



LEBANON RURAL TOURISM STRATEGY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Ministry of Tourism

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This strategy is a plan relating key directions and practical actions that could be implemented in the next five years to improve the competitiveness of rural tourism in Lebanon.

This document is intended to:

- Set strategic areas of intervention to improve the sector's attractiveness and capacity
- Outline the different key actions with recommended actors and linkages across the value chain
- Promote cooperation and common action among stakeholders and encourage rural tourism actors to develop a shared understanding of rural tourism, take ownership, and advocate for the sector

The process of developing this strategy was based on consultations with more than 150 rural tourism actors on national and regional levels. Proposed actions reflect their perspectives and priorities.

Rural tourism is "experiencing the country" through a variety of tourism activities that have positive impact on the local environment, local community and local culture. Through rural tourism visitors experience the authentic rural way of life where landscapes, nature, agriculture, food, and heritage are at the heart of activities. The vast majority of rural tourism businesses are usually small scale, family-run enterprises offering a personalized experience for guests.

When rural tourism is appropriate and sustainable, local people work to preserve the value of local assets and are involved in developing and managing their tourism activities for their own social, economic and cultural benefit.

The rural assets in Lebanon are diverse and include mountains, rural seaside, artificial and natural lakes, rivers, villages, rural towns, orchards and agricultural fields, farmhouses, museums, arts and crafts ateliers, forest reserves, protected areas (himas), hiking trails, historic and heritage and religious sites, guesthouses and rural lodgings.

For more than two decades many tourism entrepreneurs have managed to take advantage of the great assets in rural areas and transform them into successful initiatives. The entrepreneurship and the renowned hospitality of the Lebanese, their know-how, creativity and experience have contributed to developing great rural tourism projects differentiating Lebanon as a destination.

The strategy suggests feasible interventions recognizing the challenges and opportunities for the sector and building on the many great rural tourism initiatives that already exist in the country.

Suggestions include marketing and communication actions that improve the visibility of rural tourism destinations and products and attract existing and high potential markets with emphasis on the domestic market, Lebanese expats living abroad and diaspora.

It also includes suggestions to improve involvement of local communities and stakeholders in institutionalizing tourism at the local level, in enforcing policies and regulations to manage tourism activities and to preserve their natural, cultural and historic heritage.

The strategy also recommends developing innovative and quality services and products that have the potential to generate more income for local communities in a way that doesn't create a burden on the environment nor on the social and cultural assets, identity and structures of the local communities.

Vision

Rural areas and regions beyond the capital city Beirut and major urban areas are more successful sustainable destinations for travel including cultural, historical, religious, culinary, nature, sports, agricultural and adventure tourism.

Goal

Regions and local communities expand their income by receiving more visitors and by offering more competitive tourism products, services and experiences to tourists while preserving their natural environment and cultural heritage.

Strategic Directions

1. Develop and improve marketing and promotion to increase consumer awareness and the visibility of rural tourism destinations, products and services domestically and internationally
2. Institutionalize rural tourism at the level of local communities
3. Improve and enforce conservation and protection of the environmental, cultural, historical, agricultural heritage of rural areas
4. Diversify, modernize and strengthen rural destinations, products and services
5. Improve policies, legislation, and regulation of the rural tourism sector and enforcement of laws across the value chain
6. Improve information and data collection and management to support sound planning
7. Develop the culture of rural tourism among the young generation
8. Improve domestic and international business linkages and networking with the diaspora

The strategy proposes the establishment of a Common Action Mechanism which would:

- Implement the actions developed in this strategy in a sustainable and efficient way
- Advocate for the development of rural tourism through common action
- Ensure proper coordination and linkages among stakeholders

Based on the strategic directions and the recommendations of stakeholders the mechanism shall be based primarily on the creation of a Rural Tourism Movement in Lebanon (RTM). The RTM will bring together all active stakeholders in rural tourism in Lebanon to advocate for the adoption of public policies and improved legislation for the sector. Public policies and legislation will enable the market mechanisms to function effectively and contribute substantially to the increase of qualitative and quantitative competitiveness of rural tourism.

The strategy will be the guiding document for the RTM. It will be further reviewed and amended as necessary.



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