

Tourism



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ourism study predicts boom for Lebanon June 29, 2006 12: 00 AM BEIRUT: The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) is upbeat about about the future of tourism in Lebanon.

According to a report released by the WTTC this week, Lebanon's travel and tourism industry is expected to generate \$4. 4 billion in revenues in 2006, rising to some \$8. 7 billion in 2016. The report backed Tourism Minister Joe Sarkis' statement last week that the number of tourists coming to Lebanon is expected to exceed 1. 6 million in 2006. Most five-star hotels in Beirut and some mountain areas are already reporting more than 70 percent occupancy. WTTC said that the global travel and tourism industry was expected to generate more than \$5 trillion in 2006, increasing to \$12 trillion in 2016. Tourism revenues in the entire Middle East, including Lebanon, are expected to reach \$147 billion in 2006 and \$279.

4 billion in 2016. The report expects the Lebanese travel and tourism industry's activities to grow by 6. 2 percent in 2006 and 4. 4 percent per annum, in real terms, between 2007 and 2016. It added that tourism is expected to rise from 10. 9 percent of Lebanon's GDP, or \$2. 4 billion, in 2006 to 14. 4 percent, or \$5.

5 billion, in 2016. Tourism was Lebanon's main source of revenue before the 1975-1990 civil war. Since the end of the war, many Lebanese and Arab investors have shown keen interest in the country's tourism sector, a fact evinced by the growing number of hotels in Beirut and other areas.

Analysts argue that revenues from tourism will help boost the country's balance of payments in the future. They say the number of Arab tourists to

Lebanon has more than tripled in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the United States." The tourism industry is expected to generate 175, 000 jobs in Lebanon in 2006, or to account for 10. 6 percent of the total employment in the country," the report said.