

Tourism Economy in Areas at Risk: Humanitarian Crises, Hospitality Culture and New Development Strategies — The Point on Jordan*

Lucilla Rami Ceci

(La Sapienza University of Rome, Italy)

Abstract: This essay intends to outline, also through the acquisition of recent data, a picture of the current situation in Jordan in terms of tourism. Since the end of the 1990s, the author did experience of research with Jordan's universities and institutions and produced numerous publications on the issues of tourism and cultural heritage about this country. Over the last few decades, Jordan has become a popular destination for both cultural and religious international tourism, due to its archaeological and historical heritage. Jordan largely owes its modernization and the achievement of a certain social well-being to the tourist economy (14% of GDP, in 2014 it was represented by tourism). The international economic crisis and being at the center of an area of conflict and tension for years, is bringing Jordan tourism-related activities to their knees. Small and medium-sized local entrepreneurs were previously involved as well as large international holdings. However, the Hashemite kingdom seems to focus precisely on the traditional resource of hospitality. Jordan is now looking for strategies to reinvest, in initiatives for tourism development, what is granted to it by world organizations. To cope with the burdensome commitment of welcoming Syrian exiles and Palestinian refugees, it can represent an incentive for the employment of foreign personnel in tourism and a stimulus to the introduction of new models in education for Tourism.

Key words: tourism, Jordan, humanitarian crises, hospitality, development

JEL code: Z3

1. Introduction

Jordan is a Country in the Middle East with a current population of around 11.000.000 inhabitants; 6,700,000 of which are Jordanian-Palestinians (60%), 1.600,000 Syrians, 700,000 Iraqis and 2,100,000 Palestinians, 250,000 of whom are in refugee camps, over an area of 88,778 km², 4/5 of which is desert. Comparing these figures with those of previous years — in 2015 Jordan carried out a population census — there has been a noticeable increase in population (6,600,000 in 2012) due to the massive immigration to this state from neighbouring countries that have been involved in bitter conflicts for decades. The latest census in December revealed the presence of 926 thousand people assisted by United Nations agencies in the camps.

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Lucilla Rami Ceci, Researcher, La Sapienza University of Rome; research area: cultural anthropology. Email: ramilucilla@libero.it.

With scarce primary resources and a severe water shortage, Jordan has nevertheless been able to take advantage of its natural and cultural heritage. It has no oil deposits which makes it dependant on the contribution of neighbouring countries both for aid and for the employment of its own skilled labour force. It has suffered and continues to suffer from political crises in the area, such as the Gulf War of 1990-91, when the embargo imposed on Iraq had a severe impact on the Jordanian economy. Phosphate, potash and sandstone are Among Jordan's most popular raw materials. The main exported products are fruit and vegetables, phosphate and fertilizer. For decades, and in particular since the event of the inclusion of the mythical city of Petra and its renowned archaeological site in the Unesco World Heritage List (1985), an increasingly important role in the economic sector has been played by tourism.

Tourism in recent years has accounted for about 40% of revenues, thus becoming a fundamental element of the Jordanian economy. Unfortunately, since 2000, with the resumption of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the wars in the Middle East from Iraq to Syria, the economy of tourism has gone through ups and downs. To give a dramatically topical example, since October 2023, the resumption of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has made the indices of tourism in that area to plummet once again. The period from October to December — as indicated by Reuters — is commonly considered high season for the tourist resource.

The new-old war between Hamas and Israel is still unpredictable and the risk for the conflict to spread is a tangible possibility. Jordan together with Egypt have emerged as the most important regional actors to mediate between the two factions. A role that has been carved out over decades of history, after Israel defeated both countries during the Six-Day War in 1967 and in the Yom Kippur War in 1973. Since then, Egypt and Jordan have participated in all negotiations between Israel and Hamas. In particular Jordan, which in the meantime has become a solid ally of the United States in the Middle East, has not participated in any of the intifadas launched by the Palestinians and has managed to build productive security cooperation with Israel, although without turning these relationships into real ties between people and cultures. These relationships are therefore dictated by the pursuit of stability in the Region and, as for Jordan, by having a powerful common ally with Israel, the United States. Thus, following the Hamas attack on 7 October and the fierce Israeli response, Egypt and Jordan remained equidistant, calling for a ceasefire but without condemning anyone. On the other hand, from an economic point of view, this war is not a positive event for any of the Arab countries, especially for Saudi Arabia and the Gulf monarchies that make a priority of economy. Certainly, the potential rise in the price of a barrel of crude oil favours Riyadh's coffers. However, the Saudi post-oil economic transformation plan, "Vision 2030", needs regional stability, since it is based on foreign investment, infrastructure, major events, and tourism. This conflict, on the contrary other hand, may reopen inter-state contrasts and rivalries, undermining the climate of dialogue and economic cooperation in the region. In my opinion, this also explains Jordan's lukewarm attitude towards the possible acceptance of further Palestinian refugees from the Gaza Strip. In fact, there are already millions of Palestinian refugees in the country, taken in during previous crises. For Jordan, maintaining strong ties with its Western allies while and at the same time controlling the segment of the immigrant population that is already putting extreme pressure on the government to take action against Israel, will be the challenge of the coming months, as reported by The Media Line. But this is not a new fact.

In the analysis of data, collected over the last twenty years of research in Jordan, I have detected the strong attractiveness of a State that has extensively bet on tourism for its socio-economic and cultural development. Jordan has been able to favour the resumption of tourist mobility whenever the winds of war receded and there has been relative stability in the area. In fact, according to the tables produced annually by the Ministry of

Tourism and Antiquities, a phase of drastic decline in the attendance of foreign visitors, at the different sites monitored, was followed by a phase of unexpected recovery. This occurred in the immediate period following the US invasion of Iraq, i.e., from 2003 until 2005. This occurred in the years 2010/11, with figures showing a doubling of attendance at major historical sites, until the onset of the Arab Spring unrest and the outbreak of the Syrian conflict. A decisive role in this alternation was played by the opportunity offered to Jordan to benefit from substantial aid provided by international organizations. These entities offer support for the activities of assistance as well as of development that the Jordanian government is promoting in tackling the problems arisen by the pressing humanitarian crisis, caused by the conflicts in the area.

