Goverorate of Madaba

A project by UNDP Jordan Accelerator Lab

Tourism Potential

Madaba’s Competitive Advantage

Visit Madaba, where you can experience Christian and Islamic history, exhibits of ancient mosaics and a contemporary open-air exhibition, intimate urban and rural places, legends and folklore, traditional food making (and eating!), and adventure and landscapes.

Number of visitors to top touristic sites by locations January to December 2022

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Visitors (Overnight)</th>
<th>Visitors (Same Day)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Umm ar-Rasas1</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>11,500</td>
<td>11,650</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madaba Museum2</td>
<td>2,788</td>
<td>20,307</td>
<td>23,095</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerak Castle</td>
<td>26,462</td>
<td>121,252</td>
<td>147,714</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Baptism site</td>
<td>17,889</td>
<td>138,490</td>
<td>156,379</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madaba visitors’ centre3</td>
<td>18,334</td>
<td>203,529</td>
<td>221,863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ajloun Castle</td>
<td>148,550</td>
<td>117,014</td>
<td>265,564</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The citadel</td>
<td>132,076</td>
<td>168,524</td>
<td>290,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St George’s Church4</td>
<td>58,002</td>
<td>249,863</td>
<td>307,865</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jerash</td>
<td>69,478</td>
<td>279,268</td>
<td>348,746</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mount Nebo5</td>
<td>43,185</td>
<td>419,503</td>
<td>462,688</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wadi Rum</td>
<td>126,138</td>
<td>341,726</td>
<td>467,864</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petra</td>
<td>180,416</td>
<td>720,236</td>
<td>900,652</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We present five actionable recommendations based on these collective insights that would enhance the tourist experience and bridge gaps in quality.

1. Elevate the Tourist Experience: Enhance tour guide skills and capabilities to create an engaging and immersive tourist experience through improved language, communication, storytelling, and content skills.
2. Enhance Service Quality: Bridge the gap between visitor expectations and the perceived quality standards of local establishments by assisting service providers in Madaba to align their offerings with the demands of tourists, ensuring a satisfying and memorable experience.
3. Develop Comprehensive Tourism Offerings: Address the underdeveloped state of tourism products and services in Madaba by supporting offline and online marketing, fostering skills and competencies in product design, and managing a robust digital presence, driving sustainable tourism growth.
4. Enrich Destination Appeal: Expand the range of available activities in Madaba beyond historical sites to attract individual travellers and tourist groups, encouraging them to spend more time in the city and contributing to the growth of the local tourism sector.
5. Foster Domestic Exploration: Increase awareness among residents about Jordan’s cities and historical sites, mainly through educational initiatives, inspiring a sense of appreciation and encouraging domestic tourism, thereby bolstering the local tourism industry and supporting economic development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

MADABA’S COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

Top five tourist overnight and same-day visitors by nationality 2022

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Same Day Visitors</th>
<th>Overnight Visitors</th>
<th>Total Visitors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>52,348</td>
<td>116,771</td>
<td>169,119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>82,929</td>
<td>91,014</td>
<td>173,943</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>98,494</td>
<td>211,103</td>
<td>309,596</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palestine</td>
<td>213,248</td>
<td>390,928</td>
<td>604,176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>122,412</td>
<td>777,002</td>
<td>899,414</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Introduction

Through a series of innovative activities, the UNDP Jordan Accelerator Lab embarked on a journey to unlock the potential of the governorate of Madaba for sustainable tourism growth. Within these pages, we present the activities and insights which formed the foundation of our work.

Our activities emphasised the importance of collaboration with service providers from the public, civil society, private sectors, and the local community. We have worked together to craft an imagination for the future of Madaba’s tourism industry through inclusive, participatory, and immersive processes.

Explorative Discussions

Engaging with individuals and entities within the tourism ecosystem, we aimed to foster partnerships and create a comprehensive understanding of Madaba’s tourism landscape. These discussions helped us identify collaborators and focus our efforts.

Radio Mining

In a 20-minute airtime slot during Mazaj FM’s talk show “Al Taree2” with Ma’in and Haneen, listeners engaged in discussions about local tourism and shared their perspectives on Madaba’s tourism landscape.

What did we learn?

- Insufficient media coverage and promotional campaigns about Jordanian cities regionally or globally lead to a lack of awareness and recognition.
- Raising the people’s awareness improves their sense of belonging and engagement with cities and historical sites.
- Improving cultural education in school curricula promotes a stronger connection to local heritage.
- Utilising digital marketing on social media platforms can effectively market local tourist experiences, reaching out to tourists worldwide.
- High costs of local tourism compared to travelling abroad negatively impacts domestic tourism.

Explanatory Discussions

The discussions worked together to craft an imagination for the future of Madaba’s tourism landscape. We have emphasised the importance of collaboration with service providers from the public, civil society, private sectors, and the local community. We have worked together to craft an imagination for the future of Madaba’s tourism industry through inclusive, participatory, and immersive processes.

Local Solutions Mapping

We mapped 33 local tourism solutions in Jordan to understand the challenges faced in the sector and identify potential experiments. The solutions mapping involved online searches, media screening, and word-of-mouth references. These solutions included trips, food experiences, accommodation options, handicrafts, and activities.

What did we learn?

- Madaba’s high unemployment rate of 28.3% underscores the need for income-generating opportunities.
- Agrotourism and alternative tourism have the potential to address unemployment by providing job opportunities.
- Madaba has untapped potential as a destination for domestic and Arab tourists.
- Licensing challenges and language skills requirements pose obstacles for local guides in Madaba.
- The interest of tourists in stories related to historical sites emphasizes the value of incorporating storytelling elements into tourism experiences.
- Almost all solutions have an online presence (website, Lonely Planet, Booking.com, and social media channels).
- Most solutions were founded by women and/or youth.
- There are several informal tourism businesses or initiatives, signifying the importance of addressing the informal economy challenges.

