

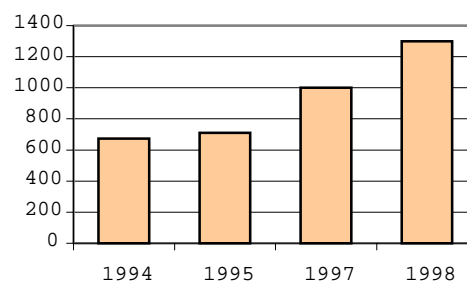
6. TOURISM AND RECREATION

Tourism in Lebanon has traditionally been urban based, i.e., most tourists head for other urban areas and poles such as beach resorts, country clubs, casinos, and restaurants. In recent years, however, tourism and recreation are increasingly practiced in natural settings such as forests, protected areas, valleys, and mountain areas. Traditional tourism is generally more destructive, as more land is used for accommodation (chalets, mountain resorts, hotels, furnished apartments). Moreover, new accommodation facilities in remote areas require access roads and other infrastructure (e.g., water supply, wastewater network, electricity). While nature tourism is less resource demanding, it could generate added sources of pressure on the environment if poorly managed. How the country will manage its natural heritage will set the pace for nature tourism in the future.

6.1 Targeted Description

Tourism represents an important and growing economic sector, generating US\$1,300 million in net revenues in 1998, up from US\$673 million in 1994 (see Figure 6. 1). In 1995, services including tourism accounted for 16.4 percent of GDP (up from 14.3 percent in 1973).

Figure 6. 1
Tourism in the National Economy
(US\$ million)



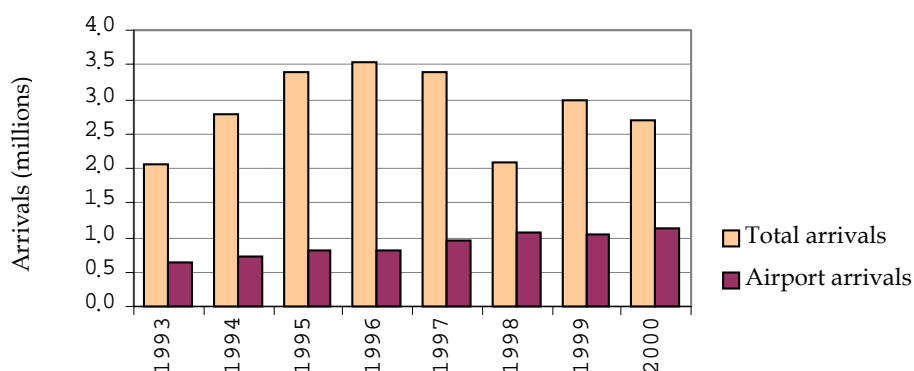
Source: MoT, Central Bank, CAS (LEDO Indicator #43)

6.1.1 Evolution of tourism

Developing accurate estimates of the number of tourists in Lebanon is difficult due to the ambiguity about “who is a tourist”. Many Lebanese return home to see their relatives and declare “tourism” to be the purpose of their visit. The total number of arrivals by land, sea and air has fluctuated significantly since 1993 (see Figure 6.2). Total arrivals include tourists as well as other people entering Lebanon (e.g., foreign labor, truck drivers). The sharp decline in total arrivals recorded in 1998 was caused by the Israeli raid that year. Other factors include the economic recession and the associated decline in foreign labor working in the construction sector. In contrast with total arrivals, passenger arrivals at the Beirut International Airport (BIA) has increased steadily since 1993, reaching 1.1 million in 1999 (up 71 percent from 1993).

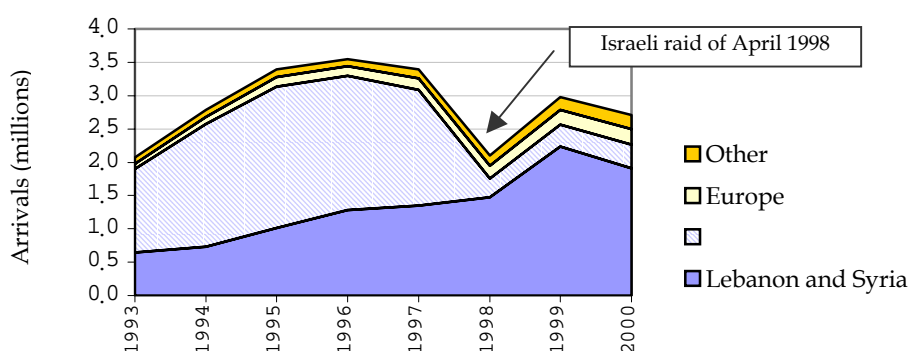
Lebanese and Syrian nationals represented 74 percent of total arrivals in 1999, up from 31 percent in 1993 (see Figure 6.3). Arrivals from other Arab countries constitute the second largest visitor group, followed by Europeans whose number has tripled in seven years (from 76,500 in 1993 to 224,800 in 1999). While visiting Arabs represented 60 percent of total arrivals in 1993, they represented just 11 percent of total arrivals in 1999. This sharp decline is largely due to the Israeli raids in 1998 and the general impression that Lebanon is becoming overly expensive.