The Hashemite Kingdom has incurred huge expenses in particular to deal with the influx of Syrian refugees fleeing the civil war in their country, but it has reaped some benefits. In 2013, 1.8% (442 million) of GDP was spent on education, health and various subsidies and 2.4% (617 million) in 2014. The new edition of the JRP (Jordan Response Plan for the Syria Crisis), published in 2020, and covering the three-year period 2020-2022, maintained its structure aimed at combining humanitarian action on behalf of refugees with the efforts to strengthen the resilience of host communities and the consolidation of national systems and institutions. The JRP has projected total funding needs for the three-year period of about USD 3.8 billion (about USD 1.3 billion for 2020 alone) plus USD 2.8 billion in budget support, for a total amount of over USD 6.6 billion. Between 2012 and 2020, the Italian Cooperation has invested over 75 million Euros in Jordan to finance the implementation of interventions in response to the aftermath of the Syrian crisis. We can summarize the benefits that Jordan has accrued in recent years in the following factors:

- a) the huge investments that Syrian entrepreneurs have made in Jordan (200 million Jordanian dinars in 2013 alone)
- b) the use of cheap Syrian labour in construction activities and industrial enterprises in general
- c) the humanitarian aid and subsidies of various kinds that the international community has poured into Jordanian coffers (\$66.2 million from NGOs, \$187.5 million from Arab donors, \$445 million from the United States and \$3.9 million from the European Union).

2. Tourism in Jordan: From Bedouin Camp to Five-Star Hotel

Jordan began to be a destination for adventure tourism as early as the first decades of the 20th century. The first seasonal tourist camp of Thomas Cook & Sons in Petra, in the south of the country, dates back to 1925. In 1956, the Nazal family of the Bdoul tribe¹ built there a small hotel (Nazal Hotel and Camp), consisting of 14 rooms plus the same number of tented places, giving rise to elite tourism. The wide valley is home to the ruins of majestic temples carved into the sandstone rock by the Nabataean caravan population who settled there between the 6th and 4th centuries BC. Inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1985, the site has been a mass tourism destination since the 1980s. From this period to the year 2000, in the village of Wadi Musa on the outskirts of the ancient city, large international holding companies built more than thirty hotels. Along a panoramic road² from Petra to the village of Thaibè many other hotels were built in the following years. Since the

¹ For the relationship between the Bdoul Tribe and the development of the archaeological Park before and after the nomination in the WHL, see my contributions: Rami Ceci Lucilla "Urbanization et pauvreté in Jordanie" in N. Boccella, A. Billi (*sous la direction de*) *Développement, inégalités, pauvreté*, Paris, Karthala, (pp. 203-236), 2005; *La Giordania tra memoria e rappresentazione. Etnografie di viaggio*, Armando Editore, Rome, 2008.

² The road was built in 2004 by the of Petra under the direction of engineer Shaddeh Abu Dhaib (Rami Ceci L., 2003, pp. 160-166).

same period, local entrepreneurs have opened small guesthouses and restaurants as well as an Internet point. Headed by the village of Wadi Musa, the first permanent settlement with an agricultural economy in the area, a whole series of service activities related to tourism have been developing over the last thirty years — At the same time fostering the gradual sedentarisation of nomadic Bedouin families. Unfortunately, in the last two years as many as 18 five-star hotels and even hostels have closed, leaving staff unemployed.

With the decrease in tourist presences, tourism-related activities such as those of local guides and tour operators have also sharply reduced. Jordan is a destination for cultural tourism due to the widespread presence on its territory of archaeological sites (Amman - the Roman Philadelphia - Petra, Gerash, Madaba, Macheronte, Kerak, Ajloun Castle, Umm-Qeis, Desert Castle, Aqaba) derived from settlements of multiple societies and cultures (Nabataean, Roman, Hellenistic, Islamic, Ottoman). But Jordan is also a destination for religious tourism. Among these important historical and architectural pre-existences there are several of religious nature that refer to the tradition of the three different monotheistic religions, Christian-Catholic, Jewish and Islamic.

Among the main ones we can mention:

- destinations for Christian-Catholic pilgrims (Baptists, Evangelicals, Orthodox, etc.): memorials of Moses, St George's Church in Madaba and Mount Nebo, cenacles, towers (stilites), site of Jesus Baptism, site of the Beheading of the Baptist (Makawir), Tiberias lake, Umm-Qais, etc.
- destinations for Islamic believers at Tombs of the Prophets, Aaron's Tomb, Cave of the Seven Sleepers (Ahl al-Kahf), Christian cult assimilated by Islam, etc.
- biblical sites of Jewish interest (Mount Nebo, Atrouz, Jordan Valley, Dead Sea, Bethany, Lot's Shrine, Aaron's Tomb (recently closed because disputed between Arabs and Israelis)³. Opera Romana Pellegrinaggi, which is directly subordinate to the Vicariate of Rome and has been active for 80 years, organizes at least six annual group trips to Jordan in addition to small individual groups.

Eco-Tourism or Park Tourism is becoming increasingly popular in Jordan. Jordan, a predominantly arid country, is nevertheless rich in areas with ecosystems of a certain importance due to the presence of rare and protected species of fauna and botany. The Royal Society for Conservation of Nature has been promoting initiatives for years to preserve and, at the same time, enhance these areas. The task is carried out through the collaboration of organisations that also encourage the transmission of local craftsmanship and related productions such as Wild Jordan (Rami Ceci, 2013, pp. 365-388). In recent years, there has also been a proliferation of organisations that promote the development of sustainable tourism. The aim is to practice principles of protection and valorisation while not dispersing the traditions of ancient nomadic cultures such as carpet weaving and jewellery making. I feel it is important to point out the protected areas of Dana Biosphere Reserve, Mujib Nature Reserve, Azraq Wetland Reserve, Shaumari Reserve, Rahme Special Conservation Area, Dead Sea, Wadi Rum, Ajloun Forest Reserve, Gulf of Aqaba reserve that are still so little known in terms of international tourism marketing. The National Parks are also increasingly chosen as destinations for trips and short holidays by Jordanians themselves. In fact, my surveys have shown a significant percentage increase over the last ten years of the so-called domestic tourism at tourist attraction sites⁴. A substantial increase in per capita spending capacity and

³ Abdul Razzaq Arabiyat, chairman of the National Tourism Promotion Authority, recently pointed out that Jordan is a destination for many pilgrims and believers of different religions, since it is home to places mentioned in both the Bible and the Koran. Moreover, recalls Arabiyat, Jordan is located halfway between Mecca and Jerusalem.

