

# How wars and terrorism affect lebanese vacation industry tourism essay



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## **Introduction**

The purpose of this thesis is to discuss how the Civil War (1975-1990), the July 2006 war, the assassination of Prime-Minister Rafic Hariri and terrorism acts like “ September 11”, has affected tourism in Lebanon.

Lebanon attracts tourists from every place in the world. Its adorable weather, natural sightseeing, rich traditions and culture and engaged financial trade market have created an environment ready to be enjoyed by foreigners visitors.

Lebanon, was known as the “ Switzerland of Middle East” before civil war (1960-1965). After that period the country had this image destroyed by that conflict and it has been hit by negative publicity due to a series of circumstances beyond its control, for example the September 11 act as well as foreigner media spreading the bad news and horrific pictures to all over the world (Kamalipour, 1995).

The Lebanese Government has invested and worked on big projects in order to accelerate the progress in rebuilding the country’s infrastructure expecting that action would bring the tourism back to its peak. However the impressions of violence and terrorism, lack of security, language, ruins perceptions, and cultural barriers, low standard of accommodations, and inappropriate infrastructure still deters people from visiting Lebanon (Kanso, 2005).

The war and terrorism affected not only the Tourism sector, but also the Economic one, leaving a big financial debt to Lebanon since there were no

more income from the tourists and from the service-oriented businesses, according to data collected from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Economy Watch, 2009).

One of the possible solutions that will be discussed in this study is the use of several communication tools within marketing advertising since the focus on reliable mass-media is crucial, such as: newspapers, radio, magazines, the Internet and the television. Stressing on the fully recovering of the tourism in Lebanon in order to leave the image that the war created behind, massive good publicity is essential to spread these messages and offering promotional advantages as part of a destination marketing communication campaign as well.

This paper will also cover another alternatives in dealing with this challenge such as: promoting Lebanon as a tourist destination, reestablish the Lebanese title of the “ Switzerland of the Middle East” and rise the tourism flow, so consequently improving the country’s economy.

The promotion and restoration of Lebanon involves many factors not just physical but also political and in order to achieve the expected goals, a list of specific and several objectives has to be developed.

Bringing Lebanon back to its old position as the top first tourism destination in the Middle East was a long run process, although not impossible to achieve.

The study will cover the essential role of Tourism in Lebanon’s economy, development and stability as well the difficulties that the country passed

through: from overcoming obstacles, political problems and traces from the war to a 1st tourist destination title achieved in 2009 (The New York Times, 2009).

## **Methodology**

The methodology used to perform this study was done in 3 phases. 1) First was the collection of secondary data from the Lebanese Ministry of Tourism. 2) Intense workloads on articles, research on publications, books and news about the topic monitored by our supervisor. 3) Finalizing by analyzing, interpreting and writing the findings, outcomes and possible solutions.

### Tourism Scenario In the Middle East

Middle East Tourism has experienced a significant growth in 2009 keeping its bright spot towards the rest of the world (AMEinfo, 2009).

Data collected from STR Global (Smith Travel Research) between 1st January and 31st December 2009 proved the statistics: the Middle East hotels had reached the highest occupancy rate, average room rates profit and revPAR – revenue per available room – globally in 2009, according to Deloitte, the business advisory firm (AMEinfo, 2010).

Even though the global economic crisis, followed by the H1N1 had slowdown the number of tourist arrivals in the Middle East, the UNWTO predicts a growth rate more than double to this region by 2020 compared to the other worldwide destinations (Bundhun, 2009).

Middle East have been investing a lot of effort in order to attract all kind of tourists from leisure to business travelers. Monumental constructions, huge attractions, fantasy lands, rich culture and peculiar traditions are some of their special characteristics.

The air traffic in the Middle East has also increased, and a good example of that is that its duty free spot was the only compared to other nations to show a significant growth in the region (Ligaya, 2009).

Taking the example of Lebanon, in 2009 the country showed a considerable growth (2. 000. 000 arrivals approximately), due to several factors as: peace, stability and the fast development of several locations surrounding Beirut and other cities (Lebanese Ministry of Tourism, 2009).

