

SADDAM'S PALACE AS A TOURISM ATTRACTION?



Iraqis want to turn the Saddam Hussein's palace into a popular tourism attraction. Even now honeymooners may spend night within the complex and visitors may go round the palace.

Iraq certainly does not attract many ordinary tourists these days. The war torn country has other problems to solve than establishing a sound tourism industry. Nevertheless, the invasion has created some new tourism "attractions".

The former president Saddam Hussein had palaces in many cities. One of them was built near the **ancient site of Babylon**. It is a massive estate in the town of Hillah, some 60 miles west of Baghdad. There are frescoes of the dictator, huge Roman columns as well as lavish bathrooms. The palace was used by the military between 2003 and 2005. Various graffiti testify American as well as Polish soldiers were here. After the military left, the palace was looted and virtually everything was gone.

However, **the palace still represents part of Iraqi history and it draws tourists' attention**. Iraqis decided to capitalize on it and they **plan to turn the palace into hotel**. The reconstruction takes some time but already now, honeymooners can spend a night in nearby houses that housed Saddam's special guard. These houses have already been transformed into luxury hotel rooms. For one dollar a tourist may go round the complex. During Saddam's rule it would be unthinkable therefore some Iraqis welcome the possibility to visit the palace. To others, however, the place only brings sad memories. It is unlikely that it will lure many international tourists. Besides any ideological and security issues there is poor if any tourism infrastructure in the region. What more, apart from the palace, there are only the poorly preserved ruins of Babylon.

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