⁴ Locations such as Gerash (*Roman Amphitheatre*) and Amman (*The Citadel*) saw a threefold increase in Jordanian visitors from 2006 to 2015 compared to an increase of less than 100% in foreign visitors over the same two periods.

better secondary education have led to a desire among Jordanians to learn more about their local area (May, 2009). The school system has made strong efforts in recent years to spread awareness of the value of local historical heritage.

According to its creators, the recent setting up of the new Jordan Museum in Amman has the exact purpose of directing the enhancement of cultural heritage to the Jordanian population so that they can benefit from it. This realizes precisely the mission of the latest Tourism Development Plan launched by the government. The mission aims at improving the general living conditions of the entire population through tourism and greater knowledge of the territory and culture. In the aftermath of the pandemic, in a general effort to revive tourism, Abdul Razzaq Arabiyat, president of the Authority for the Promotion of National Tourism, recalled the new tourist identity of the country, defined as “The Kingdom of Time” for the important artistic and architectural forms expressed by history and civilisation in this territory. Since the dawn of history, numerous cultures have in fact left their traces here, from the Nabateans to the Romans, the Byzantines to the Aramaeans, the Edomites to the Arabs⁵. This optimistic view was indeed rewarded, when compared to the negative picture in the aftermath of the pandemic, by a net 142% more Jordanian visitors in 2021 than in 2019, at the country’s most attractive sites⁶. The figure for foreign visitors to the country increased by 59.7 percent in 2021 compared to the previous year. More than 1.8 million tourists visited Jordan as of October 2021.

Jordan is increasingly becoming the destination for financial, economic or cultural meetings. Indeed, it is considered by international observers to be a country of relative calm⁷, very well guarded by national security forces despite being at the centre of an area ravaged by conflict and tension. International investors and operators are not only Westerners with interests in the Middle East, but also Arabs mainly from the Gulf countries. According to MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conventions and Exhibitions), in the field of Congress Tourism, Jordan is increasingly a destination for the world of congress travel, business travel and destinations that offer services and contexts to facilitate industry meetings, trade fairs, international conferences. Jordan is also an easily accessible destination for most European countries doing business with Middle Eastern countries. Amman, with its almost obligatory stopover for Middle East travellers, is a favourable destination for international economic, scientific and political meetings. Numerous entrepreneurial initiatives in the hotel sector, which slowed down after the 2008 crisis, are now clearly on the upswing. Evident sign of this has been the nomination, as early as 2011, of the King Hussein Bin Talal Convention Centre (Dead Sea, 30 km from Amman) as the best convention centre in the Middle East⁸. The Centre is equipped to host meetings of international appeal. But also the full resumption of work on the redevelopment of Abdali, Amman’s business district, with 10 conference halls, city mall, restaurants, shops, and cultural centres. As part of the retraining of this area, which was abandoned in 2009 due to the international economic crisis that blocked foreign financing⁹, the city’s most modern facilities, such as hotels of

⁵ Press conference at Expo Dubai, January 2022.

⁶ Source: *Jordan Tourism Strategy 2021 to 2025*, p. 7. After the long period of crisis due to the pandemic, Jordan’s tourism revenue is estimated to have increased during the last 10 months by 61.2% to reach USD 2.1 billion compared to the corresponding period in 2020.

⁷ Despite the fact that the 2015/2016 budget had indicated that public debt, (accounting for 85% of GDP at the end of 2014), would increase by the end of 2016 to over 90% of GDP, yet investment in Jordan has remained at a relatively stable level. In recent years Jordan has been strength to present itself as a stable and secure country for the investors. A fact of enormous relevance in a region marked by strong political instability in its main political players with continuing tensions leading to the latest dramatic events of this year.

⁸ The nomination made by the *Leading Business Travel & magazine Business Destinations*.

⁹ On 12 May 2015, the Jordanian authorities launched the new long-term socio-economic development strategy, which will also form the basis of the future Cooperation Agreement with the International Monetary Fund “Vision 2025”. It includes some 400 policies

major international chains, Amman's tallest skyscraper, and the most exclusive flats, have been built in a few years. Strategically located in the centre of Amman, Abdali Boulevard is gaining the title of the new social and commercial centre of the Jordanian capital. It hosts the most renowned companies, shops and entertainment venues, seamlessly intertwining business and leisure in the heart of the city. The current implementation of laws on public-private partnership, investment and tax system reform represent the local authorities' desire to stimulate economic recovery and encourage the inflow of international investors. The Vision 2025 National Strategy, launched in May 2015, has pursued the goal of promoting sustainable and inclusive growth in the medium to long term, possibly by reducing Jordan's dependence on international aid.

Unfortunately, the continuation of the war scenarios, with the worsening of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict following the infamous attack by Hamas forces on 7 October¹⁰, is also having a negative impact on another sector of tourism : the tourism of major events. Many companies had begun to choose Jordan as its privileged destination due to the incomparable beauty of many of its natural settings. In fact, Jordan offers locations of great charm, from Wadi Rum to the Gulf of Aqaba, as well as the castles of the desert and the prodigious and daring ruins of the Temples of Petra, suitable for holding major events such as concerts, rallies, exhibitions, and historical re-enactments. A famous concert held for the commemoration of Luciano Pavarotti in the evocative Plain of Bheida, near Petra, organized in 2008 by UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner), WFP (United Nations World Food Programme) and PNT (Petra National Trust) that gathered celebrities and journalists from all over the world, had raised hopes for a new tourist outlet based on the organization of events of international resonance.

