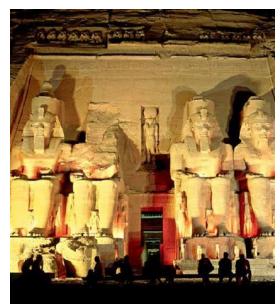
# **Egyptian Attractions Remain Open despite Business Slowdown**

The political turbulence and deadly protests that Egypt has witnessed in the recent months are scaring away the Western tourists from the beaches, resorts and famous scuba diving spots across the southern part of the Sinai Peninsula. Hotels literally remained empty for a period of at least one month prior to Eid. Western governments have stepped up their travel advice to Egypt following worsening violence amid anti-government protests.



The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), UK, recommended that tourists avoid all but essential visit to Egypt, revising their earlier advisory to steer clear of any large gathering and demonstration and avoid North and South Sinai due to increased criminal activity. However, the advisory exempted certain coastal resorts where the effects of the unrest were less evident. Among the European countries, Germany has advised its citizens not to visit Egypt since June 30. Switzerland and Scandinavian countries have also issued similar recommendations. The U.S. State Department issued a stronger advisory, recommending avoidance of non-essential travel to as well as within Egypt after Andrew Pochter, a 21 year old U.S. citizen was fatally stabbed in the chest during a protest in the Alexandria city.

Though the number of visitors to Pyramids of Giza is much lower compared to the levels prior to the 2011 Revolution, local vendors and spectators are not discouraged and they continue to show up in hopes of earning a living. The Egyptian Museum and Pyramids of Giza are kept open for the few tourists who turn up despite the political tension that has been gripping the nation for three years now.



Meanwhile, tourism officials of Egypt disagree that the recent extension of the curfew would worsen the

situation. According to Hatem Mounir, general secretary of Red Sea tourism, the extension of the curfew would help to regain confidence in the Egypt's state of security and both the Ministry of Tourism and Foreign Ministry are making tremendous efforts towards encouraging tourism.

He also said that the security expert from France who visited the country recently confirmed that Luxor, Sharm-El-Sheikh and Hurghada areas are totally safe. According to Mohamed Hegazy, Germany would showcase support for Egypt in this phase. The Egyptian ambassador in Germany added that tourist destinations such as Aswan and Luxor as well as several cities that overlook the Red Sea are absolutely safe and secure. Hesham Ali, Chairman, Touristic Investors Association of South Sinai, is of the opinion that Sinai region was not experiencing any violence and is ready to receive tourists. Violence has mostly been confined to the capital city Cairo and certain other cities.

Despite the advisory issued by some of the European nations, the number of visitors to Egypt from Europe has recorded a 20 percent increase, according to Hisham Zaazou, Tourism Minister. The number of tourists that visited Egypt in 2011 was 9.8 million and in 2012 it was 11.12 million, the minister said at the Euromoney conference. He also added that the number of visitors dropped by as much as 95 percent because of the travel ban issued by the countries around the world; however, the nation managed to not only reverse the ban but also increase the number of visitors from European countries by 20 percent.



Omayma Elhusseini, Egyptian State Tourist Office's director in London, said that the tourism to resorts near Red Sea is still marginally higher (0.7 percent) on year-on-year basis while addressing the World Travel Market conference in London. She also pointed out that webcams would be put up at resorts to show potential tourists that the beaches in South Sinai region are unaffected.

The nation's tourism promotion efforts are currently focused on Europe and the new zones that would be targeted upon in December include Brazil, India and China. The country has signed a contract with one of Turkey's airlines for arranging direct flights to Alexandria and Hurghada from Istanbul. Flights to Luxor and Aswan would also be arranged soon. Following the efforts taken by the Tourism Ministry of Egypt, 18 nations have lowered their travel warnings after ascertaining that some of the areas are completely safe and are not influenced by the events that are happening in Cairo. The decision of the cabinet to lift the emergency imposed on Red Sea and South Sea governorates as of November 12, 2013 is likely further to boost tourism activity.

The Nile, pyramids of Giza and Sharm-el-Sheikh coastal resorts are the most popular tourist attractions

in Egypt, and tourism is vital to nation's economy. The industry employs around 10 percent of the country's workforce and brings in approximately \$10 billion in revenues.

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