Lebanon

## **Overview of the Country**

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Civil War (1975-1990)

There is no agreement between scholars and researchers on what was the real cause of the Lebanese civil war , but all what is sure that the war started in 13 April 1975 after the failed attempt to assassinate the leader of Maronite Pierre Gemayel and the ex-president of Lebanon by Palestinian gunmen which ended by the death of his bodyguard Joseph Abu Assi (Ghazi, 1997).

In response to this crime, the massacre or “ Ain-el-Remmaneh” incident happened, when a bus with Palestinian passengers was shoot on its way back from a conference to the refugee camp in “ Ain-el-Remmaneh” which was a Christian part located in the east of Beirut , killing 26 Palestinians (Ghazi, 1997).

In addition to the assassination of the ex-president Pierre Gemayel and the “ Ain-El\_Remmaneh” incident, the distinctions between the Christians and Muslims raised due to 2 factors: 1) the Maronites’ power was controlling the country 2) the lack of interest in the development of the Muslims areas. These were convenient reasons to start the civil war in Lebanon.

The civil war started in 13 April 1975 after this incident between the Christian and the Palestinians. It lasted for 17 years. One year after, in June 1976 the Syrians joined the civil war in order to support the Christian against the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Progressive Socialist Party which was under the Druze command.

In January 1989 six-member committee on Lebanon were chosen by the Arab League which was guided by the Kuwaiti foreign minister to find a solution and stop the civil war. After several discussions, the committee organized a conference of Lebanese parliamentarians in Taif, Saudi Arabia, to study the Taif agreement which was approved later by the Lebanese deputies after coming back to Lebanon from the conference (Ghazi, 1997).

The goals of the Taif agreement :

Stop the Civil War

Decide the Arab identity of Lebanon

Make sure that Lebanon is an independent, sovereign, free country and “final homeland” for all the Lebanese.

Clear the nation’s political organization as a parliamentary democracy.

Make the socio-economic system a free economy (Krayem, 2003).

Significant achievements have been recognized after signing the Taif agreement:

The war was finished.

Most of the Lebanese citizens got back to their normal daily life.

State institutions restored their autonomy.

The army was now integrated.

The economic decline situation was controlled (Krayem, 2003).

The 1975 - 1990 civil war destroyed Lebanon’s infrastructure and damaged its economy. And since Lebanon’s economy and the flourishing of its touristic sector is so correlated to its political stability, the tourism sector was totally ruined 180, 000 visitors in 1992 one years after the end of the civil war compared to 2. 4 million visitors before the civil war . The Lebanese government has been stressed with the renewal of domestic manufacturing, mainly the tourism sector which make 20 % of the country’s GDP before the civil war (Ladki & Sadik, 2004).

## **Tourism before the Civil War – Lebanon “ The Switzerland of Middle East”**

The Lebanese title “ Switzerland of Middle East” came due to the 30 years of abundance and prosperity, that the country experienced before the civil war (1975-1990). The tourism was one of the most important source of income to the country’s economy, besides the magnificent growth in agriculture. By that time, before the war, the country was worldwide well known for its financial, banking and business polo tourism. And Beirut as a trendy, modern and one of the most open-minded city in the region, was considered to be the “ Paris of Middle East” (Lebanese Global Information Center, 2005).

## **Tourism during the Civil War**

As we can see from the graph during the civil war Lebanon went through inflation and in the 1990 post-war period the inflation started to decrease.

The same with the exchange rate which start to grow after the civil war stopped .

## **Tourism after the Civil War**

After the end of the war in 1990, the country was ready to start its reconstruction, beginning by the government: electing a president(for the parliament and for the republic), followed by the re-structure of the army. In 1992, after the election of prime minister Rafic Hariri, a real economic plan was designed and proposed, known as “ Horizon 2000”:

“ The plan, known as “ Horizon 2000”, actually consists of securing, over the period 1995-2007, a cumulative volume of public investments of \$ 18 billion.

These investments are estimated according to a econometric simulation  
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model to generate during the same period in the private sector investments of \$ 42 billion. These investments are expected to maintain an average annual GDP growth rate of 8 per cent. This in turn should raise Lebanon's income level to the upper limit of the middle-income countries" (Norkonmaa, 1995).

