

Safety and Security Challenges in Tourism Areas

Lebanon scale





Analysis of Threats and Enabling Factors for Sustainable Tourism at Pilot Scale

Safety and Security Challenges in Tourism Areas Lebanon scale



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OVERVIEW

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REVIEW

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List of abbreviations

CNRS-L	Conseil National de la Recherche Scientifique - Liban
IDAL	Investment Development Authority of Lebanon
LSNC	Lebanon's Second National Commission
LTNC	Lebanon's Third National Commission
MoT	Ministry of Tourism
NCG	National Center for Geophysics
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNEP	United Nations Environment Program
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNWTO	United Nations World Tourism Organization
WTTC	World Travel & Tourism Council

I. Introduction

Safety and security have always been considered as major challenges for the tourism industry. Yet, they may conflict with the economy, although the country can be known with both its developed natural and man-made landmarks. Therefore, security is the primary and most crucial feature that tourists often consider while planning travel and deciding upon their destinations. Indeed, Lebanon represents the best typical example. In fact, it is the destination that was once dubbed as the “Switzerland of the Middle East”. Nevertheless, the lack of both security and safety in addition to many other calamities has made tourism in Lebanon uncomfortable, notably over the last few years.

Generally, Lebanon is a country with limited energy and natural resources. Therefore, tourism is a key driver of economic growth and an essential source of income. The Lebanese economy and the flourishing of its touristic sector is connected to its political stability as well as to its industry which is regarded as the backbone of the economy. During the prewar years, tourism contributed 25% to Lebanon’s GDP. However, recent statistics estimate that currently the total contribution of tourism is around 19% total GDP (IDAL, 2019). In fact, it is obvious that due to geo-political conflicts and environmental calamities the tourism sector in Lebanon has been devastatingly affected (Ladki and Sadik, 2008).

The current detrimental state of tourism in Lebanon is declared openly by many decision makers who stated that “the complicated political and security situation had a negative impact on tourist arrival to the country, notably that Lebanon can suddenly become volatile”.

Many threats are risking tourism, and hamper and hinder the advantages of enjoying the attractiveness and breathtaking landscapes in Lebanon. These hampering factors are mentioned below as follows:

1. Insecurity, including political instability, regional conflicts, and terrorism.
2. Poor infrastructure that may hinder tourist potential.
3. Difficult and inaccessible transportation (*i.e.*, geographically, and securely).
4. Exacerbated expensiveness and high living cost.
5. Pollution, contamination, and paucity of cleanliness.
6. Negative human interference on the touristic landmarks and his footprint
7. Unfavorable climatic conditions (*e.g.*, climatic extremes, heat waves, *etc.*).
8. Risky natural hazards (*e.g.*, earthquakes, floods, *etc.*).
9. Permanent and sporadic epidemics.

This deliverable (related to Tender 03, # 3, ID-LB-6 of the No. CoE4BG-LB-ENI-03/2020) will highlight the threats (natural and man-made) and repercussions impacting Lebanon tourism industry, notably in the coastal zone which represents the primary destination for tourists.

The survey carried out by the Lebanese Ministry of Tourism has concluded that the main reasons for choosing Lebanon are (MoT, 2004):

- Leisure/holiday = 26.8%
- Visiting friends and relatives = 26.4%
- Nature/scenery = 19.2%
- Cultural/historical = 13.3%
- Business/work = 7.1%
- Others = 7.2%

Recently, the most important total (direct and indirect) contribution of tourism to Lebanon GDP is estimated at about 19%. However, this rate might slightly decline or rise because it is largely controlled by the incoming repercussions. Hence, 90% of this contribution comes from leisure spending versus 10% from business investments (WTTC, 2017). On the other hand, most of the tourism income is mainly derived from foreign visitors spending about 86% versus 14% coming from domestic spending (Figure 1).

The tourism industry is always affected and controlled by several influencing factors (*i.e.*, including attractions and threats). Each influencing factor assessing the degree of impact is presented in Figure 2. In fact, it is obvious that both attractions and threats have been allocated a margin describing their levels of impact. For attractions, they are described as: *highly attractive or attractive and charming*, whereas threats are described as: *strongly hindering, or hindering and worrying*.