3. The National Tourism Strategy and the Objectives of the Long-Term Tourism Development Plan

The statements in the National Tourism Strategy 2004-2010 already show how Jordan gives tourism an important function in the long-term development of the greater social welfare of its citizens. The Hashemite Kingdom sees tourism as a dynamic and essential sector whose mission is to develop a sustainable economy through the participation of governmental bodies, the private sector and civil society as a whole in expanding employment, business opportunities, social benefits, and industrial profits. The aim of NTS 2004-2010 was to double the turnover of the tourism sector by 2010. Having partly reabsorbed the disastrous effects of the war in Iraq, in the aftermath of 2006 there was an undeniable upswing in foreign tourism, which doubled its presences in 2010 at Jordan's main archaeological sites, such as Petra, Gerash and the Amman Archaeological Museum (Tables 1-2). The enthusiasm generated by the sharp upturn in tourist arrivals at the end of the first decade of the new millennium inspires the contents of the Jordanian Strategic Tourism Plan issued for the five-year period 2011-2015. It aims to make Jordan a distinctive destination that offers multiple and diverse tourism experiences

and measures to promote *equitable and sustainable* economic development, sound fiscal and monetary policies, and increased competitiveness over the coming decade. Perspectives widely reiterated in the document *Jordan Tourism Strategy 2021 to 2025*, the main objectives of which include: increasing the GDP growth rate from 3.1 to 7.5 percent, reducing the poverty rate from 14% to 8% and the unemployment rate from 12.2 to 8.5%. In addition, the strategy aims to increase the female participation rate in the labour market from the current 15 to 24%.

¹⁰ Just over a month ago, some 1,500 men of the terrorist organization Hamas rampaged through villages in southern Israel: 1,400 people were murdered and more than 240 kidnapped. Israel's reaction is not long in coming. Bombs are dropped on buildings in Gaza and on hospitals in an effort to flush out the Hamas leaders responsible for the attack on the kibbutzim. The hunt for Hamas terrorists throughout the territory, the fear of the repercussions on the fragile stability of the surrounding countries, particularly in Hezbollah-controlled Lebanon, have in a short time once again cast over the Middle East the terrifying cone of shadow of a perennial conflict that is difficult to heal.

capable of enriching both guests and hosts. Initiatives should aim at expanding the competitiveness of the tourism industry as a whole, through product innovation, depersonalization of tourist destinations, increased attractiveness of sites for a wider range of visitors, in particular by strengthening the private sector. This strategy seems to be bearing fruit. In fact, in 2019 there was growth both in the number of presences (5.3 million, equal to +7% compared to 2018) and in the hotel occupancy rate (which leads to a general increase in prices), largely thanks to the development of “low cost” airlines that guarantee multi-week connections with the EU and Russia. Italian tourists in Jordan doubled to around 65,000 on an annual basis: there were 29,444 in 2018.

The global pandemic caused by COVID-19 has slowed down this project of development which should have boosted domestic strategic resources in response of a gradual decrease in external international aid. The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Jordanian economy have highlighted the criticalities of a still fragile economic and productive fabric. However, the GDP figures turned out to be less severe than expected. Initially, the Central Bank of Jordan, after a cyclical figure of -3.6% recorded in mid-2020, had projected a 5% drop in GDP at the end of the same year, whereas on the contrary, GDP was down by only 1.6 points. During 2021 and 2022, there was a moderate recovery and a pick-up in international trade.

The cautious reopening of the borders with Iraq, besides it was a source of concern for the cases of contagion found at the border during the Pandemic, has provided only a limited boost to the Jordanian economy so far. It has fallen far short of the optimistic expectations of local entrepreneurs, due to the obsolescence of infrastructure, means of transport, and an acquired introversion to the domestic market by local companies. This less-than-stellar scenario was aggravated by the closure, imposed by anti-COVID measures in 2020/21, to the international tourism market. Tourism in Jordan was worth 16% of GDP in 2019 and was down by more than 85% at the end of 2020.

Table 1 Monthly Number of Visitors to Petra by Nationality 2005-2006

Month	التغير النسبي Relative Change 06/05			2006			2005			الشهر
	المجموع	أردني	أجنبي	المجموع	أردني	أجنبي	المجموع	أردني	أجنبي	
	Total	Jordanian	Foreign	Total	Jordanian	Foreign	Total	Jordanian	Foreign	
January	52,8%	42,5%	55,6%	24.843	4.976	19.867	16.258	3.492	12.766	كانون ثاني
February	18,6%	-22,6%	26,0%	22.568	2.225	20.343	19.024	2.874	16.150	شباط
March	-4,4%	-7,2%	-3,5%	42.617	10.443	32.174	44.600	11.250	33.350	آذار
April	19,3%	17,8%	20,1%	68.613	23.593	45.020	57.528	20.028	37.500	نيسان
May	1,0%	-20,0%	6,2%	35.705	5.653	30.052	35.368	7.068	28.300	ايار
June	-12,0%	-9,6%	-12,5%	21.027	3.794	17.233	23.898	4.198	19.700	حزيران
July	-19,8%	5,5%	-30,2%	21.374	8.221	13.153	26.645	7.795	18.850	تموز
August	-28,8%	51,8%	-52,0%	22.713	10.835	11.878	31.881	7.139	24.742	آب
September	-50,6%	-46,8%	-51,7%	15.845	3.646	12.199	32.107	6.857	25.250	ايلول
October	-26,0%	315,9%	-38,5%	26.594	5.298	21.296	35.924	1.274	34.650	تشرين اول
November	-23,9%	11,4%	-28,6%	32.142	5.549	26.593	42.229	4.979	37.250	تشرين ثاني
December	-8,7%	-16,2%	-7,0%	25.325	4.116	21.209	27.724	4.914	22.810	كانون اول
Total	-8,6%	7,9%	-12,9%	359.366	88.349	271.017	393.186	81.868	311.318	المجموع

