Book Review

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Tourism Planning and Development in the Middle East
   by: Stella Kladou, Konstantinos Andriotis, Anna Farmaki
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Tourism in the Middle East has garnered limited yet growing interest in recent years (Daher, 2006; Jafari and Scott, 2014; Almuhrzi et al., 2017; Timothy, 2018; Hall and Seyfi, 2020). Notably, the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) reported that in 2019, the Middle East was the fastest-growing region globally in terms of tourist arrivals and receipts (UNWTO, 2021). This increasing interest has been driven by the region's rich historical and cultural heritage (Hall and Seyfi, 2020), as well as the economic advancements in certain countries where tourism has served as a catalyst for economic development, job creation, and cultural exchange (Timothy, 2018). However, despite its potential, the growth of tourism in the Middle East has been hampered by various significant challenges, including terrorism, warfare, long-standing political instability, and crises (Morakabati, 2013; Isaac et al., 2015; Seyfi and Hall, 2020), which necessitate careful consideration in strategic planning and policy-making for tourism. Consequently, the Middle East has been notably underrepresented in the international tourism literature compared to other regions of the world. Given these circumstances, dedicating an edited collection to the analysis of tourism planning and development within the context of the Middle East appears to be a valid endeavour. This collection could contribute significantly to tourism research in this area, particularly by focusing on an overlooked region. Thus, Tourism *Planning and Development in the Middle East* sought to address the unique challenges faced by countries in the Middle East region from a sustainability and regulatory perspective. The book aimed to

> "advance the understanding of the positive and negative impacts of tourism development as well as how turbulence, crisis, synergies, and the top-down and bottom-up approaches to tourism development are connected to different problems and implications for local communities, the region and the relation-ship of the Middle East with the rest of the world" (xvii).

The book represents an interesting insight into the "positive and negative impacts of tourism priorities and development, and relevant implications for local communities" (xviii). The main impetus for this book comes from the editors' viewpoint that there is a scarcity of research that comprehensively addresses all aspects of sustainable tourism

development, planning, and governance in the Middle East region. According to the editors' perspective, this edited volume goes beyond the narrow focus on religion and cultural heritage that previous publications have primarily explored, thus broadening the scope of discussion.

The different perspective included in this volume focuses on how tourism is shaped, planned, and governed in the Middle East from a sustainability and regulatory perspective. At first glance, one might argue that the focus on Middle East countries in the book is limited, primarily centered around Iran, Israel, Oman, Jordan, Turkey, Cyprus, Palestine, and Saudi Arabia, while neglecting other countries in the region such as Qatar, Lebanon, Kuwait, Bahrain, Syria, Iraq, and others. The editors acknowledge that "a number of factors made it impossible to publish chapters on other Middle Eastern countries" (xiii). For instance, countries like Qatar, known for hosting mega-events and business events, Lebanon and Egypt, with its unique tourism potential and Dubai as one of the global hubs for leisure, business, and cultural experiences, could have been interesting case studies to include. However, despite not covering all countries in the region, the book still provides valuable insights into the tourism planning and development aspects of the included countries.

The book is divided into nine chapters, accompanied by an introductory chapter and a conclusion chapter. The introductory chapter, authored by Kladou and Andriotis, presents an informative introduction that provides insights into tourism planning and development in the Middle East. It offers valuable information about the tourism industry in the region, including key statistics and figures. Moreover, the chapter briefly discusses previous books that have focused on tourism in Middle Eastern countries and outlines the objectives and contributions of the book.

In Chapter 1, Alexis Saveriades takes a critical approach to examine tourism plans and their implications, shedding light on the evolution and potential trajectory of tourism development in Cyprus since its establishment in 1960. Recognising tourism planning as a crucial component of a destination's development strategy, Saveriades conducts a thorough analysis of the tourism plans and the success story of tourism on the island. By studying its past endeavours, the chapter aims to provide insights into the future of the destination and anticipate potential outcomes. In the second chapter, Elad Almog focuses on the challenges associated with the establishment of tourism routes. Specifically, the case study revolves around Route 90 South in Israel, which serves as a connection between Jerusalem and Eilat. The author argues that this particular route plays a crucial role in linking the two cities as a synergistic entity.

Women's empowerment in Palestinian tourism, with a particular emphasis on Bethlehem is addressed in Chapter 3 authored by Rami Isaac and Wisam Abbasi. This qualitative chapter aims to examine the factors contributing to women's low participation in community-based tourism and identify challenges and potential initiatives for enhancing their involvement, ultimately leading to women's empowerment through tourism. The study's findings indicate that gender integration is not given sufficient consideration in tourism projects, which significantly impacts the limited participation of Palestinian women in community-based tourism initiatives. Cultural norms, traditions, women's social status, and the Israeli occupation were identified as the main factors influencing their limited involvement. Chapter 4 centers on tourism development in rural areas, particularly exploring the strategies and considerations vital for sustainable community-based lodge development in rural regions of Iran. The chapter emphasises the identification of key pillars for successful community-based lodge development and the

significance of sustainability indicators essential for rural areas aiming to implement sustainable community-based rural development.

Similarly, Chapter 5 focuses on Iran and utilises quantitative thematic analysis of Persian-language websites to examine the perceptions of tourism officials and authorities regarding local identity, which may differ from the national identity. The chapter aims to provide an empirically grounded conceptualisation of the dialectical relationship between local and national identities, with a particular emphasis on heritage conservation challenges. It specifically helps identify barriers to heritage conservation that impede the introduction of local identity to domestic and international tourists in specific cities.