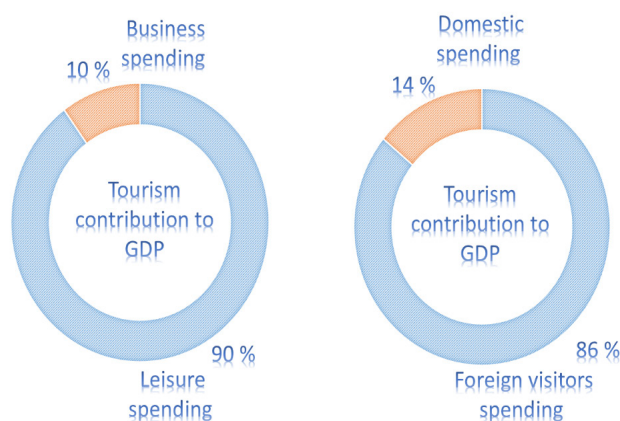


Figure 1. Tourism contribution to GDP in Lebanon (WTTC, 2017).

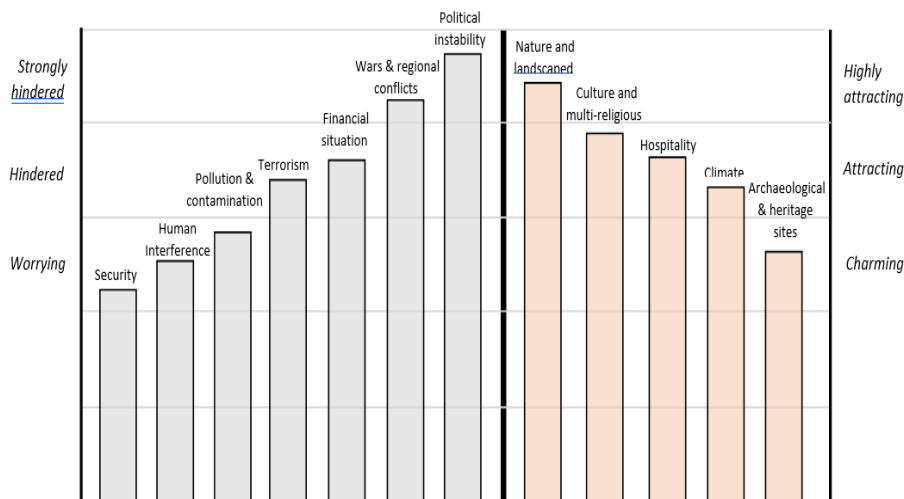


Figure 2. Influencers (attractions and threats) on the tourism industry in Lebanon.

Figure 2 presents only both attractions and threats guidelines. Yet, further details are required while assessing the situation of tourism. For example, nature and landscape are both considered highly attractive. However, some tourists opt mainly for winter activities such as skiing, whereas some others prefer to visit Jeita Grotto or Baalbek archaeological sites.

Threats have a similar trend as attractions. In fact, just one threat can stand as constraints to the tourism industry progress. For example, any existing political conflict or any terrorist attack may not only hamper progress but also it may stop it totally. Apart from the latter mentioned, both natural disasters and epidemics (e.g., Covid-19) can completely halt the entire tourism development cycle.

In addition to the above-mentioned attractions and threats, there are many other factors that can positively or negatively affect the tourism industry. For example, active publicity, propaganda and national festivals can be highly attractive for a lot of tourists. Nevertheless, media coverage of the Lebanese undesirable events has caused potential visitors to have a hesitant attitude towards visiting the country. War, political instability, and terrorism have turned the country into an undesirable vacation destination (Harb, 2010).

II. Man-made threats

Many anthropogenic threats have affected Lebanon tourism (Figure 2). Apart from pollution, other threats could completely halt the tourism cycle in the country. They change throughout the years while affecting tourism on both the temporal and geographic levels.

II.1. Political instability

Political instability is the most detrimental threat for tourism. Besides, the conflicts that arise between the different government conflicting sides due to the wrong and corrupted policies adopted. Hence, affecting the entire socioeconomic situation. Politically speaking, Lebanon is considered as an unstable country due to several reasons that have been influencing the country badly since its independence in 1943.

