

SHARM EL-SHEIKH: PAST AND PRESENT OF TOURISM



Sharm el-Sheikh is a metropolitan area, which strategically overlooks the Straits of Tehran at the far end of the Gulf of Aqaba. It has transformed itself from a fishing coastal town to a vast military naval base for the Egyptian Navy in recent years.

The major industry of the city is foreign and domestic tourism. It has a vibrant scenic landscape that includes clear and calm beaches that are popular venues for water sports like snorkeling and diving. Scientific tourism is on the upstream, with a diversity of marine life, coral reefs and thousands of species of fish that abounds its marine waters.

The first tourist establishment in the area was created in 1967 when the Israeli's built the town of Opira. The establishment that was built overlooked the Sharm el-Sheikh Maya Bay and the Nesima area. These included the Marina Hotel, a nature field school, diving clubs and the Naama Bay Hotel.

Beginning in 1982, the Egyptian government had embarked on projects that were aimed in increasing foreign investments making Sharm el-Sheikh holidays more attractive. These projects were undertaken to speed up the development of the city. Among the measures undertaken, was preserving the city's scenic beauty, by limiting the heights of building structures.

The local tourism industry experienced fallout when the city was hit by terroristic bomb attacks in July 2005, that led to the death of around 80 inhabitants including a number of foreign tourists. The immediate outcome was tourist flight out of the country in epic proportion; and booking cancellations in hotels hanging like a death kneel on the industry.

The short-run impact was discouraging for tourism. Government programs to woo investors and tourists back were put in place. Measures included - beefing up security and all-out media information campaign. The tourism industry also implemented damage control measures, like slashing on hotel rates to attract tourists.

More recently in 2011, Egypt's tourism industry experienced another downtrend in the wake of protest movements and revolution that toppled Hosni Mubarak as president. In 2010, Egypt experienced one of its highest levels of tourism influx of 14.5 million tourists. This made tourism the second largest source of revenue for the government, next to expatriate remittances.

The figures were projected to grow in 2011 to 16 million. But in just a matter of days after the revolution, millions of tourists fled out of the country - abandoning hotels and accommodations that included those in the resort city of Sharm el-Sheikh. The incident had devastating effect on the industry that led to business closures and lost jobs.

Egypt is a political epicenter and the world watches the hub of activities that goes on with any government transition. However, the quaint city of Sharm el-Sheikh still remains as top destination for any tourist to have. The city has the ambience of being far away from the political turmoil happening in Cairo. The come-ons, aside from the breath-taking scenic spots, are the alluring beaches and gorgeous resorts that are now being offered at rock bottom rates.

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