



**National Stakeholder Workshop on Ecotourism
6-7 March 2018, Beirut**

**LEBANON:
A DIVERSE ECOTOURISM DESTINATION
IN THE EAST-MEDITERRANEAN**

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Lebanon's Tourism Sector

- A leading economic sector and major source of income and employment
- Direct contribution to GDP is 7% (3.3 \$ bn) → 124'000 jobs
- Total contribution to GDP is 19.4% (9.2 \$ bn) → 338'000 jobs
- Fast growth
 - International tourist arrivals rose by 10.7% since 2013 to 1.9 million in 2017
 - Tourism exports projected to rise by 6% annually over the next 10 years
- Foreign tourist spending accounts for 86% and domestic tourism 14% of total tourism income (2016)

Lebanon's Tourism Sector

- Vast majority of income captured by the Beirut market
- But Lebanon enjoys a long-standing regional reputation for its rich and varied rural environment in different regions, each with its own natural setting and culture
- This allows ecotourism to expand tourism income generation to the wider national economy
- Can be achieved by:
 - attracting captive foreign visitors in Beirut to ecotourism sites (exports)
 - attracting tourists from foreign markets directly to ecotourism sites
 - increasing ecotourism site visits by domestic tourists

Lebanon's Ecotourism Sector: a green industry enhancing environmental conservation and sustainable development

- Environmental awareness and green consumerism on the rise
- New imperatives for sustainable development and environmental conservation
- Ecotourism has emerged as an environmentally-led form of responsible tourism
- Sustaining ecotourism requires sustaining the environment and this is now evident to all stakeholders
- Environmental stewardship a priority for the long-term economic viability of the industry
- Industry seeks to enhance ecotourist visits to natural landscapes and protected areas while conserving the environment and preserving the integrity of these sites
- Visits should extend to encompass neighboring villages offering varied activities that provide revenue to local communities, enabling them to value and protect their natural and cultural heritage as a source of income

Lebanon's Ecotourism Sector: a green industry enhancing environmental conservation and sustainable development

- There are also a wide variety of ecotourism destinations that are not critical protected nature reserves – many are cultural, agro-, recreational or community tourism sites – that can be further developed and promoted to generate additional tourism income
- These sites also must be exposed to only environmentally sustainable ecotourism activities
- In view of the above, ecotourism refers to tourist attractions, facilities and services that:
 - offer “good value for money”
 - protect tourism resources
 - attract tourists who seek to benefit rural communities and leave a positive environmental and social footprint behind

Lebanon's Ecotourism Sector: an opportunity to explore the hidden, natural and cultural treasures of rural areas while enhancing socio-economic benefits to local communities

- With its diverse biodiversity, rich vegetation and multi-cultural diversity, Lebanon is the perfect location for a wide variety of eco-activities and an ideal place for rural exploration and cultural discoveries
- Enables visitors to enjoy the physical beauty of the nature, interact with rural communities and share the daily activities, traditions and life styles of locals
- Can contribute to the economic and social regeneration of rural areas, the conservation of nature and the preservation of local culture
- Countless variants, encompassing large segments of rural life such as agri-tourism, farm tourism, wine and gastronomic tourism, rural arts, crafts and folks, village fairs and festivals, nostalgic tourism, religious processions, cultural trails, etc...

Lebanon's Ecotourism Sector: an opportunity to explore the hidden, natural and cultural treasures of rural areas while enhancing socio-economic benefits to local communities

- Can create employment opportunities in accommodation and rural lodgings, restaurants and small groceries and can generate work for local guides, craftsmen, local farmers and laborers, food and agri-producers; providing them the opportunity to increase and diversify their sources of income and invest in and foster their financial wellbeing
- Can boost the micro-economy and support small and micro-enterprises without requiring large scale investments
- If linkages are well established within the supply chain, the benefits are multiplied to reach many people in the rural area

Lebanon's Ecotourism Sector: an opportunity to explore the hidden, natural and cultural treasures of rural areas while enhancing socio-economic benefits to local communities

- Empowers local communities and improves social integration, allowing youth and women to become more involved in the social and economic life of their community
- An incentive for locals to conserve their local heritage and creates a sense of pride in their accomplishments.
- Provides an authentic and different experience for Beirut tourists seeking added-value during their visit

Strategic objectives for ecotourism development based on stakeholder consultations

Lebanon has to conserve and differentiate its assets in order to be sustainable and stand out in the competitive market for ecotourism

Towards this objective, our strategy for ecotourism development should aim to:

- Preserve the natural, historical and cultural heritage of rural areas and enhance policies that promote sustainable tourism practices
- Improve the impact of visitor experience, the appeal of rural destinations and the quality of ecotourism products and services
- Link locally produced green products and services to the national tourism sector, increase tourism expenditures and enhance the socio-economic welfare of local communities