None can deny that political instability has harmfully affected the most significant pillars of the country, namely: finance, economy, and security. In fact, all the already mentioned ruined sectors have worsened the situation of the country and led to a deteriorating image of Lebanon globally. Hence, failing to sustain the country's reliability and trust on a global scale.

Tourism inflows are often considered the 56th indicator of the political situation in any country, and it has high sensitivity to the existing politics. Based on this fact, political instability in Lebanon has affected the tourism industry through the following circumstances:

1. Postponing/or stopping any tourism-supportive projects or any tourism required improvements.
2. Political troubles and conflicts entailed tourism centralization due to the policy of centralized infrastructure. Furthermore, the limited financial resources have deepened the crisis which in its turn contributes to hindering the tourism infrastructure development in the peripheral areas.
3. Decreasing rates of international tourists because of the Loss of confidence in the usual luxurious tourism in Lebanon.
4. Loss of faith in successful touristic projects in Lebanon due to the Political instability in the country. Hence, losing local and foreign investors who were looking for touristic projects as well as postponing or even canceling any touristic existing project or any progress in the tourism sector in the country.

II.2. Wars and regional conflicts

Tourist arrivals in the Middle East are intrinsically conditioned both by the regional setting and its general perceptions of stability. However, conflicts and wars have existed in the region for decades, especially in Lebanon that has been affected devastatingly by the civil wars, as well Israeli wars, and several regional conflicts (e.g., lately the Syrian crisis).

The consequences of wars in Lebanon have been really damaging and long lasting. Unlike the other countries in the Middle East region, the instability in Lebanon has persisted for a long time, especially with the absence of comfortable political conditions (Figure 3).

For example, the loss in tourism revenue due to the regional war of Israeli Aggression in 2006 was 1,035 million USD (equivalent to 4.6% of GDP), while the loss was 419 million US dollars (equivalent to 1.4% of GDP) after the civil clashes of 2008. This is equivalent to 17.3% and 7.2% of foreign tourism receipts of the years 2005 and 2007, respectively (Basu and Marg, 2010).

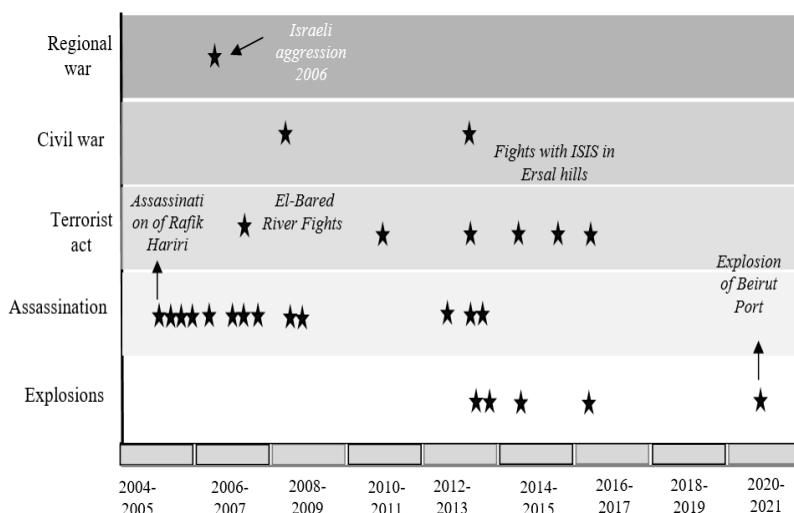


Figure 3. Chronological distribution of different conflicts in Lebanon since 2005.

II.3. Financial situation

Lebanon's current financial crisis is the outcome of several factors and threats including political instability and lack of effective financial policies as well as the lack of transparency, honesty and integrity within the public sector. Currently, Lebanon is severely suffering from a harsh financial crisis that is impacting all sectors in the country including tourism, which in turn is enduring a severe depression.