Figure 6. 2
Number of Arrivals at BIA (1993-2000)



Source: CAS Bulletins, 1996-2001 (for years 1995-2000) and MoT (for years 1993-1994)

Figure 6. 3
Number of Arrivals by Country of Origin (1993 and 2000)



Source: CAS Bulletins, 1996-2001 (for years 1995-2000) and MoT (for years 1993-1994)

In 2000, international tourists accounted for 27.4 percent of total arrivals. With the exception of 1997, the annual number of international tourists (excluding Lebanese, Syrians and Palestinians) has increased steadily since 1994. During this period, international tourists coming to Lebanon has more than doubled.

Table 6. 1
Evolution of Number of International Tourists (1994-2000)

Year	No. of International Tourists	% Annual Change	% of Total Arrivals
1994	321,600	-	11.5
1995	402,000	+ 25.0	11.9
1996	679,146	+ 68.9	19.2
1997	557,568	- 17.9	16.4
1998	599,765	+ 7.6	28.6
1999	673,261	+ 12.3	22.6
2000	741,648	+ 10.2	27.4

Source: MoT, CAS (LEDO Indicator #42)

6.1.2 Tourism infrastructure (hotels)

International tourists usually stay in hotels or furnished apartments. Lebanese tourists may also stay at second homes, beach resorts, country clubs and chalets. Section 6.2.2 examines the environmental impact of select types of accommodation.

Contrary to popular belief, the number of hotels in Lebanon has dropped between 1995 and 2000 (from 235 to 217 hotels). At the same time, the number of hotel rooms has increased by close to nine percent. As shown in Table 6.2, at least 21 new hotels were built in Beirut, while all other Mohafazas have experienced a marked decline in the number of hotels. These findings suggest that hotels are progressively converging towards Beirut and increasing in size. It remains to be seen if other regions will introduce alternative forms of accommodation, such as youth hostels, inns, camping sites, etc.

Table 6.2
Number of Hotels and Hotel Rooms (1995 and 2000)

Mohafaza	Number of Hotels			Number of Rooms		
	1995 ^a	2000 ^b	% change	1995 ^a	2000 ^b	% change
Beirut	38	59	55.3	2,772	4,563	64.6
Mount Lebanon	141	124	-12.1	5,690	5,428	-4.6
North Lebanon	40	24	-40.0	1,085	795	-26.7
South Lebanon	4	2	-50.0	263	55	-79.1
Bekaa	12	8	-33.3	499	362	-27.5
Total	235	217	-7.7	10,309	11,203	8.7

^a Source: MoT/UNDP, 1996

^b Source: Data supplied to ECODIT by MoT, 2001

6.1.3 Categories of tourism

As part of its strategy to promote the tourism sector, the Ministry of Tourism has divided tourism into three major categories and 11 groups (see Table 6.3). While business tourism is almost exclusively concentrated in Beirut, recreational tourism is spread throughout the country (along the coast, in mountain areas, and in the Bekaa plain). The remainder of this section describes select forms of recreational tourism.

Table 6.3
Categories of Tourism in Lebanon

<input type="checkbox"/> Recreational tourism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Beach holidays - Winter sports - Summer holidays in the mountains - Cultural tourism - Religious tourism - Adventure tourism - Youth tourism 	<input type="checkbox"/> Business tourism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Individuals - Exhibitions - Congresses
	<input type="checkbox"/> Other types of tourism: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Medical/health visits - Education - Training

