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The Effect of Violence on Tourism: Israel-Gaza Conflict

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When a popular tourist destination suddenly becomes embroiled in violent hostilities, common sense would dictate that people are deterred from traveling to that particular region regardless of how popular a destination it may be. What is not so clear, however, is the expected timetable of recovery for a popular tourist destination from being associated with having an unsafe reputation to the point where tourism levels equate to or are at least similar to where they were before the violence began. Understandably, people want to feel safe when they travel as evident by the sharp rise in cancellations of tourists planning to travel to the Middle East since the recent escalation of violence in Israel and Gaza.

“Clearly, prolonged continuation of intense Israeli-Hamas violence will add to the already toxic mixture of instability in the Middle East and will also impact heavily on tourism to Israel, the West Bank, Jordan, and Egyptian Sinai.^[1] Tourism to Israel has a flow-on effect to the number of western tourists who visit tourist and religious sites such as Bethlehem and Jericho in the West Bank, Petra, and Christian sites such as Bethany in Jordan and Mt. Sinai and the Red Sea resorts in Sinai.”^[2] “It’s almost certain that a continuation of the violence will only have a negative impact on an important industry for the region at a critical time of year.”^[3]

“Before the start of the Gaza campaign, Israel had been enjoying a record year for tourists, with 2.6 million visitors entering the country in the first nine months of the year — a new high and seven percent more than the same period last year.”^[4] One report has the recent hostilities between Israel and [Gaza potentially costing the Israeli tourism sector 1.8 billion](#) dollars in expected revenue.^[5] However, “The slowdown [is] not limited to Israel. The Palestinian West Bank city of Bethlehem, where the Church of the Nativity attracts Christian pilgrims from around the world, had lost nearly half its reservations due to the Gaza violence.”^[6] Clearly any conflict where people are dying will negatively impact tourism because tourists are expected to change their preferences and go for safer, closer and therefore cheaper destinations.^[7]

When can we expect tourism in the Middle East to pick up again in light of a cease fire between Israel and Gaza? A historical perspective might shed some light on this question. For the tourism industries in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Syria, Arab uprisings were catastrophic during 2011.^[8] Millions of jobs were lost and the economies of the four countries have been significantly impacted.^[9] The Jordanian tourism industry has also suffered a significant downturn during 2011 and 2012 as part of the collateral perceptual damage to Jordan resulting from the problems experienced in Syria especially and to a lesser extent in Egypt.^[10]

“The key issue for the tourism industry players in the region is time. Once things appear safe again, tourism picks up.^[11] It took Israeli tourism industry approximately six months to recover from the effects of the Lebanese war in summer 2006.^[12] Among the main reasons for such a rise in tourism arrivals was undoubtedly the relative stability of the security situation.^[13] Even during this period of growth Israeli towns close to the Gaza border were often attacked by missiles fired by the Hamas soldiers.^[14] These attacks however did not threaten the overall security in the country.”^[15]

Judging from these historical references, tourism in the Middle East could pick up fairly quickly because of a cease fire already in place with the implication being that the region is slowly becoming safe again.

^[1] David Beirman, *Continuation of Unrest Hampers Tourism: The Israel-Hamas conflict and tourism*, Global Travel Industry News (Nov. 18, 2012), <http://www.eturbonews.com/32337/israel-hamas-conflict-and-tourism> [hereinafter Beirman].

^[2] *Id.*

^[3] *Renewed Mideast attacks threaten tourist revenues*, euronews (Nov. 18, 2012), <http://www.euronews.com/2012/11/18/tourism-crisis/>.

^[4] *Israeli, West Bank tourism hit by Gaza Conflict*, ArabianBusiness.com (Nov. 18, 2012), <http://www.arabianbusiness.com/israeli-west-bank-tourism-hit-by-gaza-conflict-479966.html> [hereinafter Tourism hit by Gaza Conflict].

^[5] Gilad Atzmon, *Gaza conflict cost Israeli tourism sector USD 1.8 billion* (Nov. 28, 2012), <http://www.gilad.co.uk/writings/gaza-conflict-cost-israeli-tourism-sector-usd-18-billion.html>.

^[6] Tourism hit by Gaza Conflict, *supra* note 4.

^[7] *Gaza conflict to affect tourism industry*, ehotelier.com (January 29, 2009), http://ehotelier.com/hospitality-news/item.php?id=15476_0_11_0_CI [hereinafter Gaza conflict affects tourism].

^[8] Beirman, *supra* note 1.

^[9] Beirman, *supra* note 1.

^[10] Beirman, *supra* note 1.

[\[11\]](#) Gaza conflict affects tourism, *supra* note 7.

[\[12\]](#) Gaza conflict affects tourism, *supra* note 7.

[\[13\]](#) Gaza conflict affects tourism, *supra* note 7.

[\[14\]](#) Gaza conflict affects tourism, *supra* note 7.

[\[15\]](#) Gaza conflict affects tourism, *supra* note 7.