Lately, operational costs have multiplied due to the Lebanon financial crisis. In fact, it involves the cost of labor, energy, utilities, raw ingredients, as well as the cost of regular

equipment maintenance *etc.* Consequently, this directly affects the total cost of tourism by rising too high. However, due to the huge inflation and the sharp currency devaluation against the USD, foreign tourism might prosper thanks to being highly competitive among the different countries in the region.

II.4. Terrorism

Many international and national studies have investigated the impact of terrorism on the tourism industry, where the term “international terrorism” has emerged. Terrorism is a flash incident, yet it extremely harms the tourism industry once occurring.

Recently, Lebanon has witnessed many terrorist attacks that left a devastating impact on all vital sectors especially Tourism (Figure 3). In fact, several incidents of terrorism can be illustrated to strengthen the issue of tourism sector deterioration. Indeed, these incidents included assassinations, explosions, and aspects of vandalism. Hence, causing a lot of death cases and injuries (*e.g.*, presidents, prime-ministers, journalists, *etc.*), as well as damaging infrastructure. Indeed, these events have created long-term depression in all sectors.

II.5. Pollution and contamination

There are many polluted coastal areas in Lebanon which have negatively affected the Lebanon Tourism industry. In fact, pollution in Lebanon has become a national issue whose impact on tourism is reflected below as follows:

- The exacerbation of the landfill issue and its dissemination in local and international media has urged visitors to become reluctant to opt for Lebanon as a tourist destination.
- Many Lebanese tourist sites and landscapes have become spoiled and distorted by pollution, which has made them less attractive and more harmful and riskier for tourists' health. For example, the sandy beach of Ramlet El-Bayda, which has always been a source of attraction, has become surrounded by two sewage outlets (Figure 4).
- Water and food contamination in Lebanon as well have negatively harmed tourism, such as the severe contamination of the Litani River, as well as numerous wells, cereals, wheat, and spices.



Figure 4. One of the pollution sources (sewer) along the sandy beach of Ramlet El-Bayda.

II.6. Human interference

The environmental footprint of human activities is one of the most important driving forces that usually affect natural tourist attractions. Anthropogenic threats are also a chief factor in destroying natural ecosystems. For instance:

- Forest fires and wood logging are devastating the vegetation cover, modifying the unique landscape of Lebanon.
- Excavation for construction on snowpack areas affects snow cover, which is considered a tourist attraction (Shaban and Darwich, 2011; Figure 5).
- The climate in Lebanon affects water storage, but the excessive chaotic pumping of surface and groundwater influences river and spring discharge has decreased almost by 55 and 60% over the last five decades (Shaban and Darwich, 2011). This may lead to several changes in the country's aesthetic characteristics, Hence, reducing touristic attraction (Figure 6).
- Archeological and heritage sites are suffering from urbanization, which results in the loss of privileges and advantages of these sites. Unfortunately, it has become a common phenomenon in Lebanon which has contributed to reducing tourist arrivals.



Figure 5. Excavating in snowpack results in loss of snow cover.

