

# Egyptian Tourism Suffers Hard Thanks to Attacks on Visitors

It is a fact that Egypt is blessed with some alluring tourist sites; it is also a fact that Jihadists have a long winding history of striking these sites. Such acts do hurt the government by denying it the much needed revenue emanating from tourism. Though unsuccessful, two recent attacks tend to suggest that Jihadists are once again up to no good and are keen on disrupting the tourism industry.



On June 10, Egyptian police in Luxor averted an armed assault near one of Egypt's most popular tourism sites, the Karnak Temple Complex. The attack was averted when police officers confronted the suspected attackers as they patiently sat in a café; waiting for a group of tourists to arrive. When they were confronted, two of the assailants opened fire at the police while the third one activated a suicide vest he was wearing. One gunman was wounded and arrested while the other one was killed. This was a lucky break since it is the taxi driver who brought them there who became suspicious of their demeanor and reported to the authorities. Just a week prior to this, two police officers who had been assigned to guard tourists attractions were gunned down near the Great Pyramids in Giza, another must see site for many tourists visiting Egypt.

## The History of Attacks

The Luxor Massacre is one of the most infamous attacks on tourists in Egypt. This took place on November 17th 1997 and was spearheaded by the Jihadist group known as Gamaah-al-Islamiyah led by the blind Sheikh Omar Ali Abdel Rahman. A total of 62 tourists lost their lives. The government's reaction to this attack was swift and hard, leading to thousands of suspected Jihadists being arrested apart from the Gamaah-al-Islamiyah group, another jihadist group, the Egyptian Islamic Jihad was also targeted.



The government action and the public outcry emanating from this massacre also led to a split in the

Gamaah-al-Islamiyah – the larger part led by Mustafa Hamza renounced violence and called a ceasefire. The more radical faction though which was led by Rifai Ahmed Taha did call for a continuation of violence and armed operations and in 1998 got aligned with Osama Bin Laden when he proclaimed the formation of the amorphous “World Islamic Front”. In fact, Taha was a signatory to the fatwa which called for Jihad against crusaders and Jews. Taha’s group together with Egypt Islamic Jihad now under Ayman-al-Zawahiri would later merge with Al-Qaeda, fortunately though, by this time Egyptian forces had forced most of the militants out of Egypt.

There was a slight lull before the next wave of attacks against tourist sites took place in Egypt again. In October 2004, Jihadists who were based in the Sinai Peninsula attacked three tourists’ resorts, killing a total of 34 people. 31 of these were massacred at the Hilton hotel in Taba. In July 2005, they used three devices to attack tourist’s sites in Sharm el-Sheikh, killing 88 people in the process with a majority of them dying at the Ghazala Gardens Hotel. A few months later in April 2006, the jihadists attacked again, they targeted Dahab using multiple devices; 23 people lost their lives.

In February 2012, two American tourists were briefly kidnapped in the Sinai Peninsula; this was a body blow to the re-emerging Egyptian tourism industry which was still reeling from the after effects of the Arab Spring. It is worth noting that this kidnapping took place two weeks after a shooting incident at the Sharm el-Sheikh where a French tourist was killed and a German tourist wounded. Two days prior to this shooting, some Chinese construction workers had been kidnapped in El Arish.



In February 2014, these attacks against tourists resumed. A group then known as Ansar Beit al-Maqdis which has since changed its name to Wilayet Sinai and pledged allegiance to the Islamic state used a suicide bomber to attack a tourist bus; 4 people lost their lives, 3 South Koreans and an Egyptian bus driver.

It is an indisputable fact that the violence and unrest in Egypt has had a negative effect on the tourism industry in the country. Figures from the Egyptian State Statistics Ministry paint a gloomy picture; from the highs of \$12.5 Billion of revenues in 2010 to around \$6 Billion in 2013, fortunately though, there was a rise to \$7.3 Billion in 2014. Recent attacks are bound to hamper this growth trajectory.

### **The Likely Perpetrators**

The suicide bomber attack that failed at Karnak point at Wilayat Sinai, this is because the Al-Qaeda linked Afnad Misr does not use suicide bombers. If this is true then it does imply that the group is expanding its operational reach. Even though Egyptian authorities are heavily pursuing members of this

group in Sinai and have as a matter of fact killed several of their leaders, the incident at Karnak may suggest that the group has succeeded at establishing an operations base on the Egyptian Mainland. The feeling is that the attack could have been in retaliation of the sustained attack by security forces in the Sinai.

Even though not many tourists visit Egypt during its extremely hot summer seasons, it is important to keep an eye on the happenings there and ascertain whether Wilayat Sinai have succeeded in establishing an operations base in the Mainland and would therefore continue with their attacks against tourists. In the meantime, the tourism sector in Egypt will continue to suffer and so will the country's economy.

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