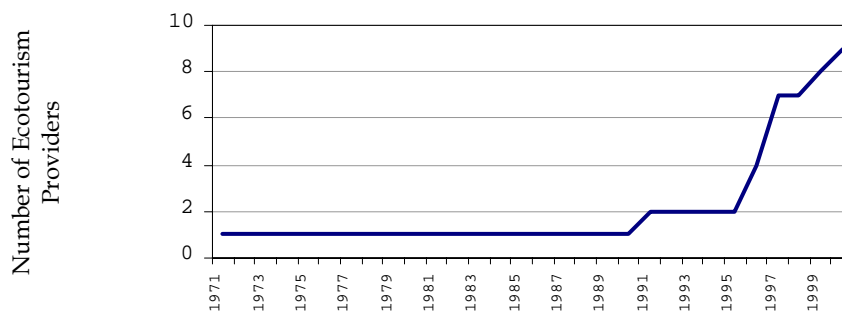
Source: MoT/UNDP, 1996

Ecotourism and adventure sports

Ecotourism encompasses a wide variety of nature-based activities, and is also referred to as wilderness tourism, adventure tourism, green tourism, alternative tourism, scientific tourism, cultural tourism, agro-tourism and rural tourism, to name a few (UNEP/Salman, 2000). Ecotourism involves various degrees of sports and exercise, culture, and environmental activities (e.g., bird watching, star gazing). In Lebanon, ecotourism is appealing to increasing numbers of people from all ages and backgrounds.

A growing number of small businesses and non-profit organizations specialize in organizing ecotours throughout the country, as well as in Jordan and Syria. Nine organizations (small businesses and non-profit organizations) provide such a service today, up from one organization back in 1971 - *Le Club des Vieux Sentiers* (see Figure 6. 4). Several of these organizations and small businesses guide up to 2,500 visitors/participants a year, according to a survey conducted by ECODIT for this report. Appendix F presents background information pertaining to each ecotourism provider.

Figure 6. 4
Evolution of Number of Ecotourism Providers (1971-2000)



Source: Survey by ECODIT, 2001

In addition, a number of associations (NGOs and federations) offer alternative forms of tourism and leisure trips, including climbing and rappelling, rafting, canoeing, cross-country skiing, mountain biking, speleology, and paragliding. Also, an increasing number of private or community-based initiatives provide camping facilities and various forms of recreation (*La Réserve* in Mnaitra/Jbeil - see Box 6.3, *Camping Aamchit, Hidden Valley* in Bzebdine, *Jdoudna Village* in Batroun, *Mada el Jourd* in Hermel, and in Ouyoun es-Simane). Environmentalists and green entrepreneurs are targeting natural sites of special interest and starting to mark trails, produce maps, and sell souvenirs and artifacts. In 2000, Al Shouf Cedars, Palms Islands and Horsh Ehden Nature Reserves received about 20,000, 20,000, and 3,000 visitors, respectively.¹

Skiing

There are currently six ski resorts in Lebanon (see Table 6. 4). Expensive investments in upgrade and expansion of the Faraya ski resort were made in the past few years. In addition, there are plans to build additional ski resorts (Knaysseh, Ehden) or upgrade/expand existing ones (Cedars). The Cedars is the oldest ski resort (initially built in 1935 by the French Army), while Faraya is the most modern and best-equipped ski resort in Lebanon. The Lebanese ski resorts are equipped with a total of 46 ski lifts with a

¹ LEDO Indicator #44, 2001

combined length of about 30 km. While this extension pales away compared to French or Swiss ski domains, snow compaction and noise pollution could impact plant cover and animals even in Lebanon.

Moreover, at least 44 hotels and country clubs are located in close proximity to the ski resorts. This includes 25 hotels serving the Mount Lebanon ski resorts (located in Faqra, Faraya, Faytroun, Kanat Bakiche, Laqlouq, Ouyoun el Siman, Rayfoun and Zaarour) and 19 hotels potentially serving the Cedars ski resort (located in Becharre, the Cedars and Ehden). See Section 6.2.2 for a discussion of hotel infrastructure and environmental impacts.

Table 6.4
Ski resorts and Corresponding Infrastructure

Resort	Altitude Range (meters)	Number of Ski lifts	Total Length of Ski Slopes (meters)	No. of Hotels ^a
Cedars	1850-3086	4	3,760	11
Laqlouq	1650-1920	12	4,795	2
Faraya-Mzar	1850-2465	15	11,915	6
Faqra	1735-1975	4	2,060	1
Qanat Bakish	1920-2220	3	2,285	1
Zaarour	1700-2000	8	5,600	1
Total	-	46	30,415	22

