

The Palestinians & Justice Tourism

Another Tourism is Possible

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Introduction to Justice Tourism:

Tourism is one of the most important industries in the world. It represents an unprecedented phenomenon in history, allowing contact between different peoples on a scale previously unimagined. It is an ideal vehicle for intercultural exchange and tolerance, through which everyone can encounter a world at once unique and diverse. It has also become a vital resource for developing local economies; ideally, it promotes job creation, infrastructure development, and economic growth and stability.

However, this ideal is often disturbed by the imbalance in the encounter between wealthy Western visitors and poor local populations, tending to place local cultures in a position of inferiority. Instead of acting as a forum for cultural exchange, this kind of dysfunctional tourism often leaves host peoples feeling that the visitors' culture is superior. This can lead either to attempts to adopt Western culture at the expense of local ways of life, or conversely, to legitimate feelings of hostility towards Western influence on the part of host populations. Traditional mass-tourism can cause disturbances and discomfort in the everyday lives of the host population if priority is given to the establishment of infrastructure geared towards tourists to the detriment of local businesses, marketplaces, schools, and places of worship, as well as the local environment.

As populations increase, the widening gap between rich and poor is creating suffering, anger, and resentment that threaten the long-term interests of us all. The environment, too, is expressing the results of these pressures, through global warming, extreme weather events, depleting natural resources, and other phenomena. These bitter fruits of economic globalisation, both human and environmental, are leading progressive people throughout the world to consider how to use resources more responsibly and share them more fairly, while at the same time working to develop the truly democratic systems that will be able to change our present course in the long term.

Justice tourism, one of the most effective means of promoting understanding, mutual education, economic exchange and environmental protection, has a central role to play in these efforts. All varieties of tourists have a choice: sun-seekers can help to heal the inequalities between cultures by injecting local economies with resources, or they can participate in their exploitation;

adventure tourists can wreak havoc on local environments, or they can participate in efforts to protect them. Put simply, tourists with a commitment to social justice – justice tourists - have the opportunity, not only to make positive contributions to the communities they visit, but to become holders of the knowledge that will one day lead to equality, democracy, and human rights for all. Keeping in mind these ideas, this brochure attempts to describe how justice tourism in Palestine can make a fundamental contribution towards the development of peace in the Middle East and beyond.

If Palestine is to take its rightful place on the world map as a sovereign and democratic state, the world must recognize the legitimacy of the Palestinian story of dispossession and occupation at the hands of Israel, and hold Israel accountable for the violations of international law that it continues to commit. Alone, the Palestinians will be unable to find their freedom, found a viable state, or develop a strong economy; like so many oppressed peoples, Palestinians need the support of individuals and civil society institutions from across the world to achieve their goals.

Advocates of justice tourism believe that the best way to establish this support is through the development of intimate relationships that only person-to-person interaction at the grassroots level can produce. Once they have seen Palestine and befriended Palestinians, justice tourists, ecotourists, and even mainstream tourists (such as pilgrims), can return to their countries in possession of the knowledge so long denied them by Western stereotypes and by the mainstream media, and begin to teach others what they know.

If the principles of human dignity entrenched in international law are to have any true meaning, they must be enforced equally and without prejudice by the international community. Palestine is a glaring example of the failure of this fundamental requirement. The questions arise: What sort of a world do we want to live in? Do we want to live in a world guided by standards of hypocrisy, cynicism, and realpolitik? Advocates of justice tourism say no, and they maintain that the only way to truly overcome such defeatist worldviews is through the power of friendship.

Mass Tourism:

Mass tourism has created social, cultural, economic, and environmental problems all over the world. It harms local populations by excluding or marginalizing them from the tourism industry, and its practices have even been known to lead to human rights violations. The mass tourism industry is a purely capitalistic enterprise: its primary goal is to make money, without taking into consideration the impact of its policies on the communities it uses to make that money. In many instances, foreign tour operators receive their revenues from tourists in the country of origin, paying hotels in host countries minimal or all-inclusive group prices (including food and transport), and leaving the local community with minimal benefits. In places where migrants make up much of the workforce, local people may be completely left out of the entire operation. For example, in some Arab countries migrant workers

even dress up as local tribesmen to offer camel treks or entertain at "traditional" dinners, whilst local Bedouin have little access to or interaction with tourists at all. Shops only stock handicrafts produced in far away countries, and authentic traditional items made by local people remain unavailable. The expertise of local guides is often ignored in favour of the limited knowledge of foreign guides. These practices are not only detrimental to the local people, but to the tourism "product" as well.

