

Iraq to Become World's No. 1 Tourist Destination by 2040

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France is the No. 1 tourist destination in the world today and China is aspiring to be the world's first-place destination by 2020. But I predict that by 2040 Iraq will grab that auspicious designation. Read on to find out why.

Unfortunately, a sad history has turned much of the country's landscape into a desert, but that was not always the case. Iraq is the seat of civilization. Some think it was the site of the Garden of Eden. It was once a blooming desert called the Fertile Crescent. Up until 1921, it was known by its ancient Greek name of Mesopotamia, which meant the "land between rivers." The two rivers in question are the Tigris and Euphrates. In southern Iraq, the city of Ur, named by the Sumerians, was the original home of Abraham, the father of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Babylon, whose ruins are still in existence today, is just sixty miles south of Baghdad. The Hanging Gardens of Babylon were one of the Seven Wonders of the World.

The collection of stories called *The Arabian Nights*, or *The Book of One Thousand and One Nights*, are told by a fictional storyteller Scheherazade, who must relate a series of stories to her malevolent husband, King Shahryar, to delay her execution. These tales, probably a compilation of Middle Eastern tales from generations, include Aladdin, Sinbad the Sailor and Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves. Many were set in Baghdad and reveal a sophisticated culture. Ancient Baghdad has been described as city of "palaces and offices, hotels and pavilions, mosques and colleges, kiosks and squares, bazaars and markets, pleasure grounds and orchard." No doubt tourism specialists would capitalize on the city's rich past, both historical and fictional.

Then there is Nineveh. When the king of Assyria captured Babylon, he constructed aqueducts and a magnificent palace on the Tigris, which is modern-day Mosul. The Book of Jonah described Nineveh as an "exceeding great city of three days' journey." Jonah is commanded to "Rise up and go to Nineveh," to have them repent or they will be destroyed. The ancient sites of Nineveh, such as the reliefs at the Sennacherib Palace, have regrettably been vandalized for its antiquities, but there are many others.

In addition to its antiquities, Iraq will undoubtedly become a site for dark tourism, or tourism related to death and destruction. Just as World War II sites in Normandy and the 9/11 Ground Zero site in New York City, significant war-related sites in Iraq are likely to experience visitation in remembrance of the dead.

Today we see a phenomenal tourism response in relation to books and movies, such as the *Da Vinci Code*, first a book and then a movie. All sort of companies are offering *Da Vinci Code* tours in Paris, London and Scotland. But I predict this response is nothing compared to the deluge of tourism in response to the literary, historical and cultural sites in a peaceful Iraq.