

IRAQI TOURISM: NOT QUITE GREAT EXPECTATIONS



Best part for adventure tourists heading to Iraq is Kurdistan. Unstable security situation prevents travelers to enter most of other regions.

Iraq is definitely not a place an average tourist would pick as a holiday destination. **Local government, however, hopes to restore confidence in Iraqi tourism.** Although several local universities offer tourism courses and organize conferences, the country will have to walk a long way before achieving any substantial positive changes.

As with other industries in Iraq, new development of tourism facilities is essential since the infrastructure is literally nonexistent in many parts of the country. **Perhaps the best part of Iraq for tourists is the Kurdistan area, which is relatively safe.** They even have their own Ministry of Tourism which promotes tourism to the region and new projects are under way here. Especially, the air transport sector needs improvements. Currently, an old airport is being renovated and new ones are planned.

Also the car renting industry has been considerably suffering from the unstable political situation. Today, however the position of the industry might improve thanks to business travelers who come to the region in growing numbers and spend several days there. This is again mainly the case of Kurdistan where the streets are safer than in the rest of the country.

Besides stabilizing the situation in the country and ensuring safety of tourists, if Iraqi authorities wish to host foreign tourists they naturally need above all to improve its accommodation sector, which has been severely affected by the war. Currently, there are all kinds of shortages with respect to electricity, water supply etc. which make it impossible to meet standards foreign tourists expect from hotels.

Nevertheless, Iraq, prior to all the needed infrastructural development, needs to improve its security situation. Just recently a truck bombing outside Iraq's Foreign Ministry caused damage to the Iraq

Museum. Its display cases, windows, doors as well as an office were damaged in the blast. Officials think that **until the security situation improves, the tourism industry cannot play an important role for the state's budget.**

Actually the only tourism sector that was not much affected by the war was the religious tourism. For example in 2007 almost all tourists who came to the country were Iranian religious travelers and pilgrims.

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