Justice Tourism as Development:

There is an urgent need for a new kind of tourism built on a human foundation, which prevents or minimizes the negative aspects of mass tourism by planning and regulating tourism based on the interests of local populations. It must be undertaken with the primary goal of ensuring sustainable economic, social, and cultural development, as well as the preservation of the environment. This form of tourism will allow local populations to compete with outside investors on a level playing field and to reap the benefits of their local tourist industry.

The interaction of justice tourism with local communities can be broken down into several interrelated categories:

1. Justice tourism and socio-economic development

As has been mentioned, tourism can play an important role in raising standards of living, education, and health for local populations by providing them with resources and jobs. On the other hand, tourism should not be allowed to dominate a local economy; non-tourism-related local industry must be protected to ensure the continued socio-economic harmony of the community. Ways must be found to invite the substantive participation of local communities in tourism while also preserving cultural and natural resources. In short, tourism must be integrated into a broader strategy of sustainable development.

Justice tourism impacts socio-economic development not only by increasing demand for tourism-related services and products (guided tours, hotels, handicrafts etc.) but also by stimulating other economic areas. Tourism can positively influence the performance of several non-tourism related economic sectors by providing the general monetary injection needed to sustain local industry. Justice tourism brings about an increase in local production, helps achieve stability in the balance of payments, and increases budget revenues. It leads to the improvement of overall infrastructure and makes regional development projects more effective and balanced, thereby improving the general living environment and quality of life. Justice tourism increases tax revenues, creates new jobs, and ensures the preservation of existing jobs. All of this stimulates growth in GNP.

2. Justice tourism and poverty reduction

Fighting poverty in any community is a comprehensive process that takes a lot of time. It requires diverse efforts: political, economic, cultural, and ecological. It can involve challenging the interests of extremely powerful multinational corporations (MNCs) and international financial institutions (IFIs), whose exploitive practices often harm local economies and environments in favour of increasing the profits of foreign shareholders and governments.

One cannot solve the problems created by poverty without dealing with poverty itself and its root causes. Justice tourism can play a central role in this effort by stimulating local economies and educating foreign tourists. In brief, justice tourism organizations need to embrace the following strategies if they are to effectively fight poverty:

- i. First, they must continue to work towards the empowerment of local communities by working to replace mass tourism practices with the type of responsible tourism practices discussed above.
- ii. Second, a specific focus must be put on the creation of programs within the justice tourism industry that are aimed at reaching marginalized classes within communities, women being the most important example.
- iii. Third, an international network of alternative tourism organizations must be created to harness the collective resources and strength of these organizations and channel them effectively.
- iv. Fourth, with the above points in mind, alternative tourism operators have to work harder to turn theoretical talk into concrete action by launching practical programs in the communities they serve.

Justice tourism has the potential to promote wider understanding of the phenomenon of poverty and its internal and external causes. It can expose the exploitative and manipulative practices of MNCs and IFIs and help visitors understand how they can lobby for change once they return to the West. In this way tourism can play a positive role in the fight against poverty and directly benefit local communities economically, culturally, and socially.

3. Justice tourism and the protection of the environment

Justice tourism supports the preservation of natural heritage and resources, taking into consideration the limitations and carrying capacity of local environments. It works to avoid the harmful environmental effects of mass tourism by ensuring that tourists leave the smallest footprint possible on local ecosystems. Tourists must be made aware of the needs of the local environment so that they can practice responsible behaviour. To use an example from Palestine, visitors from the West may not understand the need to conserve water if they are not told how sparse it is in Palestinian communities.

4. Justice tourism and the protection of cultural heritage

Justice tourism that is travel based on the desire to experience traditional cultural environments and practices. It is a response to ignorant representations of other cultures, traditions, and civilizations as primitive and alien. As such, it urges travellers to expose themselves to unique local lifestyles, values, and traditions, as well as to learn about current political and social problems. Justice tourism involves far more than visiting historic and religious sites; it also involves discovering the society and culture that produced those sites.

Justice tourism promotes participation in, and ultimately control over, the protection and management of historical sites by the local people themselves. This is one way to ensure that tourism is accepted by communities as an opportunity to show off their culture and at the same time to earn income. It can also stimulate the revitalization of cultural practices and the stimulation of artistic creativity. Tourism of this kind can even help communities resurrect past traditions which otherwise would have died out.

Justice Tourism and Palestine:

1. Historical background

Palestine has always been a centre of political, cultural, social, and spiritual life. Around 3000 BCE, Semitic migrations to Palestine from the Arabian Peninsula began: the Amorites and the Canaanites were the first to migrate to Palestine; then came the Jebusites, the Aramites, the Moabites, the Ammorites and the Nabataeans. The Hebrews arrived in approximately 1020 BCE.