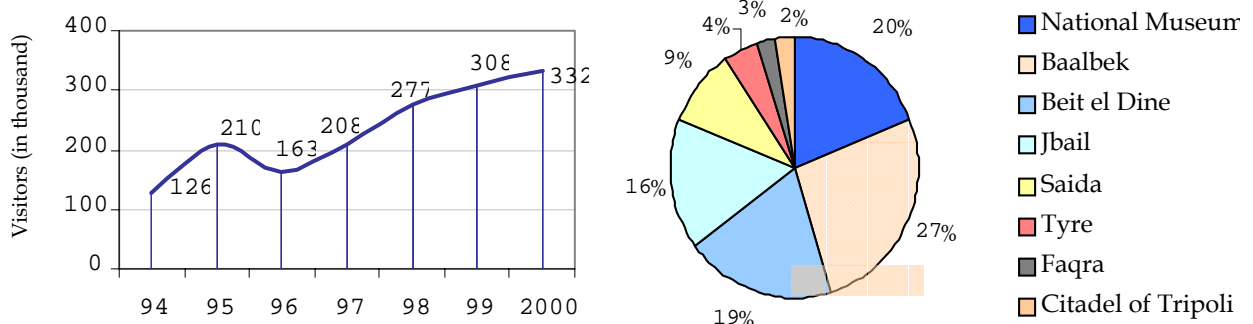
^aThis does not include hotels in Ouyoun el Simane, Faytroun, Rayfoun, Besharre and Ehden
Source: MoT, 2000

6.1.4 Cultural tourism

Lebanon offers a number of key historic and cultural attractions such as Baalbeck, Beit el Dine, Jbeil, the citadel of Tripoli, and the recently rehabilitated National Museum in Beirut. The number of visitors to eight select heritage sites has nearly tripled between 1994 and 2000. In 2000, Baalbeck accounted for 27 percent of the total number of visits (down from 41 percent in 1999).

Between 1994 and 2000, entrance fees were raised significantly. In Baalbeck, entrance is LBP 7,000 for nationals and 12,000 for foreigners, up from 2,000 and 5,000 in 1994. The additional revenues hopefully will be used to improve site conservation and management efforts.

Figure 6.5
Numbers of Visitors to Eight Heritage Sites (1994-2000) and Per Site (2000)



Source: CAS Bulletins, 1996-2001

6.2 Pressures on the Environment

Poorly planned tourism contributes to the degradation of many areas of natural and cultural significance, causing the loss of biological and cultural diversities as well as of important sources of income (UNEP/Abu Salman, 2000). While the number of international tourists has not reached its pre-war level (1.9 million in 1974), the impact of tourists (both national and international) is hard felt in many locations and areas, especially in the coastal zone, in high mountain areas near ski resorts, and along riverbanks.

Tourists impact the environment in special ways because they tend to concentrate in particular areas and during select periods of the year. Tourist arrivals peak during August. International tourists tend to stay in hotels, chalets or resorts, mostly in or near Beirut, and conduct one-way trips to one or more natural and cultural sites (see Figure 6.5). In general, most environmental impacts relate to commuting, accommodation and infrastructure requirements. In addition, recreational activities, especially mechanized sports, may have significant impacts on the environment. In the absence of stringent monitoring and regulations, other impacts could include the deterioration of tourist sites (littering, looting/collection of historic and archaeological artifacts, wild picking, etc.).

6.2.1 *Transport*

During the skiing season, the main roads leading to and from major ski resorts are crowded and sometimes grid locked during peak hours. Some roads are snowplowed more frequently than others, and traffic management is seriously deficient at some ski resorts. The same pattern of congestion can be observed during the summer near beach resorts, and in popular mountain destinations such as Broumana, Beit Mery and Ehden. These destinations host a large number of restaurants, nightclubs and coffee shops, and offer magnificent vistas.

6.2.2 *Accommodation and infrastructure*

Tourists stay in various kinds of accommodation: hotels, furnished apartments, chalets, beach resorts, and country clubs. Many internal tourists have secondary residences (or second homes) where they go for the weekend or spend the summer.

Secondary residences and chalets take up a lot of land area relative to the limited length of time during the year in which they are actually used. Moreover, they require basic infrastructure and services such as access roads, electricity, water supply, wastewater network, and solid waste collection, with significant associated environmental impacts. For example, municipalities are often under equipped (human and financial resources, equipment) to provide the services required to deal with the seasonal surge of residents and visitors.

