



# NETWORK OF RELIGIOUS TOURISM

## PROJECT BRIEF

Religious tourism is one of the fastest growing segments of the travel industry. The UNWTO estimates that **300 million** tourists visit the world's major religious sites each year (one fourth of all international tourist arrivals) and that **600 million** national and international religious voyages are undertaken annually.

This growth in religious tourism brings an unprecedented potential to foster inclusive and sustainable development – creating jobs and livelihoods, allowing infrastructure and investment and stimulating local culture, crafts and food.

This not only helps communities value their unique cultural and religious contribution, building pride and self-esteem, but can increase economic opportunity and build the foundations for peace.

Religious tourism can also promote a culture of peace by encouraging intercultural and interfaith dialogue and understanding. Common values of tolerance and co-existence can be shared and promoted alongside pilgrimage principles of sacred hospitality, openness and welcome to the stranger.



'Now is the time to harness the power and potential of religious tourism to make a positive difference in the world' – Taleb Rifai

*'Religious tourism is a key agent of peace. It is a transformative force that breaks down cultural barriers and builds bridges between people, communities and nations.*

*Leveraging the growing interest in religious tourism is crucial in building cultural dialogue, mutual understanding and peace.'*

– Taleb Rifai, Secretary-General, UNWTO

**WHAT:** A Network of Religious Tourism.

**AIMS:** To advance peace through increased prosperity; cross country and intra-regional cooperation; and greater intercultural and interfaith understanding.

**WHERE:** Beginning in the Holy Land of the Levant.

**WHO:** The UNWTO and the Ministries of Tourism in Egypt, Palestine, Jordan, Iraq and Lebanon.

**DURATION:** 24 months

**BUDGET:** 400,000 EUR



## MAIN ACTIVITIES

- **Establish a Network of Religious Tourism**
  - Develop guidelines and best practice, building capacity through shared learning from regional and international experience.
  - Create a website and marketing and communications plan.
- **Develop and promote a new Marian trail**
  - 'In the Footsteps of Mary, Queen of Peace' will include significant destinations in the life of the Virgin Mary in Egypt, Israel, Palestine, Jordan and Lebanon.
  - Open to all faiths with Mary seen as the 'Mother of All'.
- **Bethlehem – Destination Christmas**
  - Develop 'Bethlehem – Destination Christmas', a new non-profit private-public partnership aiming to celebrate the birth of 'the Prince of Peace' and revitalise religious tourism.
  - Designed as an annual international Bethlehem choir festival alongside an annual international Christmas market.
- **Stakeholders engagement and capacity building**
  - Organise two international seminars/workshops on 'How religious tourism can promote peace' and 'How religious tourism routes can drive economic prosperity and create jobs'.
- **Code of Conduct for Religious Tourism**
  - Develop a common Code of Conduct for religious tourism providers and tourists in the Holy Land.

## OUTCOMES

- A network of religious tourism is established and guidelines and best practices shared among members.
- A new cross-regional pilgrimage route is developed: 'In the Footsteps of Mary'.
- Pilgrimage and religious tourism are promoted in the Levant.
- Tangible socio-economic benefits are brought to local communities through sustainable tourism development.
- Increased cross-cultural and interfaith dialogue and understanding, alongside promotion of common values of tolerance and coexistence, strengthens peace and security in the region.
- The common heritage of the three monotheistic faiths in the region is promoted and valued.

## BACKGROUND

Setting up a Network of Religious Tourism was a key recommendation of the UNWTO international conference on tourism and pilgrimage in 2014 in Spain.

This was endorsed in 2015 in Bethlehem by delegates from 40 countries, including Secretaries of States for Tourism and Foreign Affairs from Jordan, Japan, Palestine, Portugal, Guatemala and Italy.

In May 2016, a Roundtable on Religious Tourism was convened in Maghdouche, Lebanon. It recognized that religious tourism is a key area of growth at a time of volatility in the region, and is often more resilient than regular tourism.

The Ministers of Tourism of Lebanon, Palestine and Jordan, the Advisor to the Minister of Tourism of Egypt and the Chairman of the Iraqi Tourism Board committed to set up a Network of Religious Tourism under the aegis of UNWTO.

This was supported by the Director of Culture for Saint James' Way, the Galician Tourism Board in Spain and key tour operators from Lebanon, Egypt and The Holy Land, with the backing of UNWTO.

The Network will include all sectors involved in religious tourism, including religious authorities, faith leaders, tourism bodies, governments, local authorities, the private sector, academics and local communities.