A testament to Palestine's ancient past, the country's archaeological history is incredibly rich and diverse. Innumerable excavated sites are found throughout Palestine and a huge variety of artefacts have been discovered: ancient tools, pottery, sculptures, mosaics, drawings, cave dwellings, burial places, temples, shrines, castles, fortresses, and even entire cities.

By virtue of Palestine's position geographically – linking Europe, Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, and Asia – it became a centre of social, cultural, religious, and economic exchange and interaction between many civilizations. Palestine thus influenced many other cultures and was influenced by them. An example of this can be found in the similarity between ancient creation myths found in Iraq, Persia, Greece and Palestine.

As human society progressed economically and culturally, its epistemological ideas developed and matured. This resulted in the emergence of the three monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Palestine played a

crucial role in the development of all three. Judaism appeared in Palestine by the end of the second millennium BCE and, of course, Christianity began with the birth of Jesus in the Palestinian village of Bethlehem. By the seventh century CE Islam was born with the appearance of the Prophet Mohammad on the Arabian Peninsula. The Islamic conquest of Palestine took place in 636 CE. From that date on, Palestine remained under Islamic rule, with the exception of the Crusader invasions, which began at the end of the eleventh century and continued for nearly two-hundred years. Most Arabs of Palestine are not descendants of the newcomers who came here with the Islamic conquest or the Crusades, although they intermingled and later became somewhat integrated with them. Rather, their relationship with the land goes back to the very beginnings of human settlement in Palestine.

Until relatively recently most modern accounts of the history of Palestine were written by European and American archaeologists and scholars. Their emphasis was generally very narrow, especially in the nineteenth century, when most studies focused on attempts to prove the historical accuracy of the Bible.

This emphasis on the biblical dimension led to the marginalisation of all evidence that pointed to the depth, diversity, and richness of native Palestinian civilization, including its unique contributions to architecture, agriculture, industry, and art, to name just a few. A conscious process was undertaken by Western scholars to justify the claims over Palestine made by European imperial powers, which sought to use it as a bridgehead to the Middle East, Africa, and Asia. The Zionist enterprise was the agent of these imperialist interests. An association was concocted between the Jewish religion which, like so many other belief systems, played a major part in the development of Palestine's culture and civilization, and the political Zionist project. This merger was used to justify the colonization of Palestine by suggesting that Palestine's native inhabitants were relative newcomers with no real rights to their lands. The myth was created that the history of Palestine began only with the emergence of Judaism, an idea that is absolutely at odds with all serious studies of Palestinian history.

In 1948, the Zionist project succeeded in establishing the state of Israel, but only after expelling 750, 000 Palestinians from their homes and killing many more. Since 1967, Palestinians have lived under the illegal military occupation of the state of Israel.

2. Israel's Policies to Prevent Tourism in Palestine

As is typical of colonial enterprises throughout history, the Zionist movement has always worked hard to minimize or even erase the history of the indigenous inhabitants of Palestine. This has been one of the central Zionist strategies aimed at justifying the dispossession of Palestinians from their land and the continued denial of their right of return.

From its establishment, Israel used tourism as a means of propagating this false history. As such, tourism in Israel became a vehicle for historical myth

and the continuation of the occupation. In the context of the Israel-Palestine conflict, mass tourism in Israel was an economic, political, and ideological prop for the oppression of the Palestinian people. Israel maintained a virtual monopoly over the tourism industry, exploiting Palestinian resources and heritage while excluding Palestinians from tourism's economic, political, and human benefits. Tourists were led by government licensed Israeli tour guides who told them only one side of the story: that of the oppressor. At no time were tourists exposed to the Palestinian narrative, much less allowed to meet Palestinians. They were rarely even permitted into Palestinian areas, and if they were, the exception was typically made to serve specific political and ideological purposes. On rare occasions Bethlehem was included in tour programs, but only for a visit of a few hours to see the Church of the Nativity. Because Palestinian cities and villages – and even the West Bank and Gaza – were not shown on Israeli tourist maps, most tourists who visit Bethlehem didn't even realize that they have left Israel.

These policies were designed to suggest to tourists that Jewish Israelis were the country's only inhabitants. Allowing tourists to talk with Palestinians, who would tell the stories of their past and continuing suffering, their culture, and their traditions was unacceptable in the eyes of the Israeli government. This strategy was implemented by various means, including by officially prohibiting Palestinians from becoming tour guides in the West Bank or Gaza. The famous Israeli general and politician Moshe Dayan was even quoted as saying that he would license a Palestinian to fly a jet fighter before he would license a Palestinian tour guide. This prohibition was adopted in 1967 and lasted until the period of the Oslo agreements in the mid 1990s.