Hotels are the most common form of tourist accommodation. Rates of hotel occupancy vary depending on the season, hotel category (from one to five star hotels), and available attractions. The Ministry of Tourism compiles statistics on hotel occupancy based on a limited sample of hotels located in Beirut, Metn, Jbeil, Kesrouan, and the Bekaa. While hotel occupancy fluctuates significantly within the year, it peaks during the

third quarter (see Table 6.5). Peak hotel occupancy lies around 60 percent. The Ministry of Tourism reported 691,909 international hotel night stays in 2000.²

Table 6.5
Hotel Occupancy in 1998 and 1999

Quarter	Occupancy In Percent	
	1998	1999
1 st	27.8	33.1
2 nd	42.1	43.4
3 rd	53.5	60.8
4 th	33.7	38.2
Average ^a	39.9	44.2

^a Based on sample (which includes three, four and five star hotels) and calculated for every region and for each quarter.

Source: Data supplied to ECODIT by MoT/Division of Statistics

Furnished apartments and chalets are rented out for varying lengths of time. Compared to hotels and second homes, furnished apartments usually show a higher rate of occupancy, typically with a longer stay. There are 3,198 furnished apartments in Beirut, Mount Lebanon and North Lebanon, 67 percent of which are located in Beirut.³ Chalets provide accommodation to a large number of people, mostly during winter (ski resorts) and summer (beach resorts).

Unlike beach chalets, winter chalets are occupied only a few weeks during the year. During winter, chalets may reach 100 percent occupancy, causing peak demand for water and a surge in solid waste generation. Most ski resorts, including Cedars and Faraya/Mzar, do not have a sound solid waste management scheme or a sewage collection network. Instead, solid waste is hauled to the nearest dumpsite, often not very far from the resorts themselves, and sewage is discharged into septic tanks or underground pits. Such waste dumping is extremely hazardous because it occurs at very high altitudes (up to 2,400 meters in Ouyoun el Siman and the Cedars), contaminating snow water, streams and groundwater.

Beachfront resorts have reduced access to public beaches. While such resorts are required by law to respect the continuity of the beach line,⁴ the vast majority is illegally built on public maritime domain and effectively seals off the public's access to it (see Section 11.4.3 for a legal examination on the abuses of the public maritime domain). Furthermore, most of them have built quays and marinas without any EIA. These water structures are constructed using rubble, boulders and/or concrete, thereby irreversibly cutting off water circulation and altering water currents. This may have significant impact on marine ecology (see section 10.4.3 for more information on biocenoses and marine life). Box 6.1 lists 40 existing beach resorts concentrated along a 35 km belt between Byblos and Beirut.

² LEDO Indicator #41, 2001

³ Data supplied to ECODIT by Ministry of Tourism/Department of Statistics, 2001. Database is presumably not exhaustive.

⁴ Decree-law 4810 dated 24/6/1966

Box 6. 1**List of 40 Beach Resorts Between Beirut and Byblos**

Tabraja Beach, Aquamarina I, Aquamarina II, Halat-sur-Mer, Saint Paul, Holiday Beach, Résidences de la Mer, Al Rimal, Rabieh Marine, Safra Marine, Solemar, Samaya, Santa Theresa Playa, Al Manar, Amwaj, Portemilio, Four Seasons, Blue Beach, Lagoon, King Bargis, Byblos-sur-Mer, Byblos Marine, Green Beach, Middle Beach, Saint Antoine, La Medina, Abna' al Khalij, Bel Azur, Horizon, Saint Raphael, Dona Maria, Hamac, Coral Beach, Summerland, Sporting, Long Beach, Riviera, Ajram, Bain Francais, St. Georges.

Source: CDR/ECODIT-IAURIF, 1997

In recent years, several entrepreneurs have acquired authorization to use the public maritime domain and have done so without remodeling the beachfront or sealing off public access to it. These “green entrepreneurs” have put in place removable structures (showers, snack bars, changing rooms) while staying away from the beach and the public maritime domain. And while entrance is rarely free, these beaches maintain a high standard of cleanliness, and thus attract a growing number of visitors every year (e.g., *White Beach* and *Pearl Beach* in Batroun, *Tam Tam* and *Paradise* in Jbeil, *Borabora* in Zouk, and *Bambou Bay* in Jiyeh). However, in another breach of Decree-Law 4810, some have posted lifeguards and security personnel to prevent non-paying visitors from entering. Also, the sea has been sectioned off using booms.