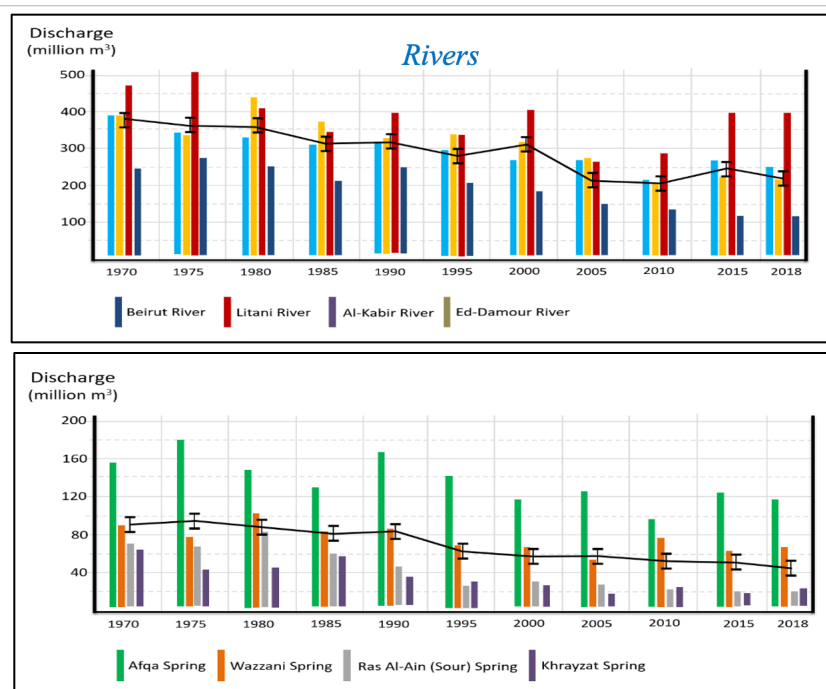


Figure 6. Decreased discharge in selected rivers and springs in Lebanon (Shaban and Darwich, 2011).

II.7. Security

Security is a major aspect of political instability which remains to be Lebanon's primary concern. However, the government is turning to be more proactive in ensuring further foreign tourist safety. In fact, security and peace threats are major issues that have been hampering the growth of the Lebanese tourism industry for ages. This situation has strongly proved that Lebanon has not yet been able to realize its full potential for foreign visitors mainly because tourist attractions have not yet been sufficiently exploited to their full capacity (Harb, 2010).

The security issue has largely demotivated western travelers from visiting and discovering the country. Hence, a national marketing plan was to be transparently implemented to show the positive advances on the security level along with Lebanon attractive touristic products that the country offers (Vlachos, 2018).

III. Natural threats

It is worth saying that in Lebanon, natural threats impact on Tourism is estimated to be much lower than the human-made calamities. In fact, as a rule Lebanon climate is usually described as moderate. In other words, such a climate can never entail or generate extreme weather or harsh natural disasters. Even in case of catastrophes, damage can be low or sometimes null. Hence, offering to tourists an easy access to all Lebanese regions and areas. However, these characteristics are still hindered by irresponsible and damaging human behavior as mentioned in the previous section.

Most of the studies conducted in Lebanon attributed a significant part to the sharp fall and even total failure in the tourism sector due to several natural threats. These studies reveal that climate and weather are highly influential in altering tourist's motivation, enthusiasm, and satisfaction (LSNC, 2001; Riebe, 2011). Nevertheless, this is still away from precision and reality, and it has never been proved that natural threats have slowed or hampered the prosperity of Lebanon Tourism.

III.1. Climate

Lebanon is characterized by a mild and moderate climate which consists of the smooth flow of the 4 seasons. Indeed, the climate always remains moderate in most cases, whether in heavy rainfall in winter or in high temperature in summer. Nevertheless, sometimes Lebanon may witness cases of extreme weather conditions within a limited time interval. Yet, Tourism in Lebanon soars in spring, reaches its peaks in summer, and slightly decreases in fall.

It is obvious that climate change is negatively affecting both Tourism industry in Lebanon the natural ecosystems as well, through the striking increase in temperature and the serious decrease in precipitation (Laouina, 2008).

The changes in climatic conditions and their impact have been summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Major impacts of climate change on the tourism industry in Lebanon
(Shaban ,2014; Shaban *et al.*, 2019).

Changing climate	Description	Impact	Impact on tourism
Torrential rainfall	Intensive rainfall (high rainfall rate within a short period of time).	Results in floods and mass movements (<i>e.g.</i> , landslides, rock fall, <i>etc.</i>)	Destruction of landscapes and several natural components.
Increased temperature	Overall temperature increases by about 1.8 °C over the last five decades.	Impacts the agriculture and water sectors, notably with increased evapotranspiration rate.	High snow melts rate and loss of skiing and recreational activities in snow areas.
Seasons shifting	Delay or in-advance existence of seasons (instability in season dates).	Conflicts mainly with agriculture purposes	Hurts many species in the ecosystem, as well as interrupts the timing of tourism.
Extreme climate	Increasing in the spells of dust and snowstorms, heat waves	Flash impacts on different sectors and infrastructure	Visitors usually avoid/or postpone their schedule while extreme climate exists.