Source : Ministry of Tourism & Antiquities

المصدر : وزارة السياحة والآثار

Table 2 Monthly Number of Visitors to Petra by Nationality 2009-2010

Month	التغير النسبي Relative Change 10/09			2010			2009			الشهر
	المجموع Total	أردني Jordanian	أجنبي Foreign	المجموع Total	أردني Jordanian	أجنبي Foreign	المجموع Total	أردني Jordanian	أجنبي Foreign	
January	42,3%	27,5%	43,9%	57.368	5.072	52.296	40.322	3.978	36.344	كانون ثاني
February	64,3%	44,0%	66,1%	59.258	4.069	55.189	36.057	2.825	33.232	تباط
March	46,2%	6,3%	51,1%	102.918	8.193	94.725	70.390	7.709	62.681	اذار
April	23,9%	-15,7%	34,0%	126.970	17.555	109.415	102.489	20.819	81.670	نيسان
May	42,4%	-35,0%	57,3%	98.201	7.230	90.971	68.977	11.131	57.846	ايار
June	17,7%	5,4%	19,9%	48.664	6.663	42.001	41.346	6.319	35.027	حزيران
July	23,4%	4,5%	32,4%	56.355	15.500	40.855	45.680	14.828	30.852	تموز
August	3,0%	-56,5%	22,4%	51.497	5.335	46.162	49.988	12.267	37.721	اب
September	23,0%	-10,4%	28,9%	74.551	8.246	66.305	60.622	9.200	51.422	ايلول
October	17,6%	0,2%	18,7%	124.466	6.635	117.831	105.866	6.621	99.245	تشرين اول
November	23,0%	48,0%	21,0%	106.943	9.442	97.501	86.933	6.380	80.553	تشرين ثاني
December	16,9%	46,3%	15,0%	68.094	5.127	62.967	58.268	3.505	54.763	كانون اول
Total	27,2%	-6,2%	32,5%	975.285	99.067	876.218	766.938	105.582	661.356	المجموع

Source : Ministry of Tourism & Antiquities

المصدر : وزارة السياحة والآثار

Source: Jordan National Tourism Strategy (2004-2010). Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities website: <http://www.tourism.jo>

However, already in the first half of 2021 there was a new unexpected increase in tourism in Jordan that can only be explained by a psycho-anthropological approach. Already in the spring of 2021 there were very noticeable signs of an upturn in tourism activities as the first effects of the pandemic vaccine both in Italy and in Europe. The enthusiasm detected is immediately reflected in the tourist destinations favoured by these countries in the pre-pandemic years. As an observer of tourism trends in Jordan for many years, I am therefore not surprised by the surge in data shown in Table 3. As a matter of fact, at the beginning of the year 2021, we read an astonishing +59.7% of visitors compared to the same period in 2020. Between January and November 2021, more than 1,807,225 tourists travelled to Jordan. Income from tourism in turn increased by 61% compared to the same period the previous year. Petra alone, a wonder of the world and WHL site¹¹, reached 145,087 visitors.

4. Impact of Syrian Refugees on the Jordanian Economy: An Outlet for the Recovery of the Tourism Economy?

The 7th Conference on “Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region” was held on 15 June 2023 in Bruxelles on the initiative of the EU. The conference to support the country that has experienced more than a decade of war has the dual objective of mobilizing humanitarian and financial aid for the Syrian people. Not only in Syria but also in neighbouring countries and host communities throughout the region. The aim of this annual conference is also to engage the international community in supporting the project of a comprehensive and credible political solution to the conflict in Syria, in line with UN Security Council Resolution 2254 (2015). Since 2011, the EU and its Member States have been the largest donors of assistance to Syria and the hosting countries for Syrian refugees, mainly Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan by providing over €30 billion. During the last conference,

¹¹ World Heritage List, the list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Petra has been on it since 1985.

donors pledged a sum of more than ten billion Euros in loans and subsidies, a figure not far short of that requested by the UN. Of this sum, the bulk of the non-reimbursable funding (4.16 billion Euro) comes from Europe and its member states. A commitment proposed by the European Commission that is the sum of the 560 million already planned for this year, of an extra billion and another billion and a half for 2023. At the conclusion of the work of the Donors' Conference for the humanitarian crisis in Syria, the refugee host countries were clear about the schedule of commitments required in order to access international credit. Jordan will have to fulfil the following commitments in the short term:

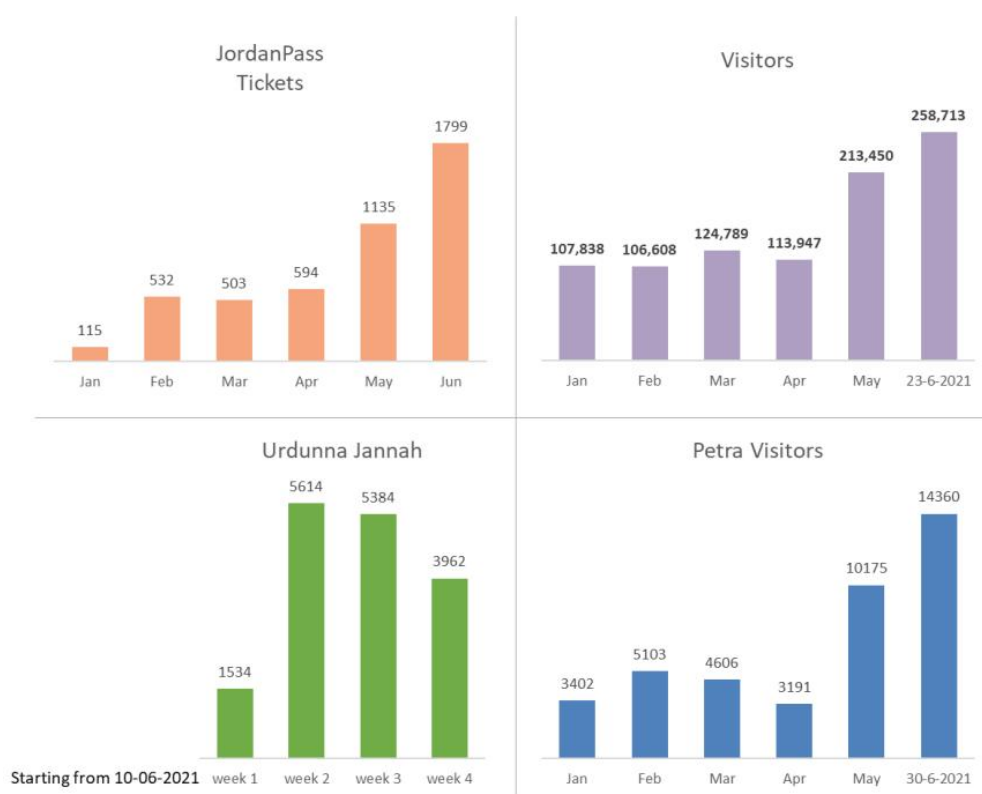
a) to plan the creation of jobs for Syrian refugees, who have been living at the margins of the Jordanian labour market;

b) to abandon the mere logic of welfarism towards refugees;

c) to bring these segments of the population into the labour market in order to transform a burden into an opportunity of development, functional to King Abdullah II's project of building "a prosperous and resilient Jordan". A project for which the foundations were already laid in the Jordan National Tourism Strategy 2011-2015.

