

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM - 2

Tourism may seem to be one of the answers to the provision of employment and income to this region and people may well look towards the established sites with some envy. However whilst mass tourism to these world-famous sites has brought employment opportunities and investment, a number of issues and potential problems for the future have emerged.

For example, at Wadi Rum the rapid growth in tourism has resulted in a large fleet of jeeps criss-crossing the desert causing damage to the fragile vegetation and thereby promoting land degradation by wind and water. Thoughtless tourists have discarded plastic drinks bottles and even glass in this otherwise pristine wilderness environment. Encampments offering home-from-home luxuries complete with loud music and lasers are starting to replace the genuine Bedouin camping experience.

On the Red Sea coast just south of Aqaba trampling and the mooring of boats have destroyed much of the coral reef that fringes this stretch of coastline. The beaches are littered with cigarette butts and broken glass. The very resource that has attracted people in the past has now largely been destroyed. This is a classic example of unsustainable tourism.

What is sustainable tourism?

Sustainable tourism is tourism that does not damage the natural environment or adversely affect the culture and lifestyles of local people. It offers visitors the opportunity to enjoy the attractions of an environment without compromising those attractions for future generations. Through sustainable tourism, visitors can engage with local people in a respectful manner that fits in with local cultural values and lifestyles.

In order for tourism to be developed sustainably a number of key issues need to be addressed:

- ⌘ **The needs of the local people** - it is important to involve local people at all stages in the development of an area for tourism. Local people can benefit from employment opportunities in hotels, restaurants, information centres and as guides. They should be involved in identifying specific sites for tourism (for they know the local environment better than anyone) and areas to be kept free from tourism.
- ⌘ **Conservation** - natural and historical sites are popular tourist destinations but they need careful management to conserve them. This might include the use of boardwalks to preserve special ground environments or the use of Perspex to protect rock art from vandalism. A thorough inventory is essential before a site can be opened-up to the public to prevent irreparable harm being done.
- ⌘ **Access** - most tourists travel to sites by road, either in coaches, taxis or private cars. In Jordan most tourists travel in small groups. Roads need to be safe and of a good quality and thought needs to be given to parking and the amount of

free access that should be given at tourist sites. At Wadi Rum, for example, access is restricted to Wadi Rum village with all coaches stopping some miles short at the Wadi Rum Visitor Centre.

- ⌘ **Interpretation** - most tourists visiting Jordan wish to learn more about the natural and historical sites. Information boards and, at larger sites, information centres are extremely good ways of encouraging people to learn about and respect environments and thereby promote sustainable tourism. If people are aware of the fragility of an ecosystem or the historical significance of an ancient ruin, they are much more likely to treat it with respect.
- ⌘ **Local building materials** - people often make use of local building materials to provide shelter. Goat hair is traditionally used to make Bedouin tents and local rocks used to construct houses. Increasingly, however, concrete and manufactured breezeblocks are being used and this involves transportation from further afield. If local materials can be used, it helps to reduce the carbon footprint, and blends more sympathetically into the landscape.
- ⌘ **Water** - this is Jordan's most precious resource. From April through to November rainfall is rare. In the short winter period rain and snow will go some way to replenishing supplies but water shortages are very common and widespread. Fortunately, Jordan has supplies of water deep underground but these are fossil aquifers reflecting a much wetter climate some 10,000 years ago. In many places, current rates of abstraction exceed recharge. Any new tourist development must conserve water and look to re-use 'grey' water for non-drinking purposes.
- ⌘ **Waste** - tourism generates huge quantities of waste in the form of litter, food waste and sewage. With limited disposal services available, much of the waste generated at a newly developed site needs to be processed on site. Where possible waste should be reduced at source and serious consideration needs to be given to plastic water bottles, for example. Compost toilets and the composting of food waste should be considered too.
- ⌘ **Energy** - in Jordan burning gas produces almost all electricity. Renewable energy developments are in their infancy. However, a number of isolated tourist sites make use of wind turbines and solar power both of which are abundant and freely available.

Fig.H6: Images of Al-Dahek



TASK H3: Developing sustainable tourism in the Badia

To the south and close to the border with Saudi Arabia is Al-Dahek, a stunning desert landscape as yet completely undeveloped but offering tremendous tourist potential. At the same time however it is under threat from mineral exploration and exploitation. Figure H6 shows some photographs of this area.

The wide valleys are called wadis. They are formed by water resulting from heavy winter rain or snowmelt. In the past the climate was much wetter than it is today probably accounting for the huge size of many wadis. The uplands in-between the wadis are mostly made of chalk with flints. The upper parts have been eroded by wind and have also been intensively weathered by both frost shattering and carbonation. The lower parts have been smoothed by flowing water. There are isolated shrubs in the valley floor where there is some moisture in the ground. Perhaps surprisingly, wildlife is abundant in this area particularly desert rodents and birds. It is a stunningly beautiful landscape, but should it be developed for tourism?

The aim of this activity is for you to assess the potential of Al-Dahek for sustainable tourism. Work in pairs or small groups to address the following issues and produce a report with your suggestions and recommendations.

1. What are the attractions of the area for tourism? What activities might tourists do here? Does the area have a unique selling point (USP)?
2. The site is some 40 minutes from the main Jordan-Saudi trunk road and access at the moment is only available in 4X4 vehicles. Should access to the site be improved? Should a tarmac road be constructed? Are there any benefits in keeping access to 4X4 vehicles only?
3. Should any tourist facilities be provided at the site and if so what? Consider the advantages and disadvantages of an information centre, a café/restaurant, outlets for local crafts, an accommodation lodge or a campsite, toilets, etc. Consider the issues of local building materials, energy, waste and water. Draw a plan or layout of any facilities that you suggest.
4. How might local communities benefit from the development of the area for tourism?
5. In conclusion, do you think the site should be developed for tourism? Explain your decision in the context of sustainable tourism.