Strategic objectives for ecotourism development based on stakeholder consultations

- Develop a regulatory/institutional framework for the ecotourism sector and enforce laws across the value-chain
- Promote the community-based approach for conservation (Hima), in collaboration with municipalities and local authorities
- Initiate customized promotion and communication strategies for ecotourism development in the domestic, diaspora and foreign visitor markets
- Improve common action and cooperation among rural tourism stakeholders

Action 1: Diversify ecotourism activities and value-added products

- Develop new attractions through a revival of historic monuments, activities and events, including international events (such as, for example, an international mountain biking race).
- Develop niche markets, such as wellness and healing tourism, nature tourism, spiritual tourism, gastronomy tourism, agri-tourism, wine tourism, accessible tourism, etc...
- Strengthen value-chains in the rural food, sweets and handicrafts industries.
- Establish rural destination clusters of villages by applying new trends such as thematic trails, varied recreational activities, nostalgic experiences and innovative entertainment.
- Engage local communities in hosting tourists and in the manufacturing/sales of value-added products including organic agro-food products and traditional handicrafts.

Action 2: Enhance linkages between ecotourism and other economic sectors

- Promote/strengthen economic cooperation among ecotourism service providers themselves, including the development of shared ecotourism circuits.
- Strengthen linkages between food, heritage (history and culture) and both rural tourism and mass tourism in Beirut.
- Strengthen/develop linkages between tourism and agriculture (between farmers, producers, restaurants, hotels and tourism businesses), for goods and services needed to support ecotourism development and new offerings.
- Ensure local sourcing by all guesthouses, restaurants and handicraft shops and mass tourism hotels in Beirut.
- Promote fair trade and direct access to markets for farmers and craftsmen.

Action 3: Improve the quality of ecotourism products and affiliated services

- Improve the quality and professionalism of service providers and spread a culture of customer service oriented practices.
- Develop national standards, regulate and set requirements for tour operators, tour guides, guesthouses and eco-lodges.
- Develop a national eco-labeling scheme based on environmental appeal and a businesses' compliance with environmental principles.
- Promote national/international certification and labeling across the value chain.
- Establish a consumer protection & complaints mechanism across the value chain.

Action 4: Advocate institutional support and expand infrastructure

- Prioritize/establish vocational training, including an ecotourism guide program.
- Offer training on hospitality good practices and on hygiene for rural ecotourism sites, guesthouses, restaurants.
- Encourage courses and research projects, at the university and adult education levels, in environmental and historical site conservation, and ecotourism development.
- Enhance the public and private sectors to collect information and data related to expansion and improvement the ecotourism industry.
- Support rural communities in the collection of statistics to help formulate regulations and set short-, mid- and long-term strategies.
- Evaluate and analyze qualitative and quantitative data collected for planning and development purposes.
- Provide tourism planning/development back-up and guidance to interested rural municipalities and communities.
- Establish/Improve funding and investment mechanisms to support the increased commercialization of rural products and services.
- Increase guesthouse capacity in rural villages.
- Develop rural transportation services for ecotourism where needed.

Action 5: Promote new marketing and communication strategies for ecotourism

- *The strategy should focus on a promotional plan for the domestic market, the Expat and the Lebanese Diaspora and the International ecotourism market.*
- Enhance partnerships with local and international media for targeted promotional campaigns.
- Stimulate partnerships with private sector to improve access to financing, tourism ventures and investments.
- Activate the use of media and information technology in promotion campaigns and maps location services.
- Develop partnerships with international ecotourism societies, diaspora networks, foreign embassies, airlines and Beirut hotels for ecotourism promotion.
- Increase eco-tourists' length of stay through offerings of themed ecotourism circuits established and coordinated by various ecotourism service providers.
- Offer incentive programs including discounts for national and international students, youth associations and elderly citizen groups.
- Create online platforms, for different eco-tourist sites to publish promotional news items.
- Promote the culture of ecotourism and all its subcategories and raise awareness within schools, universities, churches and mosques.

Action 6: Ensure long-term environmental, social and economic sustainability

- Advocate a better quality of life for people and nature through conserving sites, protecting species and developing the rural economy.
- Promote the SPNL 'Hima' community-based approach for conservation in collaboration with municipalities and local authorities.
- Raise awareness of the Hima approach as a model built on the involvement of local communities in decision making, the sustainable use of local resources and the creation of economic alternatives for income generation.
- Support local communities and municipalities in environmental conservation and historical site preservation (zonal and clustering approach).
- Involve NGOs, social and cultural clubs, religious institutions and the private sector to participate in the social and economic development of rural areas.



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Thank you for your attention

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