

Jordan hopes webcams of its historical sites will invigorate tourism industry rocked by political instability elsewhere in the region

Amman, Jordan (National Post) February 13, 2013

Considering a visit to Jordan? Some of its most breathtaking wonders, from the amazing rock formations and remains of ancient life in Petra to the lowest point on Earth at the Dead Sea, are now just a click away as Jordan becomes a leader in using technology to promote tourism.

In a bid to boost tourism revenues after two bad years, Jordanian tourism authorities this month introduced the live web cam streaming from five top attractions, including [Amman's ancient citadel](#), the [Red Sea port of Aqaba](#) and the [Amman skyline](#).

Billed as the First World Wonder Webcam, the pink city of [Petra's stream](#) features its treasures, used as a backdrop for Indiana Jones films, which can be seen from a nearby hilltop while tourists take pictures or are led by Beduin on camels or horses on the rocky terrain. [The Dead Sea web cam](#) is billed as the Lowest Webcam on Earth.

The Arab citadel stream shows ancient Roman columns standing tall, with viewers able to listen to bustling downtown market traffic.

Can technology turn the Jordanian tourism industry around, which recorded almost four million Arab tourists and 767 European visitors last year. Abed al Razzaq Arabiyyat, Managing Director of the Jordan Tourism Board, thinks so. He says Jordan was privileged in avoiding the violent consequences of the Arab Spring revolutions in the region that began two years ago.

"We are trying to do what we can to help tourism grow. Jordan is proud to be a safe destination for travelers from all backgrounds," he told The Media Line. The hope is that the new marketing gimmick will send tourists flocking to Jordan and revive the struggling industry which endured two dreadful years characterized by massive cancellations and the loss of regular visitors.

"This will not only show Jordan is unaffected by the political turbulence that has been going on around the region, but will also showcase the beauty of the sites day and night," said Arrabiyyat.

Amman-based tour guide Abdullah Hyassat, 55, who works with Italian and Spanish-speaking groups, said that while it did not affect Jordan politically as in neighboring countries, tourism suffered a great deal after the Arab spring. "I did not get a work order in more than a month. Many Petra hotels face bankruptcy. We hope this promotion tool works," he said. Tourism is the third highest contributor to the national economy, with annual revenues of around \$2.8 billion dollars, or seven percent of the country's gross domestic product.

The webcam idea appeared to have clicked with Al-Sharq international tourism agency head Ebrahim Hanna. "Showing off the unique and rare beauty of Jordan's attractions will only have a positive influence on tourism," he told The Media Line. "Over the past year, my company had 50% cancellations, but 2013 could be worse as people are finding new destinations to visit. I hope this project will rectify the situation." Turkey and other Asian countries were among those mentioned as experiencing stable tourism visits.

Jordan's latest tourism magic comes courtesy of a US-based company, [EarthCam](#), an international firm providing streaming video services for clients in more than 1,500 cities. Western tourists interviewed in Jordan by The Media Line admitted many Europeans would love to visit the region, but are concerned by the political situation.

"My friends warned me that this region is dangerous, but I was never in any kind of danger," said Spanish tourist Maria Menses, 42, from Madrid. She said she enjoyed a simple walk down Amman's Rainbow Street, dotted with cafes and restaurants and one of the city's main attractions. "Jordan is a very exciting country; the world needs to know more about its ancient treasures," she told The Media Line as she drank tea. The live stream idea would appear to be set to both quench that thirst for knowledge about the country and lure more visitors.

Clarissa Ramirez, [EarthCam Network](#) Product Specialist who oversaw the launch of the project, said the experience caters to the needs of many types of travelers. "We are thrilled to partner with the Jordan Tourism Board (JTB) to give people around the world the change to experience the country from several unique perspectives," she said in a JTB statement. "This collection of educational and scenic cameras offers something for everyone, whether you are an adventure-seeker, history buff or travel enthusiast."

Official figures show tourism dipped in 2011 but picked up in 2012 due to an increasing number of Arab visitors from Libya, the Gulf states, and neighboring countries. Instability in traditional tourism destinations, including Egypt and Syria, is also expected to drive up the number of visitors to Jordan this year, JTB officials say.

However, all eyes remain on the lucrative Western market, particularly the US and Western Europe. That's why JTB is pitching Petra as "a vast, unique city carved into the sheer rock face by an industrious Arab Nabatean civilization more than 2,000 years ago" and tabbed the Dead Sea as "the largest natural spa in the world." With the help of those pitches and especially the webcams, Jordanian tourism officials hope computer users around the world soon will be streaming to Jordan in record numbers.



Webcams highlight areas of Jordan that the tourism board wants to highlight.