The Ministry of Tourism started on a large assortment of actions between 1993 and 1994:

Reactivating plans and deals with bordering countries to switch over travel tours were used to attract a lot of visitors a year

Looking for industrial and financial support from regional and international organizations to accomplish development projects

Structure a tourist database to present statistics on the percentage of travelers and visitors of tourist positions and follow up of the business performs in the industry

Six tourism bureau in Arab and western centers resumed their activities after they were closed for a period of time

Cheering the reinstallation of the local and the international festivals.

Instruct employees for all the jobs which is related to the tourism sector like hotels, restaurants and all the attraction places.

They opened Jeita grotto now being operated with recent technology

Excused broken tourist services from taxes (Kanso, 2005).

Between the 1991 and 1996 the development and the reconstruction process achieve significant levels, reaching an average of 6.5 percent growth in the GDP. Most of these construction was from huge sums of private investment, from the Lebanese emigrants and Gulf Arabs who were assigned to rebuild the inhabited and marketable buildings destroyed during the war (Republic of Lebanon, 2010).

In 1996, Hezbollah the political and Islamist military organization decided to support the Ministry of Tourism in order to help the reinvigoration of the roman temple of Baalbek in Beka Valley, a major tourist destination in Lebanon. This measure was part of their strategic plan, in order to change their image towards tourist and citizens, and reinvent them not only as political group but as secure and indigenous social and cultural organization. However the United States government continued to intercept their citizens from traveling to Lebanon, whilst Hezbollah is still armed (Theodoulou, 1996).

According to Heyer, in the year of 1999, the revenue generated from tourism activities contributed 7.3% to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and “ an average growth of 14 percent between 1995 and 1999 proved Lebanon’s tourism was back on track” (Heyer, 2009). However due to Israelian air strikes, the industry sector was prejudiced again in 2000 (Heyer, 2009).

Because of Lebanon’s problem during several wars and conflicts, several Gulf cities as Dubai, Bahrain, Abu Dhabi replaced Beirut as a main playground destination in the Middle East, specially among the wealthy Arab tourists (Middle East, 2000), increasing significantly the tourism in these areas,

leaving Lebanon years away far from development. The 15 years war, besides destroying physically the country, almost killed completely its economy. The tourism which was one of the main supports of direct income, was vanished for a long period and the political and government sectors collapsed. Besides the lives lost and those one injured, the damages, financially analyze were about U\$ 5 billion (Norkonmaa, 1995).

After the war stopped the tourism started developing again, and this time the country started receiving a special kind of tourist called the “ curious tourist”. People who went to Lebanon they wanted to see the post war consequences, how is the life after the war and how the building were looking like (Raschka, 1992).

“ The Russians aren’t coming, but the French, South Africans, Japanese, Greeks and Colombians are. They are all flocking to see what post war Lebanon looks like” (Raschka, 1992).

Lebanon lost a lot of tourists due to the war. The main reasons were that they were afraid to go there and also because everything was damage and destroyed. There was nothing to do there as an attraction but destruction.

Tourists from the other countries were still few. The US is not encouraging Americans people to go and visit Lebanon because of its bad image created by the civil war.

Before the civil war statistics showed that Lebanon had two million visitors in 1974, and after the war in 1992 (the first year after the war) Lebanon had 175, 000 visitors, which was a big difference (Raschka, 1999).

“ According to Abdul Hamid Fakhoury, President of Middle Eastern Airlines, his airline alone used to carry 1. 2 million passengers, 85 per cent of whom were foreigners compared to 800, 000 passengers carried in 1993 less than 25 per cent of whom were foreigners”.

All the industry in Lebanon such as Hotels, Port, Airport, and Travel agencies were affected by the civil war.

According to the Lebanese Hotel owners Association 145 hotels were damage and in Beirut the number of hotel had fallen from 130 to 44 and the contribution of tourism to GNP which was 20 % before the civil war declined to 7. 4% in 1977 visitors spend only 469272 nights in Beirut 1979 compared with 2307122 nights in 1974 which is the period of the civil war.

The Middle East Airline lost a lot of profit LP14m in the 1975 and PL69. 1m because of the civil war and in 1982 they were obliged to close for 115 days and five aircraft were destroyed.

According to the Yearbook of tourism Statistics the number of visitors to Lebanon from 1998 to 2000:

(World Tourism organization, Yearbook of tourism Statistics, 2004)

The war not just disallowed Lebanon from following a violent tourism rules that assemble the ever-changing wants of the international tourist but from the other side formed a lot of problems like:

All the tourism which was going to Lebanon transfer to Cyprus, Turkey and Egypt.

