



MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA
TOURISM AND DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE
U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE



A Salute to Regional Diversity and Opportunity Inaugural Conference

April 2-3, 2012 - Washington, DC

Against a backdrop of unprecedented change in the Middle East and North Africa, the region's tourism industry has suffered greatly during the past twelve months. In order to support the process of reform now underway throughout much of the region, the travel sector—a key component of economic growth, development, and employment generation—must be revitalized and strengthened.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce is therefore organizing a major, unprecedented Middle East and North Africa Tourism and Development Initiative to promote travel to the region. It will be launched at an inaugural conference in Washington, D.C. on **April 2-3, 2012** and will involve high-level participation from regional governments; leaders from the hotel, airline, and cruise line industries as well as other parts of the tourism sector; the U.S. government; and experts in the region's environment, history and cultural heritage.

A [recent study](#) by the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard highlighted a paradox in the role of tourism in expanding economic opportunity in the developing world. On the one hand, the past decade has seen marked growth in the attention paid by policy-makers, development experts, and industry leaders in the contributions made by the tourism sector in many countries. On the other hand, and despite growing evidence of the beneficial impacts of tourism in developing economies and good practices by some individual firms, critics still question whether the overall balance of impacts is positive.

Tourism companies are not development agencies. Tourism is a fiercely competitive, specialized, rapidly evolving commercial sector. It is comprised of a diversity of large companies and a plethora of small owner-operated enterprises functioning on tight profit margins. Neither is flush with cash nor privy to shareholder enthusiasm for prioritizing development over profit. CEOs must consider strategic societal issues, and there are plenty of other candidates for attention, including the industry's carbon emissions, maintaining health and safety, and respecting human rights. Adding to the challenge, there is now a broader range of actors comprising the tourism industry; there is no one-size-fits all, broadly applicable model. Actors include small hostels, large hotels, tour operators, travel agents, ground handlers, cruise ships, airlines, car hire and transportation, local guides, and a range of leisure and entertainment services. Governments too are key players in infrastructure, marketing, licensing, and regulation.

The Tourism and Development Initiative will include a **one-year program** of public-private sector engagement to revitalize tourism by showcasing the MENA region's rich touristic fabric and encouraging U.S. interest and investment in the region. Stakeholders will design a 12-month program with measurable benchmarks for bringing visitors back to the region. The program is envisioned not just as a means to strengthen an industry that has experienced significant setbacks in the past year, but as a way for the private sector to demonstrate support for the inspiring political transitions in progress in this important region.

Conference Details

The event will feature keynote addresses by regional tourism ministers, as well as other high-level government officials. In addition, the ministers will be available to meet with sponsoring companies to discuss issues of particular interest.

The program also enjoys the strong support of the U.S. government, and the U.S. Chamber is working closely with relevant officials to ensure that the program achieves its full potential. The inaugural conference will feature senior participation from the Department of State, the Department of Commerce, the Overseas Private Investment Corporation, the U.S. Trade Representative, and the U.S. Trade and Development Agency, among others.

In addition, this effort will involve close collaboration with cultural and historical experts from the U.S. and the MENA region, including representatives of the United Nations, the OECD, archeologists and specialists in antiquities and site preservation, museum curators, academics, musicians and artists. The program will feature panel discussions, question and answer sessions with key participants, and breakout sessions tailored to the needs of particular companies and sectors. *One highlight of the year-long initiative will be a visit by a high-level delegation of travel executives and industry experts to the region to showcase their historic, environmental, and contemporary political attractions.*

Goals and Objectives

The U.S. Chamber is soliciting the participation of the key players in the region's tourism industry. This will include major hotels, airlines and cruise lines, tour operators, the financial sector, travel publications, online travel sites, and others. In addition, the Chamber will pursue the involvement of U.S. media to raise the profile of the Initiative, and to highlight the issues discussed during the conference, and underscore the extraordinary sites and travel opportunities in the countries involved directly to American and international audiences.

The U.S. Chamber views this project as an opportunity for U.S. businesses to demonstrate very tangible support for the remarkable progress made by countries in transition during the past year. The inaugural conference will emphasize that these countries are again becoming safe for travel and offer a variety of options to travelers from the U.S. and elsewhere. Revival of the tourism industry is one of the fastest and most concrete ways that the U.S. can provide a sustainable economic boost to this key region. The Chamber believes this initiative can serve as a major show of support from the U.S. private sector for the political and economic aspirations of the region's peoples while, at the same time, delivering real economic benefits to U.S. and multinational companies.