

LEBANON REQUIRES REMOVING THE TRAVEL ADVISORY



The GCC countries have been urged by Lebanon to lift the travel advisory to their citizens against visiting the Mediterranean country. The ban which was issued last June was mainly due to the ongoing fighting in Syria.

Gulf tourists account for 60% of tourism revenues and 40% of international arrivals. Fadi Abboud, the Lebanese Tourism Minister, said that **the Lebanese tourism industry was suffering due to the travel advisory and that hotel guests declined the previous year**. He added that Beirut was safe and that the ban should be lifted as there was no reason to continue it. He also added that tourists from the GCC countries represented 60% of Lebanon's tourism receipts.

The Arab Spring and particularly the war in Syria have made Lebanese international arrivals to decline from 2.2 million in 2010 to 1.85 million in 2011 to 1.6 million in 2012. In 2012, the Lebanese tourism industry is approximated to have contributed \$4.3 billion, about 10% of the GDP, according to World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC).

Prior to the Syrian war, WTTC issued a forecast that expected tourism to generate USD15.5 billion or 35.5% of the overall economic activities in 2012 in Lebanon; it also included 461,000 jobs that represent 33.8% of the total employment. Things have not worked in that direction however.

According to the International Monetary Fund, despite the challenges, Lebanon's 4 million population shares a \$43 billion economy that grew last year at 3%. **The tourism industry that represents 25% of the GDP has been suffering because of the political instability in Syria.**

However, strengthening political stability will boost the performance of the industry which earned \$7.2 billion in 2011. Abboud added that a new government was to be formed in the next few weeks and hopefully the situation would improve.

Lebanon attracted \$5 billion new investments in the tourism industry, approximately 40% from abroad last year. Lebanon increased its hotel capacity from 16,000 rooms to 21,000 across 600 hotels.

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