A lot of European countries presented their nation a choice of incentives to promote national and local tourism.

Tourist imitation of overcome towns, cities and war crimes have continued sturdy.

All of these problems lead the tourist to think thousands of times before traveling to Lebanon and make the trip to Lebanon undesirable.

Terrorism

### **9/11 Attack in the U. S. A.**

The terrible terrorism attack against the twin towers in New York City had a huge impact in political, social, cultural and economical sectors around the whole world, specially in the Arab Countries.

After the incident, Middle East region was completely marginalized and stereotyped as a place full of terrorists, war and bomb-men willing to kill. (Kifner, 2004).

The easy in-flow tourism between the USA and these countries was banned for a while and severe restrictions and security matters were adopted in order to avoid new attacks. (Kifner, 2004).

Consequently, Europeans and Americans were not coming anymore to the Middle East after the attacks and the arabs were not going abroad to Europe and USA because of constant suspicion, airport prejudice and streets attacks. (Kifner, 2004).

Due to this invisible barrier imposed by the American government, the wealthy Saudis and Gulf Arabs had to look for another place to spend their vacation time, once that even in their home country was not safe anymore because of security situation and compounds attacks (Kifner, 2004).

So Lebanon was the choice of the majority of them, receiving huge real state development and international consulting companies.

The country started experiencing a real tourism booming, and billions of dollars were passing through Lebanon.

The Gulf Arabs chose Lebanon not only for vacation, but also for construction, building their multi-millionaire holiday-mansions everywhere in the country such as in the mountains, by the beach and in downtown Beirut (Kifner, 2004).

In addition to that, big luxury hotel chains started occupying those empty areas where before were just ruins from the war and begin to build their resorts, hotels and Villas, increasing the value of the area by attracting new tourists (Kifner, 2004).

In the airline industry, the increase was also significant. Middle East Airlines, the Lebanese airline company, had its first profit since its foundation.

Surprisingly the attacks in the USA helped Lebanon a lot in its tourism reconstruction.

“ The Oslo agreement between Israel and the Palestinians raised hopes for a new era of tourism and prosperity in the area, with travelers making a circuit

of historic and religious sites in the previously hostile countries” (Kifner, 2004).

Since the period where Beirut was known as Paris of the Middle East, before the civil war in 1990, the country didn't host this amount of investment and development.

### **Prime Minister Rafic Hariri's assassination**

Rafic Hariri, was a well-known lebanese entrepreneur, business-man and philanthropist. He was elected the Prime Minister of Lebanon in 1992, right after the civil war, being the one responsible for the physical and economic reconstruction of the country in the following years, until his resignation in 2004. His considerable accomplishments while Prime Minister made him a politician icon all over the world, specially among the Lebanese citizens (Rafic Hariri - The Official Website). “ No single individual has played a bigger role in rebuilding the credibility of Lebanon's economy around the world” (Hennock, 2005).

Being the most wealthy man in the country - U\$4 billion fortune -, helped Rafic Hariri to start Lebanon's reconstruction with significant sponsors. He used his influences and business networking contacts to attract powerful friends from France, the Guld and Saudi Arabia and potential investors to Beirut, accelerating the economy again (Hennock, 2005).

For Mr. Hariri, there was no queue of importance for the country's needs during the post-war era. He initialized a massive reconstruction process effort, declaring everything as priority for the rebuilding process, such as:

hospitals, schools, infrastructure (water, phones, electricity) and the economy.

During May of 1994, The Prime Minister had a belief that if the downtown of Beirut was rebuilt, the life would be back to Lebanon. So he started a project to revitalize the Central District of Beirut (BCD), in order to achieve this goal. And after 16 years of the beginning of this project, the downtown in Beirut is still the core place of tourism in Lebanon, being the the meeting point for all foreigners, Arabs and Lebanese people. In addition to that it is the financial district and the country's institution's polo location (Rafic Hariri - The Official Website). Since the tourism of Lebanon is directly linked to the economy of the country, the Prime Minister's actions was crucial for the number of visitors to increase.

“ The development of the tourism industry (as well as that of other sectors) was held back over the past few years because of the political stand-off between Mr Hariri and the president, Emile Lahoud, which was a reflection of the deeper struggle over Syrian domination of Lebanon” (Business Middle East, 2005).