The building of tourism infrastructure was also almost completely prohibited in Palestinian areas. Israel impeded the building of hotels so that tourists would not stay in Palestinian areas. The poor state of the basic infrastructure was also a major problem. Starting in 1967, Palestinians were forced to pay taxes to the Israelis, but they never received proper services in return. Roads and sidewalks were always in poor condition, as were sanitation services. Almost no road signs were erected to indicate Palestinian towns or cities, even those with historical or Biblical importance. When the names of Palestinian towns and cities did appear on signs they were often painted over or literally cut out of the signs by Israeli settlers.

Not only did most tourists remain ignorant of the cultural richness of Palestine, but they were also in many cases exposed to a distorted image of Palestinians. As is the norm in their society, Israeli tour guides were known to promote xenophobic stereotypes regarding Palestinians. Racist comments about the exploitative nature of Arabs, their backwardness, and their lack of cleanliness were common. Tourists returned to their countries carrying with them impressions developed on their visit, and they themselves became agents of the Israel agenda, usually without realizing the extent to which they had been taken advantage of.

There was one brief period of positive tourism development in Palestine. After the inception of the Oslo process in 1993 and the establishment of the

Palestinian Authority and its Ministry of Tourism, the Palestinian tourism industry experienced remarkable growth. Before the outbreak of the second, or al-Aqsa, Intifada in September of 2000, the flow of tourists almost doubled to 105,000 per month, hotel capacity rose from 2500 to 6000 rooms, and occupancy rose to 60%. More than a hundred tour operators did business in the country, utilizing 230 modern tour buses and 231 licensed guides. Tourism became one of the critical sectors of the Palestinian economy. It accounted for 7-10% of the country's GNP, and employed 10,000 people. This positive period ended abruptly in 2000 with the outbreak of the second Intifada.

3. Tourism after the al-Aqsa Intifada

The deliberately provocative visit of Ariel Sharon to al-Haram al-Sharif (called the Temple Mount by Jews) ignited the second Intifada, which almost entirely decimated the Palestinian tourism industry. In its attempts to quell the uprising, the Israeli government targeted the tourism industry in particular. The Gaza International Airport, opened due to the Palestinian/Israeli agreement, was closed and bombed at the beginning of the Intifada, and serious restrictions on travel were imposed at all border crossings. Israel, including the holy sites in East Jerusalem, was closed to Palestinian tour buses and guides, and groups seeking to visit religious or historical sites in Palestine experienced found them difficult or impossible to access. Israel regularly shelled not only residential and commercial areas of Palestinian cities, but also deliberately hit religious sites such as the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, the Church of the Virgin Mary in Beit Jala, the Latin Church of Beit Hanina, and the Old City of Hebron. Hotels were also a particular target in this systematic campaign aimed at destroying Palestinian infrastructure. During the Israeli invasion of Palestinian cities in 2002, many hotels were shelled, bombed, or occupied by soldiers. These included the Paradise Hotel and Bethlehem Inn in Bethlehem, the City Inn Hotel in Ramallah and many others.

Since the outbreak of the Intifada it has also been the Israeli intention to isolate the Palestinian people from tourists who started to come to support Palestinians as part of solidarity and activist programs. This policy continues to this day. It is accomplished by blocking access to Palestinian areas where foreign help is needed, or even by deporting such solidarity tourists before they even leave the airport in Tel Aviv. Those who do make it through face constant harassment by Israeli authorities. Moreover, Israel also continues to warn tourists of any kind against visiting Palestinian areas, making use of Western myths that paint Palestinians as hostile to foreigners.

The Apartheid Wall which Israel has been constructing for the last four years will continue to impose new restrictions on movement, confiscate more Palestinian land, and even affect the tourism industry by separating important religious and cultural sites from one another. The wall has also completely changed all the pilgrimage routes in the Holy Land and made it even more difficult for tourists to enter Palestinian cities.

At this point, almost all of the progress made by the Palestinian tourism sector during the Oslo years has been destroyed. Currently there are around 180 licensed Palestinian tour guides (most of them licensed after 1996), and over 4,600 Israeli guides. Tourism in Israel/Palestine generates three billion dollars annually; the Palestinian tourism industry accounts for only 3% of that revenue.