d) to take various measures¹² to facilitate Syrians' access to work. 78,000 jobs in the short term and thousands more in the coming years (UNHCR - United Nations High Commission for Refugees).

Table 3 Tourism Trends in Jordan



Source: Jordan National Tourism Strategy 2021 to 2025. Performance 2021.

¹² One of these, enacted from April to July 2016, was called a "grace period" during which employers could regularize their Syrian employees free of charge. The Syrians in turn obtained the work permit by presenting the documents issued by UNHCR to asylum seekers or the identity cards of the Jordanian Ministry of the Interior (whereas previously a passport or legal entry document was required, of which Syrians often lacked).

However, the possibility of employing labour is not the only reason behind the sudden rise in tourist arrivals in Jordan, but real estate investment in tourist reception facilities certainly is as well. Indeed, although investments in construction projects have slowed down due to the geopolitical situation in the region, it is worth noting that overall, the construction sector contributed around 4.3% of the Kingdom's total GDP in 2011, according to data provided by the Housing and Urban Development Corporation (HUDC). In 2012, 6,717 building permits were issued. Obtaining a building permit in Jordan is easier than in other neighbouring countries in the region, including Turkey, Lebanon and Egypt. According to a Doing Business 2012 report compiled by the World Bank and the International Finance Corporation, it took about 70 days to obtain a building permit in Jordan in 2012, which represented a decrease of 22 days compared to 2009 estimates. Similarly, the cost of obtaining a building permit (as a percentage of per capita income) fell by almost 37 per cent between 2009 and 2012, while the number of procedures required to secure a building permit decreased from 20 steps in 2009 to 17 steps in 2012. Jordan has also moved in terms of training and security. On 12 April 2018 in Amman the first collaboration agreement on safety and training of workers in the construction sector was signed by the Minister of Public Works and Construction, Sami Halaseh, and the Director of the CESF, Construction Safety and Training Center of Perugia, Cristiana Bartolucci. The Italian Ambassador to Jordan, Giovanni Brauzzi, was present.

These elements can help us understand why, despite the fact that tourism has suffered a sharp drop in the number of visitors over the last ten years, the construction of new hotel facilities goes hand in hand with increasingly frequent restoration work on sites throughout the country. For some time now, archaeological excavations, once carried out exclusively by foreign missions, have also involved young Jordanian and Syrian archaeologists, trained in training centres (the one in Madaba, to name one) that are working to create experts in every sector complementary to tourism. The policy of developing and promoting tourist attractions makes Jordan a country capable of meeting multiple expectations. Great impetus has also been given to conference and therapeutic tourism, with the construction of large hotels and renowned spa centres, especially in the capital, in the Dead Sea area and on the Red Sea coast. The presence and gradual integration of Syrian and Iraqi technicians is causing the utilities sector and the energy sector, two promising avenues for Jordan's construction sector, to grow again.

The Aqaba Water Company has recorded an increase in demand of about 127% since 2004. As the demand for water in the city continues to grow, the authorities aim at building a large seawater desalination plant, known as the Jordan Red Sea Project (JRSP). The project will be led by JRSP, which will launch several tenders to complete the master planning submitted by several companies in 2012.

5. New Industrial Initiatives That Will Boost Tourism: From Exotic Mirage to Global Business

The industrial initiative linked to the possibility of foreign investment in Jordan could be a reason to boost tourism. Since 2013, contacts have been underway between the Governorate of Aqaba, a city on the Red Sea, and the province of Trapani in Sicily (Italy) to start trade exchanges (marble and salt from Trapani for phosphates and agricultural products from the province of Aqaba). To do this, the creation of a direct air link between Trapani and Aqaba, which already has an airport, is crucial: it would shorten distances and avoid a stopover in Amman. Royal Jordanian Airlines is willing to provide aircraft from its fleet. Aqaba's King Hussein International Airport (KHIA) has long been undergoing an upgrade. A project to rehabilitate the passenger terminal began in 2012 and was

completed at the end of the same year. The cost of the project is USD 11.25 million. Other rehabilitation projects for a total of \$33.76 million are underway, such as those focused on the development of the airport's taxiway drainage system, taxi service and aprons. There is a project for the construction of a new terminal to be completed in 2025 at an estimated cost of \$28.13 million. The Italian Condotte d'acqua spa company is involved in the airport expansion works. The works involve the construction of new aircraft parking areas of 165,000 square metres, connecting ramps to the runways, service roads, and stormwater hydraulic systems.

The mythical fortified village overlooking the Red Sea that let the legendary British commander Thomas Edward Lawrence, known as Lawrence of Arabia, escape the well-known cry "Aqaba, Aqaba!"¹³ has been given a new lease of life as a well-equipped beach destination for global tourism. Ayla Oasis in Jordan is a futuristic project involving the transformation of 430 hectares of desert into an oasis criss-crossed by lagoons and surrounded by hotels, residences and recreational facilities, within an area characterized by sand dunes up to 8 metres high. The engineering challenge consisted in lowering the underlying water table by approximately 18 metres to allow the project works to be carried out.