What did we learn?

- Local creative solutions build a case for working with grassroots initiatives, supporting existing efforts and advocating for UNDP to look beyond the usual suspects.
- Many local solutions are related to tourism in Jordan, especially for alternative, experimental, and agritourism.
- Almost all solutions have an online presence (website, Lonely Planet, Booking.com, and social media channels).
- Most solutions were founded by women and/or youth.
Through a collaboration between the Member of Parliament Majdel Al Nabou and the American University in Madaba, a printed English-language city tourist map was created and designed to enhance the visitors’ experience navigating Madaba City. The Jordan Accelerator Lab conducted an experiment to test the map’s functionality and user-friendliness. Fourteen participants from eight countries completed the testing.

**What did we learn?**

- The respondents predominantly favoured online maps for their convenience in providing directions, locations, transportation options, and reviews.
- The respondents gave mixed appreciation for its inclusion of additional details that are typically absent in online maps like Google Maps.
- Most respondents indicated they would be willing to pay for a printed map if it presented unique and detailed information about activities to do in Madaba.
- Suggestions for improvement included estimated walking times between locations, information about site tickets and opening hours, money exchange shops, detailed descriptions of places, and replacing banks with ATMs once.

**A DAY AROUND JORDAN EXPERIMENT**

We held focus group discussions to gather insights, beliefs, and perceptions from women, youth, and individuals with disabilities regarding their work, self-reliance capacities, challenges, and aspirations in Madaba governorate.

**What did we learn?**

- Participant observations of challenges maintaining employment due to low salaries, work-life balance, higher salaries, and disabilities.
- Balancing work and family commitments and limited access to public transportation posed challenges for women in the Madaba area.
- Short-term jobs were a common challenge faced by youth participants.
- Work preferences were driven by aspirations, career advancement opportunities, and continuous development.
- While they preferred launching a business in the tourism sector, participants found it demanding due to the need for substantial funding and the industry’s seasonal fluctuations.
- Participants emphasized the need for better-researched training courses that align with market needs, ensure employment opportunities, and include new technologies.

**IMMERSION VISITS**

We immersed ourselves in the local ambience and tourism experiences by spending three days in Madaba as local tourists. We unveiled the challenges and explored the opportunities and solutions. We sought to engage with local stakeholders to forge bonds with the community and build trust that could pave the way for impactful collaborations.

**What did we learn?**

- Overpriced, repetitive, and mostly imported products and souvenirs overshadow the local offerings. This disparity presents an opportunity to enhance and diversify local products and souvenirs.
- While restaurant prices remain comparable, the high food quality ensures a satisfying culinary experience for visitors.
- The limited options for night activities in Madaba City are an area for improvement, as confirmed by various stakeholders.

**MAPPING TOURISM SERVICES, SKILLS, ASSETS, AND STORIES**

We embarked deeper into existing tourism services in collaboration with 20 German-Jordanian University (GDU) students. We explored the local skills, assets, and stories for collaborative experiments for enhanced tourism offerings. The students conducted 96 interviews in Madaba City, Dhiban, Libb, and Mleih, resulting in data showing suggestions for potential experiments.

**What did we learn?**

- Many skills lie under-mapped, such as heritage boxes. Incorporating interactive heritage boxes. Incorporating interactive 
- There is potential for packages of themed place-based tourism experiences such as food, art, and history experiences, especially in rural areas. For example, in Libb and Mleih municipally, there is a potential for a food experience that combines storytelling, traditional dishes, livestock, dairy, and baking.
- Local legacies and folklore offer compelling story content for diverse tourism applications such as walking trails, immersive experiences, and marketing materials.

**WORK AND SELF-RELIANCE INSIGHTS**

Partnering with Shablousa Ewez, a local youth-led non-profit company, we created an open-air exhibition experiment, Reveal Madaba, showcasing Madaba’s intangible cultural heritage through sensory pieces and interactive elements. The experiment aimed to observe tourist engagement with self-guided experiences. The experiment included observation, short random interviews, and long interviews used to collect data. Observation data collected over 23 days recorded 388 visitors, with the highest footfall during the afternoon and morning. 19.5% of the visitors scanned a QR code leading them to the Reveal Madaba website. Visitors provided positive feedback about the Reveal Madaba exhibition, finding them engaging, interactive, and a valuable way to learn about Jordan’s cultural heritage.

**What did we learn?**

- Valuable insights into their travel expectations and motivations.
- Eight unique travellers’ personas through a combination of quantitative and qualitative research.
- Valuable way to learn about Jordan’s cultural heritage.
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- Expanding the heritage sites in Jordan.
- Strategic location selection is crucial for the boxes to ensure their durability.
- New horizons for tourism in Madaba. This collaborative effort empowered participants to contribute to developing meaningful and impactful strategies.

**A DAY AROUND JORDAN EXPERIMENT**

We capitalised on the presence of 13 Arab Accelerator Labs for a regional retreat in Jordan and invited them to visit and compare three top travel destinations in Jordan. The tour commenced with Joza archaeological site and continued to Madaba. Finally, a field-visit to Petra, for a Bedouin dinner in the mountains and a tour in the ancient site. This experiment helped us compare the competitive advantage of each of the destinations. Our colleagues emphasised the importance of storytelling in creating tourists’ narrative and local experiences.

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**TRAVELLERS’ PERSONAS**

In our quest to understand the preferences and desires of tourists, we crafted eight unique travellers’ personas through a combination of quantitative online surveys and qualitative interviews. By engaging participants from eight nationalities and stakeholders in the tourism sector in Jordan, we gained valuable insights into their travel expectations and motivations.

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