

Egypt moves to shore up tourism sector in shadow of Gaza war

By Aidan Lewis

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Egypt is offering incentives to shore up its tourism industry in southern Sinai on the Red Sea, with fallout from the conflict in the Gaza Strip so far contained to under 10% of bookings in the country, the Egyptian tourism minister said on Monday.



FILE PHOTO: A general view of buildings at the Red Sea resort of Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, June 4, 2022. REUTERS/Mohamed Abd El Ghany/File Photo

Tourism, a key source of scarce foreign currency for Egypt, was on track to earn more than \$13 billion this year and hit a target of 15 million visitors, despite some delayed reservations for the end of the year, Ahmed Issa said in an interview.

Ratings firm S&P Global warned on Monday that a fall in tourism due to the Gaza war could cause significant problems in Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon. Some travellers are cancelling or postponing holidays to the Middle East and North Africa.

"So far the impact is on the customers who have bought the regional products, because the tourism sector in Israel has actually practically shut down, so this is where we're seeing the most significant impact," Issa said on the sidelines of the World Travel Market trade fair in London.

"But in the grand scheme of things, the overall size of bookings, that represents less than 10% of the total number of bookings in Egypt."

Issa said Egypt was offering an extra \$500 of incentives per flight landing in Sharm el-Sheikh, because this is where customers were asking "the largest number of questions", and working very closely with wholesalers, retailers and airlines to keep them committed to Egypt.

Sharm el-Sheikh is about 360 km (225 miles) south of Sinai's northern, Mediterranean coast, which borders with the Gaza Strip.



FILE PHOTO: A general view for pools of a hotel in the Red Sea resort of Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, June 4, 2022. REUTERS/Mohamed Abd El Ghany/File Photo

Expanding tourism sector markets

Strong numbers from Germany, which would account for about 10% of bookings for Egypt this year, and China, not traditionally a large market for Egypt, had helped tourist numbers rise 7% above the previous year by the end of October, Issa said.

As part of a plan to expand the tourism sector by 30% annually, Egypt is trying to increase private sector participation, including to run services at tourist sites and airports.

"There are several private sector groups, local and international, who have expressed interest in partnering with the Egyptian government in managing the airports," said Issa.

Egypt is also hoping for a boost from the vast, delayed Grand Egyptian Museum next to the Giza pyramids, which Issa said was expected to open officially between February and May next year.

"We're installing about 200 pieces a day today in the showcases, we're finishing the last touches of the audio guides," Issa said.

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