Chapter 6 focuses on the governance aspect of tourism and conservation at the mixed World Heritage Site of Cappadocia in Turkey and explores the relationship between conservation efforts, residents' subjective well-being, and the tourism perspective in the studied site. The findings reveal a significant correlation between residents' and governmental institutions' perceptions of the environmental quality in Cappadocia. However, the chapter highlights a noteworthy disparity in the importance attributed to governmental bodies in environmental and cultural conservation within the region. Chapter 7 also centers on Turkey and explores the interconnectedness of sustainable tourism development and place identity, with a focus on the island of Bozcaada (Tenedos) and its association with wine. The authors highlight the significance of strategies that leverage the natural, cultural, and identity characteristics of Bozcaada. They argue that local identity may differ from the national identity, which raises an important question of which identity should be emphasised. This echoes the findings suggested in Chapter 5 regarding the representation of local and national cultural heritage in Iran.

Chapter 8 takes a multi-methods approach and focuses on a cross-cultural study of the global multicultural tourism workforce, with a specific focus on Israel (Eilat) and Jordan (Aqaba). The author examines the "Red Sea Peace Park" project, which facilitates Jordanians working in the hospitality industry in Eilat, and explores the project's opportunities, limitations, and potential for replication. Through the analysis of these cases, the study highlights the importance of human encounters in fostering tourism development and suggest that the success of cross-cultural collaborations relies on building solid relationships based on mutual understanding and the integration of diverse cultural perspectives and beliefs. The study concludes that by promoting cultural foundations through close and personal encounters, positive gestures, and pleasant experiences, it is possible to overcome apprehensions, concerns, prejudices, and fears. Ultimately, these efforts can lead to improved relations between states and contribute to a more harmonious and cooperative tourism environment. Chapter 9 takes a comparative approach and reviews the relevant literature on geo-tourism studies, with a specific focus on abiotic nature-based tourism, in four Middle Eastern countries: Saudi Arabia, Oman, Jordan, and Iran. The study reveals that geotourism has been developed and promoted as a sustainable form of tourism, experiencing significant growth and increased awareness in the Middle East over the past decade. Through this comprehensive review, the chapter sheds light on the importance of geotourism as a tool for economic development and community empowerment in the Middle East.

The final chapter of the book serves as a concluding reflection on the various concepts, themes, and issues explored throughout the book. It provides a synthesis of the key findings and insights from the preceding chapters. Additionally, the chapter identifies

and highlights important areas for future research in the planning and policy domains related to the development and success of tourism in the Middle East region.

In terms of presentation, the book has clear type and has also been produced to a high standard, comprising 172 pages of clear, nicely laid-out text as well as a good solid cover image. Overall, *Tourism Planning and Development in the Middle East* is suitable for tourism academics, policymakers, and practitioners willing to gain a primary insights into sustainable tourism planning and development in the Middle East region.

One of the book's key strengths lies in its comprehensive approach. It covers a wide range of topics, including policy frameworks, sustainable tourism practices, the preservation of cultural heritage, environmental conservation, community engagement, and destination management. The inclusion of case studies and practical examples further enhances the book's applicability and relevance. The presence of illustrative figures, tables, and maps enhances the book's readability and aids in effectively visualising the discussed concepts.

Yet despite these strengths, the book is not without its shortcomings. Firstly, it would have been helpful if each of the papers had an abstract or highlights to provide a concise overview of their content. This would assist readers in quickly understanding the main points and themes addressed in each chapter. Secondly, although covering the various aspects through the case studies might seems interesting, this contribution to the literature may have been better highlighted with a substantial in-depth critical discussion in the chapters. This would have allowed for a deeper exploration and analysis of the topics covered. Indeed, for the present reviewer, there are simply some chapters lacking in-depth analysis and seems limited as in contrast to the existing extensive body of knowledge. Some chapters (e.g., Chapters 8) have only a limited number of references suggesting an insufficient level of theoretical support. Expanding the theoretical foundations and referencing existing relevant up-to-date literature could have strengthened the chapters and provided a stronger academic basis for the arguments presented.

Thirdly, it is worth noting that while the book focuses on tourism planning and development in the crisis-vulnerable region of the Middle East, it would have been beneficial to include discussions on geopolitical tensions, security concerns, and the impact of conflicts on the tourism industry in the region. These crises have significant implications for tourism planning and policymaking in the region (Isaac et al., 2015; Morakabati, 2013; Timothy, 2018; Seyfi and Hall, 2018). By addressing these topics, the book could have provided a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and complexities faced by the tourism sector in the Middle East and the ways in which planning, and policy need to adapt to such circumstances. Furthermore, while the book acknowledges the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism industry in the Middle East, it would have been beneficial to delve into more detail regarding the resilience of tourism destinations and the adaptation mechanisms adopted by countries in response to the crisis. A more thorough exploration of how tourism continues to operate in such turbulent times would provide valuable insights into the strategies and measures implemented by the region's countries to sustain the tourism sector during crises. This would enhance the book's relevance and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by the Middle East tourism industry in times of crisis which is clearly related to any planning policy-making efforts.

However, a single book cannot paint the full picture of tourism in the unique Middle East region. Overall the book provides some interesting insights into various dimensions,

from policy frameworks to sustainability practices, and equip readers with a solid understanding of the complexities involved in harnessing the potential of tourism in the Middle East. The book's content can be useful in undergraduate programs to facilitate discussions on tourism planning, development, and practices in the region. It serves as an introduction for those who are unfamiliar with the Middle East, providing a foundation for further exploration. At the postgraduate level, students can delve deeper into the comprehensive reading and bibliography provided at the end of certain chapters. This allows for further research and analysis of specific topics of interest. Furthermore, the book can be welcomed in industry circles as it offers a useful set of contributions for practitioners. Policymakers and industry readers will find the insights and case studies presented in the book relevant and interesting, providing them with valuable perspectives on the unique challenges, successes, and lessons learned in tourism planning and development in the Middle East in different contexts.

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