**Indicators of climate change in Lebanon*

III.2. Natural hazards

The existence of natural hazards is controlled mainly by the category of the land components (rock and soil) and their structures, as well as the climatic conditions that may sometimes be triggered by human interference. There are many natural hazards in Lebanon; yet they are almost local (in limited areas). No severe natural hazard has been reported since 1956, when a devastating earthquake occurred with a magnitude of 6 on the Richter scale. This earthquake caused severe damages in urban areas infrastructures and recorded 130 death cases.

Even though most natural hazards in Lebanon are of a small-scale size, they are gradually moving up in an ascending trend due to climate change and human interference (Figure 7). However, several localized natural disasters have frequently happened in Lebanon, namely floods and landslides mainly in wet seasons. Floods might extend for long distances and hit urban areas established along watercourses. Flood impacts in Lebanon are exacerbated due to the chaotic and illegal urban sprawl, as well as to the frail infrastructure. This usually happens in low-land areas, such as Beirut. Landslides exist locally and are rarely disastrous.

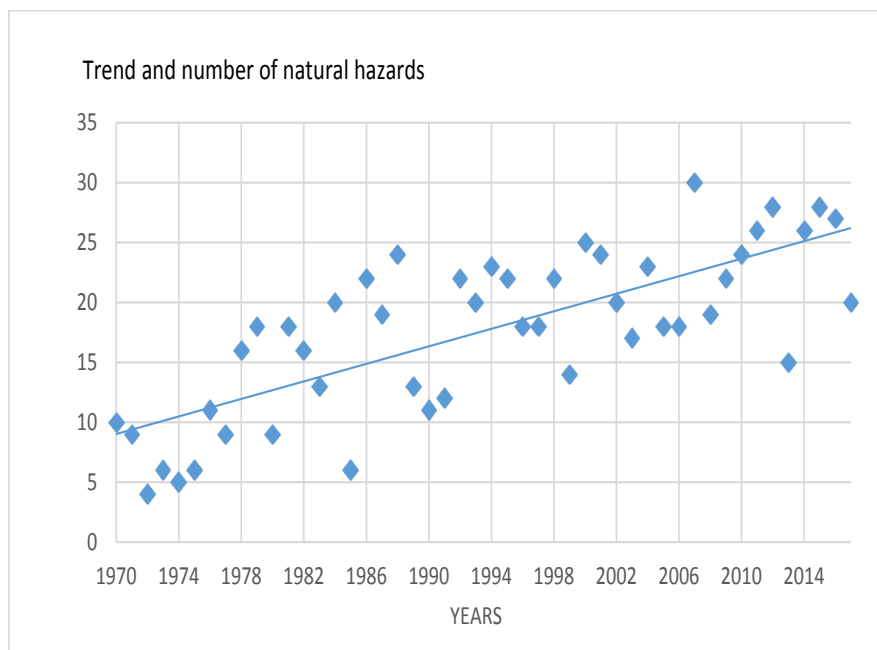


Figure 7. Trend and number of natural hazards in Lebanon between 1970 and 2016 (Shaban, 2015).

With reference to the frequently existing floods and landslides, tourists usually consider the right time for their tours during the wet seasons. Therefore, they limit their mobility only to urban hubs (*e.g.*, restaurants, leisure sites, *etc.*) and avoid reaching remote and rugged areas.

Seismic activity (*i.e.*, earthquakes) is considered a continuous natural threat in Lebanon, because the country is located over the massive “Levant fault” which stretches from the Gulf of Aqaba to Turkey. Therefore, the National Center for Geophysics of the Lebanese Council for Scientific Research (NCG–CNRS–L) launched a free mobile application, LebQuake, which provides information about the seismic activity in Lebanon.

III.3. Pandemics

Lebanon is one of the best medical hubs in the Middle East region. There is an advanced academic and educational background among the Lebanese population and an important part is oriented towards healthcare. No remarkable pandemic has been reported in the country for many decades, until the widespread of Covid-19 pandemic.

Covid -19 is a new cataclysm spreading all over the world. Yet, it represented an opportunity for the governments to get prepared in advance to be able to effectively face any pandemic or any contagious disease. It is predicted that Covid -19 is going to extend for a longer time resulting in instability and disequilibrium both in the economic

systems and social conditions. It is therefore a major natural threat for many vital sectors including the tourism industry.

