

INVESTORS NEEDED: IRAQI PALACES TO BECOME TOP TRAVEL DESTINATION



Iraqi authorities plan to turn Saddam Hussein's luxurious palaces into a popular resort. Investors are lured by the locals hoping to improve the dire situation of the tourism industry.

Iraq might not be a tourist Mecca these days but this fact does not make the Tikrit officials all the less optimistic. The town hides a precious gem that might turn the whole region in a popular destination - the luxurious palaces of Saddam Hussein.

The 76 abandoned villas spread over thousands of acres and for the local authorities as well as the whole province of Salahuddin they represent a potential gold mine, reported Tourprom.ru. In Tikrit, Hussein built his biggest stronghold 95 miles north of Baghdad. Artificial lakes and gardens are the highlight of the residence that includes 136 buildings and occupies over 1000 acres, according to the data of the U.S. Army. The U.S. troops used the residence as a military base before returning it to the Iraqi authorities in November 2005.

"We addressed various international companies and offered them the opportunity of investing in the palaces. **The villas need to be reconstructed of course but the project could make the region quite a unique tourist destination.** Some of the villas are situated by a lake, while others offer beautiful view. We hope the project will be of interest to the investors," said Mr. Al Fahal, the head of the Investment Commission of the Salahuddin province.

He said that the province presents no safety risk for foreign companies: "Salahuddin is the safest province in Iraq. When the war was in full swing, Americans viewed it as the safest place."

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