4. The Role of Justice Tourism in the Struggle Against Israeli Apartheid

As has been described, the Zionist agenda and the Israeli occupation work in tandem to re-write the history of Palestine and subvert Palestinian identity. Therefore, justice tourism has an extremely important role to play in rebuilding our country's image internationally; justice tourism can be one of the key instruments in Palestine's redevelopment, playing an essential role in preserving and enhancing national pride and spirit, while also contributing to the health of its cultural and heritage institutions.

Justice tourism asks visitors to concentrate on the political realities of the situation in Palestine and to try to understand them. Only by seeing with their own eyes what Palestinians must endure every day – the constant humiliation, the continued colonization and settlement building, the plight of refugees, the dramatic consequences of the growing Apartheid Wall, the human rights abuses, as well as so many other realities of such a highly institutionalized and sophisticated occupation – can a visitor truly understand the nature of the Israel/Palestine conflict. It is the hope of justice tourism operators that with this understanding will come a desire to try to help, both in Palestine itself and upon the visitor's return home

5. Tourism and Peace in the Middle East

The situation in Palestine has been very much affected by the political and economic agenda of the United States, which has provided Israel with the military equipment and funding it requires to maintain the occupation. Continued American support for Israel, despite the state's abominable human rights record and failure to respect international law and United Nations resolutions, has made it clear that the United States bases its policies on nothing but its own interests.

American/Israeli hegemony in the Middle East increased substantially with the collapse of the Soviet Union, which left the United States as the world's only super power. It also left America without an enemy, and thus without a convenient pre-text for its unpopular or unlawful policies and actions. This was soon rectified with the adoption of Islam, Islamic nations, and Islamic "terrorism" as America's new main adversary.

The US continues to threaten or attack any nations that refuse to conform to its wishes in the Middle East, including Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Iran. The Palestinian question remains a central issue, affecting American policies in these other countries. In order to achieve their goal of hegemony it is

inevitable that the US will only allow the Palestinian/Israeli conflict to end on its own terms.

Early indications of this began with the First Gulf War, which Arabs everywhere considered a major defeat for their people. This led the Palestinian leadership to accept the proposals brought forward at the Madrid Conference, which in turn led to the imposition of American/Israeli political solutions, stretching from the Oslo accords all the way through to the current "Road Map".

The attacks of September 11th, 2001 reinforced the already rampant association of Islam and Islamic people with terrorism in the minds of the Western public. The result has been further religious, political, and cultural polarization. The latest American invasion of Iraq has worsened the situation tremendously. The Palestinians have been caught in the middle of this game of power politics and have suffered greatly as a result.

The success of the American/Israeli agenda in the Middle East is dependent on the support of Western citizens. Because of this, a vast array of corporately owned media and propaganda companies exists to convince Western citizens of the validity of their governments' agendas. Justice tourism can play a decisive role in reducing that support by building bridges between people, thereby encouraging critical thinking, political awareness, and finally opposition to Western policies in the Middle East.

To accomplish these goals, justice tourism must:

- reinforce dialogue and understanding among peoples;
- create an environment of trust among peoples;
- make visitors aware of political situations and work to encourage them to participate in political action upon their return home;
- confront the pressures of political projects that seek to reinforce conflict between peoples.

Conclusion:

In a world troubled by economic disparity, xenophobia, and violence, justice tourism aims to facilitate intercultural dialogue. It seeks to promote harmony and understanding among all people. There is no better way to do this than to encourage tourism that promotes real human interaction between guest and host, and leaves visitors with an in-depth knowledge of another peoples' way of life. Through justice tourism, travellers can be encouraged to choose to go out in search of real human encounters. Indeed, tourism as a means of solidarity can be the path to justice, a vehicle for building a real global community. It has a critical role to play in supporting the struggle of people to defend their rights for independence and freedom.

In Palestine, there is a need to develop a justice tourism product that can compete against the Israeli dominated mass tourism industry that now exists, and compete on the international market. This can be achieved through a focus on alternative programs and the development of better infrastructure. This will attract visitors to stay longer and to spend more time in the country. The tourism product should be broadened to include special interest holidays and theme tours, hiking, camping and adventure tours, all of which should include conferences and meetings with local people. An improved image for Palestine needs to be created by better advertising tourism and recreational opportunities in Palestine.

Of course, the main goal of justice tourism in Palestine is to ensure sustainable economic, social, and cultural development based on the preservation, maintenance, and enhancement of Palestine's cultural heritage. If these goals are pursued, both travellers and their Palestinian hosts will reap huge benefits.

We hope that there will soon be an end to the suffering of Palestinians, which continues as a result of the Israeli occupation. We hope that Palestine is able to progress, and that it once again becomes a guiding light to the world. Its holy places, archaeological sites, culture, and history all have the potential to connect people from across the world to the very depths of the human experience.