Lebanon's tourism sector was heavily affected by the Covid -19 pandemic. In fact, the number of tourists fell to its lowest monthly records. Indeed, Lebanon was severely affected by this virus and is now ranked at 41st worst countries in terms of Covid -19 (Worldometer, 2021) impact. Hence, worsening further the viral outbreak, as well as deepening social unrest, and doubting over the government commitment and its ability to make social reforms and to secure external funding, and overcoming the risks.

IV. Measures to conserve tourism

National strategies and policies should be developed in order to face the impact of any man-made/or natural disaster on the tourism industry. Such measures should be taken both to protect humans and preserve the ecosystem. Therefore, serious, and credible studies should be conducted to come up with an efficient marketing plan for Lebanon (Ladki and Sadik, 2008).

In 2001, the Lebanese Ministry of Tourism took a set of measures in order to boost tourism. However, these measures mainly focused on easing mobility rather than developing new approaches and strategies to rescue Tourism. These measures are:

- Establish an active promotional campaign for the country.
- Speed formalities in accessing the country.
- Facilitate formalities in obtaining a visa and extend its validation.
- Motivate embassies abroad to promote tourism assets.
- Improve the archeological sites in Lebanon.

General measures placed for specific types of destinations as delivered by the Second International Conference on Climate Change and Tourism, which was held in Davos, 2007 (UNWTO and UNEP, 2008) were integrated with measures added by LSNC to UNFCCC in 2010. The most necessary of these measures are summarized below:

- Strengthen the role of the Ministry of Public Works and Transport in traffic management and in establishment of new roads to facilitate access to tourism destinations.
- Create financial incentives to encourage investment in more sustainable touristic activities such as eco-tourism.
- Establish “information offices” in regions of touristic importance, such as areas where nature reserves are located.
- Facilitate communication between the private sector and the municipalities involved in touristic activities.
- Look for funds from international organizations to support projects for the development of eco-touristic activities across the country.
- Enhance tourists’ awareness of cultural and sustainable tourism to promote diversification of tourism activities. The Ministry of Tourism should lead the implementation of these measures.
- Raise education and awareness among tourism businesses and professionals on the potential risks from climate change.

Concerning, the current situation of the tourism industry in Lebanon, and more specifically the existing threats whether man-made or natural threats, there must be

more practical measures to be handled other than those listed by (UNWTO and UNEP, 2008; LSNC, 2011). The concept behind these measures has been derived from several elements including types and dimensions of the identified threats, available tools, successful application in different countries, as well as the natural setting of Lebanon. Therefore, these measures can be concluded as follows:

1. Adopt a national waste disposal management plan covering the entire country and based on scientific approaches and techniques.
2. Designate new protected areas and natural reserves, as well as reinforce, control, and regulate the existing ones for their sustainability, noting that many protected areas are witnessing undesirable events (Figure 8).
3. Avoid establishing industrial zones, electrical power plants, refineries, landfills and chaotic unplanned constructions along the shoreline.
4. Adopt “Artificial Snowing” technique especially in years with shallow snowpack.
5. Designate several Lebanese crests where snow is often accumulated as protected areas with environmental controls and isolate them from ski resorts.
6. Establish protective controls within touristic sites to avoid any risk that might affect tourists. In fact, several events were reported in which tourists were injured or killed in Lebanon (*e.g.*, tourist sinking in Jeita Grotto in 2016)
7. Secure suitable roads and transport tools to/from the touristic sites.



Figure 8. Effect of fire striking Tyre Coast Nature Reserve (Manja R, 2011).

V. Conclusions

The Arab region consists of 41.3% of the total world's tourism (Riebe, 2011). However, Lebanon remained the pioneer in the tourism industry in the whole region until the 1980s when conflicts and security instability affected the country, resulting in the dwindling of Lebanon's image, and as a result it was ranked the 5th country in the Arab region after UAE, KSA, Egypt and Jordan.

