

Lebanon: This Summer (2004) is a record touristic season.

Lebanon expects to realize this summer a record touristic season, after it has actually recorded an increase of 35.2% in the number of foreign visitors during the first 6 months of the current year (2004) against the same period of last year... the general director of the Ministry of Tourism Nada Sardouk foresees a significant increase in the inflow of tourists; not less than 1.3 million in 2004 and still expecting a very promising season that it will reach its apogee in July and August.

Mrs. Sardouk referred this improvement in the number of tourists during the first half of the current year due to the government policy in encouraging the festivals, the commercial exhibitions and mainly the various convention and activities during the months of January, February and March where this period is usually considered as a dead touristic season.

The tourism in Lebanon started showing some improved indication just after the war end (75 – 90). The record shows an inflow of more than one million visitors in 2003 and this was witnessed for the first time since 30 years.

The foreigners who entered Lebanon were 470,833 during the first part of the year 2004 (where the Arab nationals constitute the majority and mostly out of Gulf rich countries) against 348,452 tourists for the same period of last year.

And Lebanon, which strives to increase its touristic revenue since the end of the war, is increasingly become an attractive touristic center to the Arab nationals who lost their interest in being or visiting the Western countries due to the unsecured and unwelcome treatment after the 11/9 events in 2001 and the same in Europe due to the high exchange rate of the Euro.

Since the year 1999 Lebanon is witnessing a significant increase of visitors each year; 1,015,000 visitors in the year 2003 against 956,464 visitors in the year 2002; 837,072 in 2001, and 741,648 visitors in the year 2000.

This year (2004) the occupancy rate in the large hotels exceeded the 90% threshold with a price ranging between US\$100 to US\$ 300 for a room/day for the largest 10 hotels. In addition to the profit realized from the room occupancy and restaurants, the hotels would realize additional revenues in organizing commercial exhibitions and conventions for the businessmen and exorbitant wedding ceremonies.

According to experts, the capital invested during the last 12 months in touristic projects in Lebanon is estimated at US\$ 4 billion, where the number

of 5 star hotels in Beirut and in the mountain is being increased tremendously, and a sizable number of Gulf citizens bought high standing residential apartments and luxurious villas.

Lebanon is rich in its archeological and historical sites all over its territory and particularly in the Roman ruins of Baalbeck where festivals of International artistic and local groups are performing and the same applies to other sites as Beit-El Dine palace representing the 19 century architecture and Byblos, Sidon and Tyr dating back to more than 6000 years of history.

We hope that the political conflicts in the region will come to an equitable settlement and that the peoples of the whole world would live in peace, tolerance and love – and that the Lebanon would remain more than a beautiful country and hospitable people but a mission for tolerance, love and understanding among the different factions and civilizations of the world as the Saint Pope John Paul II stressed during his visit to Lebanon.

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Beirut - July 2004