Mr. Rafic Hariri was assassinated on February 14 of 2005. An explosion was detonated against the Prime Minister convoy next to Beirut's marina, right after he had left the Parliament. Besides him, another 20 people died during the attack, which since today has no authorship proofed (Rafic Hariri - The Official Website).



After his tragic death, the government decided to rename Beirut's International Airport with his name, since its upgrade was a project of the Prime Minister.

“ The re-emerging tourism industry in Lebanon suffered a significant setback recently with the massive explosion that killed Lebanese Premier Rafik Hariri and damaged a handful of Beirut hotels” (Middle East, 2005).

“ Even though Lebanon was down 10% in the tourism sector in 2005, more than 1. 2 million tourists visited Lebanon” (Martin Frost, 2006).

## **Terrorism acts in Lebanon**

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### **Why terrorism attacks Tourism?**

There are several motives to explain the fact that terrorists are attracted by the tourism.

The first reason is that the tourism is the main source of income of many countries all over the world, so by damaging it, the core function of the economic basis of the nation stop working. Second, the tourism attractions are the best way for the terrorists to get their message delivered through out media coverage, getting the attention that they need. And third, this industry hasn't focus too much dealing with security matters because they believe that a simple security presence will push away the tourists (Tarlow, 2003).

On the other hand, the implementation of security measures is not a cheap action, rising then the need to build a relationship between private and  
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public sectors in the tourism industry. In addition to that the hospitality first obligation is the guest protection. Security must be developed in all segments, as technological investments, education and staff training. “ Security plus service and value for money will become the basis for 21st century success” (Tarlow, 2003).

Finally and perhaps the most important point, is the adoption of a risk management control. Avoiding unforeseen circumstances are less costly to the business. Well prepared companies face better the risks than others without any sort of management plan (Tarlow, 2003).

### July 2006 War

This war is known as 2006 Israel-Hezbollah War. It started on 12 July 2006 and ended in 8 September 2006. The clash started when Hezbollah traversed into Israel and attacked an Israeli Defense Force (IDF). They killed three of the armed and kidnapped the other two and they went back with the prisoners to the south of Lebanon. After that the leader of Hezbollah Hassan Nasrallah announced that the prisoners were taken for the purpose of exchange hostages with Israel. From the other side the Israel's Prime Minister Ehud Olmert stated that the response would be an act of war on Lebanon and assure that will be a sturdy war.

### **Tourism Before July 2006 War**

After all the damages that were caused by the civil war, Lebanon rebuilt and developed its tourism from 1992 until 2005. Lebanon was again backing to the world tourism map.

The country was ready again to receive over 830, 000 visitors in 2001, a growth of 13% over 2000. Everything started again, occupancy in the hotels was very high, and tourists from all over the world were in the streets visiting the new Beirut.

The government rebuilt everything. The restaurants started opening again every year; festivals were taking place in different areas like in Baalbek or Beit el Dine.

During summer all the private beaches received a lot of clients from all over the world to enjoy the pleasant climate and a suntan.

Most of the tourists were from the gulf countries. They usually come to Lebanon to spend their holidays and to enjoy the food, weather and of course the hospitable people. Some of them bought apartments and villas in Lebanon, so they can come whenever they want.

All the restaurants in the downtown were crowded, and all the sightseeing's and attractions were fully booked. Anyone who might want a special place, booking in advance is mandatory.

The traffic in the city was significantly big. Cars were taking hours to move from one place to another.

Consequently, taxi drivers were getting advantage of this situation because they started having an increase on their income with the tourists.

So tourism in Lebanon prospered again after 17 years of war and damages.

Unfortunately 1991 was not the last war in Lebanon. In July 2006 Lebanon had a conflict with Israel.

### **Tourism During July 2006 War**

During the 2006 war everything change and all the hope disappeared.

Reservations in the hotels were canceled, everything started to close and the tourists who already had their trip planned to visit Lebanon changed their flights and went back home or some of them changed their plan by going to The streets were completely empty, with no activities in the restaurants, nightclubs and pubs.

### **Tourism After July 2006 War**

The 2006 war caused a lot of impact on Lebanon's economical, environmental and of course on the tourism industry. The infrastructure was damaged specially in the South where the conflict was.