The Ayla project, carried out by Condotte d'acqua Spa, is located on an area close to the border with Israel, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Aqaba is an integral part of Jordan's golden triangle of tourism: the natural and man-made landscapes of Petra, the sands and rocks of the Wadi Rum desert and the coral reefs of the Gulf of Aqaba make it one of the country's major attractions. The Italian company was commissioned to turn more than 400 hectares of desert overlooking the shores of the Red Sea for just thirty klm before the Arabian border, for the construction of a high-level tourist resort with hotels, parks, and beaches. Applied Technology Management, a US company provided feasibility studies for the lagoon portion of the project. The Italian company Gruppo Ingemar is responsible for both the design and construction of floating structures on the Ayla Oasis Marina. The Oasis has an investment value for the construction of the lagoon and infrastructure of \$351.6m, while the next phase of the project is expected to cost \$281.3.

In the city of Aqaba¹⁴, there are many ongoing projects related to tourism. Although there are many tourist attractions, the city has a serious shortage of hotel rooms. Marsa Zayed is a \$10 billion redevelopment project in Aqaba. Marsa Zayed, named in memory of the Late Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan, is located in the city centre of Aqaba with 2 km prime waterfront and it is one of the most significant developments in the region. Emad Kilani, creator of the Marsa Zayed project and CEO of Al Maabar, an Emirati company based in Abu Dhabi, reported that in order to attract large tour operators, the city would need at least 7,000 hotel rooms. The Marsa Zayed project includes eight hotels with 3,000 rooms and a cruise ship terminal, as well as around 3,000 residential and retail units, offices and recreational spaces. The project has started its first phase of development, which includes a residential and shopping area (Al Rha Village), a mosque (Sheikh Zayed Masjid) and 200,000 square metres for infrastructure development. When all phases of the project will be completed, Marsa Zayed will provide over 6.4 million square metres of commercial space. Arabtech Jardaneh, an Amman-based engineering

¹³ Thomas Edward Lawrence captain of the British Army led the revolt of the Bedouin tribes against the rule of the Ottoman Empire in the Middle East, during the Great War. He became an icon of the "desert peoples" desire for freedom and was called Lawrence of Arabia. The cry "Aqaba! Aqaba!" with which he incited the tribes in the last attack to take the important port on the Red Sea. (T.E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* an account of Lawrence's part in the Arab Revolt.

¹⁴ The Jordanian government has gone to great lengths to attract investment to this spectacular, albeit geomorphologically impervious area. From the beginning of 2022, for the Aqaba area alone, there will be a 5% corporate income tax rate (excluding banks, insurance companies and land transport), exemption from sales tax for most goods and services, exemption from property tax and the possibility of employing up to 70% foreign employees (as an exception to the general rule).

and design architecture company, was appointed to design the infrastructure for the first phase, and the contracting firm Hussein Atieh & Sons Company — also based in Amman — was awarded a contract to complete the construction of the primary infrastructure. In the first quarter of 2013, Hill International, a US company, was awarded a four-year contract to manage the development of the first phase, which was due to be completed as early as 2015 (ITA (Italian Trade Agency), 2015).

Since the Ottoman period, the port of Aqaba has been a strategic naval base and an important trading centre. Today, following the only partially realized interventions in the entire area to promote its tourist development, the port is becoming an integral part of the underway pharaonic project of modernization in this area of great historical value not only for Jordan. The Aqaba Container Terminal is an example of how a cleaner, quieter and safer infrastructure can create new forms of sustainable urban environments. According to Giulia Frittoli, landscape designer and Partner at BIG (Bjarke Ingels Group) in New York, the collaboration on the renovation of the Aqaba Port was a unique opportunity to explore the hidden potential behind industrial sites and rethink the infrastructure as a catalyst for sustainable urban transformation. The Bjarke Ingels Group is supporting APM Terminals and Maersk in reinventing the future of the maritime industry with a master plan for the Aqaba Port Terminal in Jordan, scheduled to be completed by 2040. Considered one of the most strategic ports in the country and an important gateway to the Levant region, the 3-square-kilometre plan will combine several strategic approaches on a regional scale. It will include the renovation of the terminal, the expansion of logistics functions and the connection of the wider port community as well as the natural environment.

In the hinterland of Aqaba, the equally legendary Wadi Rum desert was once crossed by tourist buses that stopped at the welcoming, unique and very simple rest-house. Here the tour leaders would agree with local guides on different programmes to visit the rock inscriptions, the Lawrence spring (Abu Aineh) and the Bedouin tents for the ritual tea. Having entered the international circuits of mass tourism a few years ago, Wadi Rum has now donned the official garb of the established tourist destination. The logic of the market bluntly adopts the lexicon of development cooperation. At the new Visitor Centre, the brochure of the ASEZA (Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority) with the support of the RSCN (Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature), makes it clear that the traditional “Host-Guest relationship” has been transformed. The text of the brochure indeed proclaims “Helping Nature, helping people!” The local population is involved, but its participation in host management appears more like a folkloric ritual than a real productive activity. Organized into cooperatives by ASEZA¹⁵, the Bedouins are bound to register, at the Visitor Centre, all tourist reception and entertainment activities. The management company sets prices as well as the hourly commitment of the operators. “The protection of nature passes through the new opportunities offered to the local population”, the brochure reports. Actually, the traditional handicrafts produced by the Bedouin women can only be purchased from a single retailer within the Visitor Centre.

ASEZA was created with the aim of managing a territory of about 375 sq. km, which includes the entire southern area of Jordan, and to create all the infrastructures to make Aqaba and its region a special economic territory for the development of new investments. The basic aim is to give Jordan a prominent role in the global tourism economy. The Aqaba Special Economic Zone thus becomes an area of free trade and multi-sectoral economic development. Thanks to a series of agreements facilitating local and foreign investment, free trade and the creation of a qualified industrial zone, ASEZA has transformed Aqaba into a hub for the tourism market as well. Its strategic location, the provision of an international port and airport, a good road and motorway network,

¹⁵ Management company of the Wadi Rum site that plans and organizes the different visiting arrangements requested by outsiders.

and a commercial railway are its strengths. ASEZA's commitment is to make Aqaba an international investment centre, through constant encouragement to the private sector, which is involved in most of the activities. To do this, it provides information, legislative and operational support and tax concessions. One of its first substantial achievements was the establishment of the free port of Aqaba, followed by investment incentives and dynamic land management.

6. Eco-sustainable Tourism Initiatives in Jordan

These initiatives mainly originate from organizations that promote and support sustainable development.