Country Clubs are hybrids between secondary residences, chalets, and furnished apartments. Country Clubs have gained recognition and popularity in recent years, probably because they host several facilities and offer many recreational activities (swimming pool, gym, courts, horse back riding, etc.). Unfortunately, many country clubs are not licensed and therefore not inspected by the Ministry of Tourism. Several of them have been constructed at the expense of vast pine forests and could pollute important sources of drinking water in the long term (see Box 10.4 for an assessment of the Jeita water sources).

Secondary residences (second homes) are small to medium-sized apartments (and less commonly villas) usually found in mountain areas. They take up a lot of land area relative to the limited length of time during the year in which they are actually used. This type of accommodation causes the greatest damage to the environment because it generates so little utility, as compared to, say, shared houses, inns, campsites and youth hostels. In Lebanon, 62,967 residential units were used as second homes in 1996-1997 (six percent of the total number of residential units).⁵ While not all of these homes are tourist destinations, a large proportion is used by Lebanese and non-Lebanese during summer and/or winter, depending on location. Almost half of the second homes are located in Mount Lebanon, clearly a favorite destination (see Table 6.6). But Nabatiyeh has the highest percentage of secondary residential units among al Mohafazas (11.2 percent).

⁵ CAS Studies, 1996-98

Table 6. 6
Secondary and Total Residential Units by Mohafaza

Mohafaza	Total No. of Residential Units	Secondary Residential Units	Percent of Total Secondary in Lebanon	Percent of Residential in Mohafaza
		Number	Residential Units	Residential Units
Beirut	116,238	2,390	3.8	2.1
Mount Lebanon	463,583	27,656	43.9	6.0
North Lebanon	179,278	10,067	16.0	5.6
South Lebanon	111,342	6,743	10.7	6.1
Nabatiyeh	73,085	8,195	13.0	11.2
Bekaa	121,305	7,916	12.6	6.5
TOTAL	1,064,831	62,967	100	5.9

Source: CAS Studies, 1996-1998

6.2.3 Mechanized sports

High-impact mechanized sports include snowmobiles, jet-skis and all-terrain vehicles. Their impact depends on how they are used/handled, their number and distribution. As in most sports, it is usually the small minority of amateurs who wreck it for the majority.

Snowmobiles are becoming an increasingly popular winter sport. There are no data on the number of snowmobiles in Lebanon. Unlike any other motor vehicle, snowmobiles do not require a driving license and are often leased by amateurs without any prior training. Snowmobiles cause extensive noise and air pollution and disturb the fauna. Despite progress achieved in reducing noise levels in newer models, poor maintenance can result in excessive and unnecessary noise and air pollution, thereby disturbing the peace and tranquility of usually serene high mountain environments. Snowmobiles in Lebanon venture across extensive snow covered tracks, such as from Faraya to the Cedars (a 40 km stretch).

Reckless driving of snowmobiles has caused several injuries and fatalities, including innocent bystanders and skiers. Urgently needed are basic safety rules and requirements for training, speed limits on trails, random sobriety checks, and mandatory helmets.

Jet-skis have been increasing in number for many years already. They cause extensive noise pollution, pollute the air,⁶ and pose real safety concerns to swimmers. There is still no regulation on the use of jet-skis in Lebanon (i.e., minimum distance from the shore, well marked entry and exit points to and from the shore),⁷ and drivers often ride them recklessly, performing various stunts within the confines of marinas and other enclaves. Fatalities are reported every year. Although jet-skiers often disturb swimmers blatantly, lifeguards rarely intervene.

All-terrain vehicles have seen a marked rise in the past years, although there are no data on the number of four-wheel drive vehicles in Lebanon. While there currently is no restriction on the use of such vehicles (such as only being authorized on roads and beaten tracks set aside for this purpose), the majority of 4x4 drivers use them on public roads

⁶ Like snowmobiles, jet-skis are two-stroke engines which usually emit more pollutants than regular vehicles

⁷ Pers. comm. Daniel Germani/Manager of Saint George beach hotel, Beirut, 2001

only, with no direct impact on plant cover. However, some drivers seek out remote areas and rough tracks, causing extensive damage to soils and plant cover (ruts⁸ are formed and erosion occurs on slopes) and potentially altering the natural water regime. For example, in Qornet el Sawda, at 3,000 meters above sea level, there is an incessant flow of four-wheel vehicles, recklessly crisscrossing eternal snow, the only such formation in Lebanon.⁹ Careless driving is also seen along and across many riverbeds (e.g., Nahr Ibrahim, Nahr el Litani), disturbing freshwater flora and fauna. In addition, the vehicles disturb the peace and quiet of other users of those paths (i.e., hikers, fishers, picnic-goers, etc.).