The unemployment rate increased since most of the industries closed their doors and fired their employees.

Lebanon got again the marginalized image of war and insecurity. Tourists got scared from coming to this country again. Lebanon's tourism went back to zero point again.

One of the most important impacts that this war left was in the environment. Israeli jet bomb the fuel tanks at the Jiyeh power station situated thirty kilometers south of Beirut leading to drip 10, 000 to 15, 000 tons of fuel into the Mediterranean sea reaching twenty- two areas over an extend of 150 kilometers out of Lebanon, in Syria seashore and Turkish and Cypriot water.

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It took almost two months for the Lebanese government to start the cleaning procedure. In the mean time most of the oil sank down and destroyed all the sea life killing the fishes that were the source of livelihood of a lot of Lebanese families.

From the other side it affected the beach resorts occupancy, where most of the tourists Lebanese used to spend their summer time.

Before the war started in July 2006 the hotels were almost fully booked, there were no available places or empty flights to come to Beirut. The prices started increasing due to the high demand.

The Lebanese Ministry of Tourism was expecting more than 1.6 million tourists. The industry employed over 150,000 people.

During the war the priority of the government was in how to create a better image for the country and construct better infrastructure by improving the public transportation system, bringing more investment to the country. This would help to reduce the external debt.

Unfortunately the priority of the government after the war had to change from improving to rebuilding the suburbs of Beirut, because Israel missed had destroyed them all.

The small enterprises were highly affected by this war. Their owners who had taken loans from the bank to build their businesses were now accumulating debts due to the lack of economic activity in the city.

Present days

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The huge investment of several luxury hotel chains into the region has brought Lebanon back on the destination scenario. The investors are now willing to inject capital in the country as they are optimistic concerning the development of the economy. Beirut is now experiencing a boom in the tourism sector and Lebanon's image nowadays has been all over the world again, but not because of its conflicts, destruction, kidnappings or wars, but because of its beauty, diversity, rich culture, cuisine and trendy characteristics.

"Beirut's sizzling nightlife, from gritty to glam, helped drive a record tourism year in 2009. Overcoming a reputation as a Middle East trouble spot, Lebanon welcomed nearly 2 million visitors last year, a 39% increase over 2008. It was the No. 1 destination for tourism growth in the world, according to the World Tourism Organization." (USA Today, 2010)

The tourism in Lebanon in the year of 2009 experienced a significant growth. And according to the Ministry of Tourism, this happened because the war has ceased bringing back stability to the country.

Core companies from the hospitality sector are supporting and investing hard and closely to keep Lebanon's image in a position as first class destination and business polo in the Middle East.

Besides that, there are several facilities that the country offers to the tourists, such as:

-Direct air links to worldwide destinations.

-Easy access to the country.

- Ideal strategic location.
- Archaeological and historical sites.
- Beautiful and amazing natural sceneries.
- Modern International Airport.
- First class hospitality infrastructure.
- Excellent services quality.
- Cutting edge telecommunications and utilities.
- Buzzing business, shopping and leisure environments.
- Friendly, open minded and genuinely welcoming people” (Lebanese Ministry of Tourism, 2010).

In addition, another awards were received by the country, rising its image positively towards the world as a “ must-go” tourist destination.

In 2006 Travel and Leisure magazine ranked Beirut as the 9th city to visit in the world on its annual report.

The Clemenceau Medical Center was ranked one of the 10 best hospitals for medical tourism in 2010 by the Medical Travel Quality Alliance.

Jeita Grotto was selected to proceed in the competition of the New 7 Wonders of Nature.

In 2009, the NY Times ranked Lebanon as the #1st on its “ 44 places to go” list.

From a non-existing tourism activity after war, to one of the 1st spots in the world, the country starts from scratch to rebuild his reputation, economy and tourism.

“ Increase of 38. 91% in comparison with January last year 2008 when the total number of visitors reached 1, 332, 551 visitors. Also an increase of 43% in the number of visitors from Arab countries that reached 785, 985 visitors during the Year 2009, compared with 549, 463 visitors for the last year 2008” (Lebanese Ministry of Tourism, 2010).

## Conclusion

Although the conflicts and war has ended around 4 years ago, the image that Lebanon is a hazard country still persists. Tourists usually tend to point out the lack of security, inst