

Tourism and Political Change

10

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Arab Politics and Tourism: Political Change and Tourism in the Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya

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Published by Goodfellow Publishers Limited, Woodeaton, Oxford, OX3 9TJ
<http://www.goodfellowpublishers.com>

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Design and setting by P.K. McBride

10 Arab Politics and Tourism: Political Change and Tourism in the Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya

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Introduction

Libya, formally known as the Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya — in Arabic Al Jumahiriyah al Arabiyah al Libiyah ash Shabiyah al Ishtirakiyah al Uzma (Library of Congress – Federal Research Division 2005), has enormous potential as a destination with its diverse high quality and unique tourism assets – its archaeological heritage (notably its Roman and Greek antiquities), its spectacular beaches, its mountains and its desert. However, to date these assets have not been developed for a number of reasons, not least Libya's isolation as a result of United Nations (UN) sanctions and relatively recent recognition of the importance of diversifying the Libyan economy from its reliance on oil and gas revenues. Although UN sanctions have now been lifted and Libya has re-emerged on the world stage, the challenges relating to the development of Libya into an internationally-competitive destination, both internally and externally, should not be underestimated. This chapter will explore some of the political issues relating to tourism development in Libya.

Libyan tourism

Libya is located in North Africa on the southern edge of the Mediterranean Sea and shares borders with Egypt to the East, Sudan to the south-east, Chad and Niger to the south, Algeria and finally Tunisia to the West (see Figure 10.1). Libya is 90% desert and has three distinct areas: Tripolitania, which contains the most densely-populated Western coastal strip north of the Western mountains (Jebel Gharbi); Cyrenaica, which contains the Eastern coastal strip north of the Green Mountains (Jebel Akhdar); and the Fezzan in the South. Libya's 1770 kilometres of coastline (CIA 2009) has spectacular white and golden beaches which are lapped by the crystal clear and stunningly blue waters of the Mediterranean.



Figure 10.1: Map of Libya.

The World Travel and Tourism Council (2009) provide an overview of the economic impact of Libyan tourism, showing both GDP contribution and tourism employment are expected to rise over the next ten years (Table 10.1).

Table 10.1: Ten year predictions for the contribution of tourism to the Libyan economy (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2009).

Indicator	Units	2009	2019
Tourism contribution to GDP	%	8.6	10.2
	Libyan dinars (millions)	9937.9	27,873.3
	US dollars (millions)	7703.8	21,607.2
Direct and indirect employment	Jobs	159,000	232,000
	% of total employment	8.8	10.4
	Proportion of jobs	1 in 11.4	1 in 9.6

However, despite this optimism, Libyan tourism can only be described as emerging although as Ham (2007: 5) asserts:

Libya has it all: ancient cities of rare splendour, the Sahara that you thought existed only in your imagination and the unmistakable cachet of being ruled by one of the 20th century's most iconic figures, Colonel Muammar Qaddafi.

Clearly these assets provide great potential for tourism in Libya – with its beaches, archaeological (particularly Greek and Roman) heritage, mountains and deserts. These assets and the requisite infrastructure and superstructure for their effective exploitation – roads, hotels, restaurants and resorts – are underdeveloped. Some superstructural developments have taken place, e.g. the opening of the 299-room luxury Corinthian

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hotel in Tripoli in April 2003 (Library of Congress – Federal Research Division 2005) which was developed through Libyan–Maltese investment partnership.

Libya's tourism attractions reflect successive periods of occupation. There are thirteen major archaeological sites, of which five are inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage list (UNESCO 2009) – Tadrart Acacus, the old town of Ghadamès, Cyrene, Leptis Magna and Sabratha – as outlined below.

- ◆ The earliest of the five World Heritage sites is the Neolithic rock art sites of Tadrart Acacus in the South-west of Libya which link to Algeria's Tassili N'Ajjer (also inscribed on the World Heritage list). Thousands of cave paintings dating from 12,000 BCE to 100 CE document changes in the Sahara's fauna and flora (UNESCO 2009).
- ◆ Ghadamès – 'the pearl of the desert' – is one of the oldest pre-Saharan cities, standing in an oasis on Libya's Western border. UNESCO (2009) describes Ghadamès as an outstanding example of a traditional settlement through which runs a network of covered passageways at ground level for men to move around the settlement.
- ◆ Cyrene, a former Greek colony, was one of the principal cities in the Hellenic world. It was later Romanized and remained an important capital until an earthquake in 365.
- ◆ Leptis Magna was originally founded by the Phoenicians around 1000 BCE, it survived the Spartans to become first a Punic and eventually (around 23 BC), a Roman city developed by Emperor Septimius Severus into one of the most beautiful cities of the Roman Empire (UNESCO 2009);
- ◆ Sabratha, a Phoenician trading-post and port serving the former Numidian kingdom of Massinissa in modern-day Algeria, was rebuilt by the Romans in the 2nd and 3rd centuries CE.

History and political structure

Ronald Bruce St John provides a select chronology of Libyan history (St John 2008). What is now Libya has, at various periods, been occupied: simultaneously by the Phoenicians in the West and the Greeks in the East, then the Romans and later the Arabs. It was part of the Ottoman Empire from 1551 to 1911 and under Italian occupation from 1911 to 1943. The three parts of Libya (Tripolitania, Cyrenaica and Fezzan) were unified in 1934 (Library of Congress – Federal Research Division 2005).

During World War II, Libya was one of the main battlegrounds of North Africa and at the end of the war fell into military administration – Tripolitania and Cyrenaica under the British, the Fezzan under the French. Post-war, the United Nations General Assembly created the United Kingdom of Libya with Idris al-Sanusi as King. In 1958 oil was discovered and by the early 1960s Libya had become an oil exporting country, transforming it from one of the poorest countries in the world to one of the richest (Library of Congress – Federal Research Division 2005)

King Idris was ousted, 1 September 1969, in a military coup led by Colonel Muammar al-Qaddafi who, aged 27 became President of the 12-person Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) which was designated as Libya's supreme executive and legislative authority (Martinez 2007). Although the RCC was dominated by Qaddafi he did not hold absolute authority and the RCC operated collegially, debating issues until consensus

Chapter extract

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