The landscape characteristics, mild climate and people's hospitality in Lebanon makes it a landmark for international tourism. Tourism in Lebanon has faced several threats due to conflicts and political instability, which have affected the general socioeconomic status of the country.

The tourism sector was one of the most significant sources of the GDP in Lebanon, and it contributes to more than 25%. Nonetheless, it has declined due to both natural and human threats that have had a serious impact on both the safety and security of tourists (Figure 9).

Even though Lebanon enjoys numerous tourist attractions and a remarkable geographic location, it unfortunately suffers from continuous decline in its tourism industry. This is exactly the case of Lebanon, where anthropogenic and natural threats severely affect the safety and security of tourism.

Even though political instability, wars and regional conflicts are the most detrimental man-made threats, it is obvious that the reported threats are interlinked. For example, political instability affects the financial situation, security, pollution, and contamination (e.g., waste disposal management, water contamination, *etc.*), whereas terrorism generates all sorts of threats. This shows that an integrated solution must be adopted to face all kinds of threats.

Climate change is the main natural threat that requires about 22 million USD (LTNC, 2016). However, natural threats have less impact than man-made ones. Climate and natural hazards are usually timely related and occur during specific periods of the year. This drives tourists to select the appropriate time for their visits. According to Lebanese tectonic history, earthquakes occur periodically, and they are also long lasting. However, pandemics are rarely reported in the recent history of Lebanon. However, the country was not prepared enough to be able to contain the pandemic, as reported later.

Reliable measures taken to reduce, and hopefully stop the impact of the existing threats to the safety and security of tourism, became an urgent issue and even a necessity in Lebanon. However, the present measures are still ineffective and only tackle generic issues. In this deliverable, several practical measures have been illustrated to contribute effectively to reducing the safety and security risks on touristic areas in Lebanon. These measures have been adapted according to the already identified threat types, as well as according to the available tools, effective measure implementations in different countries, as well as the natural setting of Lebanon.

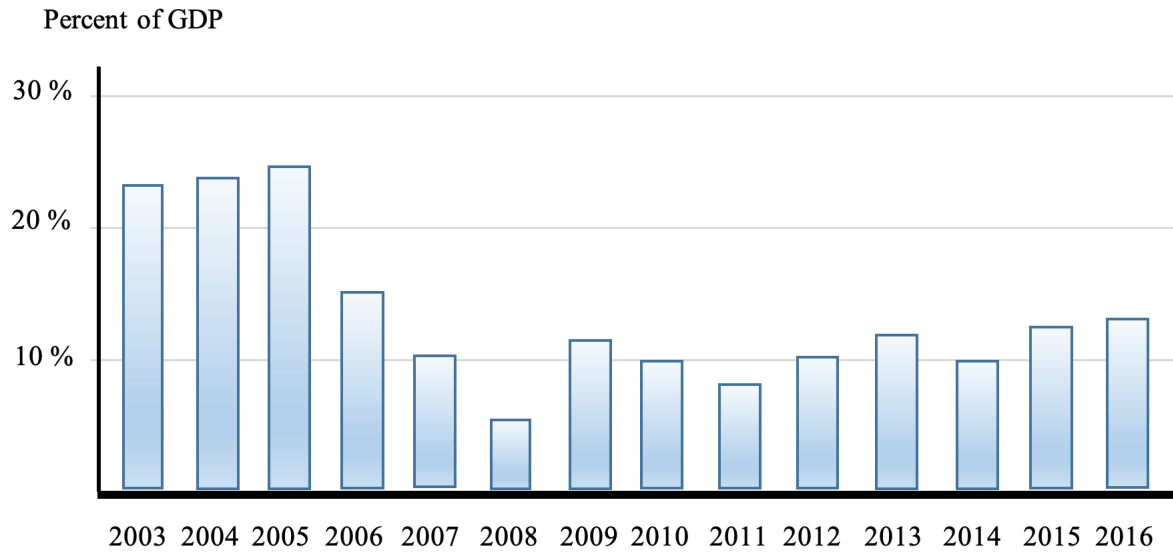


Figure 9. Example of the contribution of tourism in the GDP of Lebanon.

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