6.3 Key Policies and Actions

If Lebanon wishes to promote the tourism sector, then a clean and healthy environment must be recovered and/or preserved. At the same time, if the growth in tourism is allowed to degrade the landscape and pollute the environment, then growth will slow down and ultimately decline. The GoL's 10-year reconstruction plan (1993-2002) did not prioritize the environment or tourism – they accounted for less than 2.5 percent of the total envisaged budget (US\$13.3 billion). Nevertheless, an ambitious strategy for developing tourism has been elaborated in 1996 (MoT/UNDP, 1996) and the ministries of environment and tourism endorsed in 2000 a strategy framework for sustainable tourism.

The WTO defined sustainable tourism as “tourism that meets the needs of present tourists and host - regions while protecting and enhancing future opportunities”.

Source: UNEP/ Abu Salman, 2000

6.3.1 National Strategy for Tourism

The World Tourism Organization (WTO) has disseminated a framework strategy for developing the tourism sector worldwide. This strategy identified several axes of intervention to guide countries like Lebanon, including the development of new products and diversified services, the participation of local communities and tourism developers, environmental conservation, and the promotion of tourist awareness and marketing strategies based on the comparative tourism advantage of the country. Building on the WTO framework strategy, the GoL set a national strategy for tourism with the following priority actions (MoT/UNDP, 1996):

- ❑ Rehabilitating and management of the historic sites in Tripoli;
- ❑ Renovating the old city center in Jounieh;
- ❑ Managing the coastal plain of Damour;
- ❑ Planning for the management of the Qadisha valley;
- ❑ Managing the Qaroun lake;
- ❑ Elaborating a plan for the mountain areas;
- ❑ Managing the coastal area in Batroun; and
- ❑ Rehabilitating and upgrading public beaches.

⁸ Ruts are grooves made by wheels in soft ground

⁹ Qornet el Sawda is protected by Ministerial Decision 187/1, dated 17/11/1998 (see Section 13.2.3 for information on the management status of protected sites).

6.3.2 *Linking existing ski resorts and building new ones*

In 2000, the GoL formed a national committee to support ski resorts and the associated industry (Ministerial Decision 37, dated 26/2/2000). The committee groups representatives from various ministries including tourism, interior and municipalities, environment, youth, and finance. The objectives and mandate of the committee have not been laid out explicitly.

A report issued by a French delegation to Lebanon in December 1999 pointed to the need to link and expand existing ski resorts.¹⁰ It also recommended that activities be diversified in order to enhance the use of existing infrastructure during the summer season (swimming pools, sports activities, etc.). For example, the Zaarour ski resort could extend its domain in the direction of Sannine. Likewise, the Cedars ski resort and the Ehden region have a great potential to expand skiing and receive up to 15,000 skiers a year. There is also a project to develop a ski resort in Knayseh, just north of the Damascus highway. Project proponents have met with opposition from local inhabitants and the local mineral water bottling company; they have commissioned a full-fledged environmental assessment of the their project. Mount Hermon also offers unique opportunities to develop ski and related industry in South Lebanon, but taking advantage of those opportunities certainly would require comprehensive and lasting settlements of the Middle East conflict. All of these new projects must pay particular attention to protecting precious water resources and endemic plant species in the high mountains of Lebanon (see Section 10.2.1 on endemic species in highlands).

¹⁰ Report submitted to MoT, and prepared by a delegation from the French Ministry of Tourism. December 6-18, 1999.

6.4 Outlook

The challenge ahead will be to energize the tourism sector without compromising environmental quality and natural resources. In fact, the tourism sector may not grow at all *unless* more attention is paid to improving the environment and water quality, enhancing the landscape and cultural heritage sites, and streamlining transportation. The sector also could benefit greatly from concerted efforts in a number of areas, beginning with the regulation of shorefront resorts and country clubs. This will require a comprehensive review and updating of the number, type and location of tourist complexes around the country. This, in turn, necessitates better coordination and consultation between the Ministry of Tourism and the DGUP. Moreover, the national strategy for the development of tourism laid out in 1996 should be reviewed to encourage low-impact tourism, various forms of nature-based tourism, as well as environmentally friendly accommodation. In an effort to reconcile tourism and development, it should also advocate rural-based tourism.

The United Nations and the World Tourism Organization designated the year 2002 as the "International Year of Ecotourism." It happens also to be designated the "International Year of the Mountain."