- Fair Trade Jordan together with RSCN (Royal Society for Conservation of Nature), IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) and JHFHD (Jordan Hashemite Fund for Human Development), is the main body for the certification of Fair Trade standards in Jordan. It planned a sustainability certification scheme for the tourism sector in 2012, adopting requirements to ensure sustainability (Ammarin Camp in Bheida)¹⁶.
- Woman Handicraft Center (Iraq al-Amir): since 1994, women's handicraft activities in the region of Wadi as-Seer, in north of Amman, have been supporting the accommodation facilities of the former Ottoman village and contributing to the preservation and management of the fortress of Iraq al-Amir, the most distinguished monument in the area.
- Jordan River Foundation focuses on child safety and sustainable community development. The JRF runs a range of environmentally sustainable projects in Jordan centred around two macro areas: child safety and community enhancement and strengthening. Many of the projects in this second macro area are tourism-related. Once the facilities have been created and the local population trained, JRF leaves the project in the hands of the beneficiaries who will try to create income-generating activities around the pole that has been enhanced. It recently implemented an eco-tourism project at Ajloun Castle in cooperation with RSCN. The nature reserve, handicraft centre, research centre, restaurants and reception facilities are now run by the local community. Nature trails are being developed within the Wadi Mujib reserve in connection with the Dead Sea area
- Wild Jordan is not only concerned with nature protection but it also promotes and supports environmentally sustainable tourism initiatives, enhancing local human resources. Attention is paid on the use of water resources, alternative energy sources, protection of the land, endangered species, local traditions and handicrafts. A passion for trekking and canyoning is also spreading among Jordanians. Mujib Waterfall, Dibein Forest, Shaumari Wildlife and especially Dana Reserve, in Wadi Feinan, are well-established eco-tourism experiences.

To give an idea of the naturalistic and cultural richness that these organizations protect and attempt to enhance for the benefit of the population, I am providing some data for the Dana Reserve. Established in 1989, 308 square kilometers north of Petra, on the King's road, 2 hours from Amman, it boasts more than 600 botanical species, 18 species of birds, 45 of mammals, and copper mines (Kirbet Feinan) dating back 6000 years (excavation of which has been banned by the government). The once-abandoned Bedouin village — Ottoman

¹⁶ This is almost a first for the tourism sector. In fact, the FTJ is based on the Fair Trade in Tourism South Africa (FTTSA), which awards the label to those activities that pursue fair trade criteria and offer tourists the assurance that by using those services they are supporting local communities and preserving the environment.

period — lives again today in some structures restored by the local population (Bedu Ata'ta) such as the Dana Tower Hotel and the Dana Guest Lodge overlooking the spectacular Wadi Feinan.

7. Education for Tourism

A few years ago during her participation at the opening conference of the German Industry Day in Berlin, Queen Rania of Jordan emphasized that “the refugee crisis requires more sustainable solutions”, adding that a new approach centred on growth and investment is needed. In essence, the real goal must be to create economic opportunities that help refugees to become self-reliant, and host countries must gain from this crisis rather than being weakened as a result. According to the Queen, spokesperson in this case for the royal office for cooperation and assistance to refugees, this is possible essentially through education. The Jordan Compact, a long-term holistic approach to the refugee crisis, promised at that time to create 200,000 jobs for Syrian refugees and Palestinian nationals over the next three years, provided that they gained an educational qualification on Jordanian soil. The aim of this pilot project, which has been implemented in 18 economic zones across Jordan, is to enable the youngest, often without families and therefore most vulnerable, to support themselves, instead of relying solely on international subsidies.

What impact can this project have on tourism development? First of all we should consider what assumptions the Project just mentioned can rely on. In fact, Jordan has long been a supporter of initiatives that have education as a driving force for economic development in different sectors. UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency, for Palestine refugees) runs one of the most impressive education systems in the Middle East (184 schools in Jordan alone). The above mentioned Jordan River Foundation, teaches courses for the valorization of artisanal knowledge aimed at tourism marketing, spreading its centres throughout the country as well as in the Jordan Valley. Young Jordanian archaeologists, trained in training centres (as already mentioned the one in Madaba for mosaics) but also at university departments have been participating for some time now in archaeological excavations, once carried out exclusively by foreign missions. Efforts are being made to create experts in every sector complementary to tourism. School textbooks also in lower schools are enriched with references to the region's cultural heritage, increasing young people's awareness of its richness and diversity. This therefore fuels attitudes towards activities in the tourism sector. Initiatives involving the cooperation of Italian and Jordanian universities on issues related to tourism development and the promotion of the historical, cultural and archaeological heritage are multiplying. In 2010, a Training Project Italian-Jordanian Project of Anthropology of Sustainable Tourism for operators in the tourism sector was presented by the writer to the Jordanian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities. The project was as part of a bilateral agreement between La Sapienza University of Rome and the Jordan University of Amman titled Enhancing Cultural Heritage (Tangible and Intangible) through the promotion of Sustainable Tourism. For several years, the project allowed young university graduates, from the Italian Innovation and Development degree course, to carry out their specialization phase in Jordan.

As part of the cultural exchanges between Italy and Jordan aiming at wide-ranging projects, a collaboration between the University of Palermo and the Al al-Bayt University of Al-Mafraq in Jordan was recently launched, giving rise to the Summer School “Architecture Landscape Archaeology”. The School promotes activities and experiences of interaction, mobility and exchange between Italian and Jordanian students and teachers, in the framework of the internationalization of the university system. It intends to deepen the fields of knowledge, design and valorization of the architectural and landscape heritage, through a high level theoretical,

methodological and scientific contribution and with an international focus on living in the Mediterranean. The training activities aim at the recognition and study of architectural language and cultural expressions (with particular reference to Islamic culture), recognizing them as a constituent heritage of a civilization and a fundamental resource in the construction of dialogue, in the development of habitat valorization processes also for tourism purposes. The School's activities, attended by Jordanian and Italian students, include lectures, visits and workshops scheduled in Agrigento and Palermo. The programme was also presented to other Italian universities interested in exchanges that prepare students to become operators in key tourism-related sectors.

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