6.4.1 *Settling beachfront violations*

By law, all tourist facilities and complexes are required to obtain a license from the MoT. Because the Ministry holds records of licensed tourist complexes only, all non-licensed complexes do not appear in its records. The monitoring division at the MoT is mandated to inspect the operation of licensed tourist complexes only. This means that non-licensed complexes are currently not subject to any inspection. In the wake of this gridlock, the GoL has been exploring ways to settle illegal/non-licensed beachfront resorts. While the government views this issue primarily as a financial transaction (i.e., opportunity to generate much needed funds through settlement fees), conservationists argue that any planned reorganization of beachfront resorts must restore the integrity of the public maritime domain and respect the public's access to the beach.

6.4.2 *Surveying accommodation facilities*

The Ministry of Tourism has recently amended the classification system for tourist accommodations to include hotels, tourist residences, condominiums, inns, chalets, motels, resorts, historical hotels, youth hostels and campsites.¹¹ In order to energize the sector, the ministry needs to compile a comprehensive and detailed list of all existing tourist accommodations in Lebanon, including licensed and non-licensed ones (see box 6.2). This database will serve as a baseline to guide policy makers and investors alike.

Box 6. 2

Excerpt from Decree 4221 on Conducting a National Census

"The Ministry of Tourism may call upon the services of specialists, consultation firms and institutes to conduct a national census of tourist establishments, to classify such establishments and train appointed employees on their inspection and monitoring under the supervision of the Ministry."

Source: Decree 4221 (10/10/2000), Article 24

¹¹ Decree 4221 (10/10/2000), amends Decree 15598 (21/09/1970), on the definition of general standards for the creation and operation of tourist establishments

6.4.3 Incorporating environmental considerations into the licensing procedure

In an effort to strengthen the role of the MoE in the permitting system for new facilities, SPASI developed a set of general environmental guidelines for green hotel. These guidelines reflect the Ministry's determination to improve the environmental performance of hotels; they cover several areas of intervention including, energy conservation (cooking, lighting, cooling and ventilation), water and wastewater management, solid waste management, air and noise pollution control, landscaping, and the selection and use of building materials. These guidelines were disseminated to the hotel industry in the form of an audit manual during a launching ceremony at the UN House in October 2001 (MoE/SPASI, 2001a). They could be very useful in the future when large tourist projects would be required to prepare EIAs, whose approval by the MoE would become a prerequisite for project licensing.

The design of the first green hotel in Lebanon became a reality on June 1, 2000, when an environmental protocol was signed between the owner of green hotel Oasis and the MoE. This protocol binds the hotel management to environmental guidelines set forth by SPASI for the design phase of the green hotel. Oasis, a five star hotel due for completion in 2003, will be built in Sawfar, Mount Lebanon.

Box 6.3

La Réserve, a Model for Nature-Based Tourism?

La Réserve is a private adventure tourism and outdoors sports activity camp, located in Mnaitra, close to the legendary Afqa spring (upper Caza of Jbeil). It was established in 1998 following an earlier attempt to set up a private hunting and game management reserve (it was a losing business). *La Réserve* currently manages an integrated recreational camp, located at an altitude of 1,400 meters, and has capacity to host 250 visitors per day. *La Réserve* encompasses several land parcels covering an estimated three million square meters, which were rented from various landowners for a period of 17 years. The management of *La Réserve* organizes a wide variety of on-site adventure sports including hiking, rappelling, climbing, horseback riding, mountain biking, archery, rafting and caving.

Open to the public between April and October, *La Réserve* attracts children, teenagers and adults (including firms and NGOs). During the peak summer season, it employs 30 staff and an additional 12 overseers for summer camps. *La Réserve* has witnessed a steady increase in customers every year, currently topping 4,000 per year. To meet its peak water requirement of 30 m³/day, *La Réserve* receives a weekly water ration from the nearest water authority and covers the deficit by buying water from private haulers. It uses on-site power generators to supply electricity and solar panels as a supplemental source of water heating. Wastewater is disposed into earth-lined septic tanks.

Despite the need to improve water/wastewater management and adopt renewable energy, *La Réserve* has come a long way in providing nature lovers with an alternative form of tourism, including an array of activities with minimal impact on the environment. *La Réserve* has proved a popular and economically viable option to promote soft tourism while instilling an awareness of nature and ecology among visitors. It may have inspired other similar initiatives, such as *Jdoudna Village* in Batroun and *Mada el Jourd* in the Hermel area.

Source: Based on site visit and *Pers comm* Aariss P, Manager of *La Réserve*