

WASTEBOOK

THE FARCE AWAKENS

3 EXTREME TOURISM

Lebanon
United States Agency for International Development
\$2.1 MILLION

Unless you are into extreme tourism, chances are you did not choose Lebanon as the destination of your family's summer vacation this year.

The U.S. State Department issued a travel warning in May urging Americans "to avoid all travel to Lebanon because of ongoing safety and security concerns." U.S. citizens have been killed in bombings and kidnapped within the Middle Eastern nation in recent years. Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL or ISIS) terrorists have staged attacks along the nation's eastern border with Syria and there are tensions along its southern border with Israel as well. "Sudden outbreaks of violence can occur at any time in Lebanon," including attacks by suicide bombers, according to the State Department.²⁹ Islamic State sleeper cells are also believed to be hidden within Lebanon.³⁰



USAID spent more than \$2 million this year to promote tourism to Lebanon, a nation the State Department is warning Americans to avoid due to terrorist threats.

Despite these risks to U.S. citizens, the *United States Agency for International Development (USAID)* spent more than \$2 million this year to promote tourism to Lebanon.

USAID is funding two five-year programs—Lebanon Industry Value Chain Development (LIVCD) and Building Alliance for Local Advancement, Development, and Investment (BALADI). "Through BALADI, USAID has provided \$1.6 million for rural tourism related activities since 2012, and expects to invest around \$1.3 million this year. Through LIVCD, USAID has invested over \$1.3 million for rural tourism since

2012, and expects to provide more than \$850,000 this year."³¹

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Rock climbing is one of the ongoing USAID-supported projects in the Lebanon.³² “Through a USAID-supported project, guides will be trained to encourage a safe and sustainable climbing culture in the village” of Tannourine, says Katy Anderson of the Rock Climbing Association for Development.³³ “We build rock climbs to boost the local economy through rural eco-tourism,” she says, but admits “there has not been a big outdoor leisure culture here” and the project’s “impact on local business has been slow.”³⁴ She points out “there are still landmines around Tannourine,” but adds “some of which have recently been cleared.”³⁵ Anderson admits “Lebanon may not be an easy sell to foreign tourists: most people are wary about flying into Beirut, and that’s before they realise [sic] how crazy the roads are. But the climbing community is more adventurous than most.”³⁶

A variety of other projects to attract tourists to Lebanon are in the planning process. A report prepared for USAID says, for example, “the development committee of the Hammana Municipality has been very active at developing tourism in the area with an ecotourism development initiative” which includes “the establishment of a “Laughter Festival.”³⁷ The report notes “the Ehmej municipality has been working over the past few years on developing ecotourism in the region with funds from USAID,” specifically mentioning “adventure tourism” as well as “kids’ activities.”³⁸

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NOTHING TO LAUGH ABOUT: A “Laughter Festival” is among the projects intended to attract tourists to Lebanon highlighted in a report prepared for USAID. Hundreds have been injured and more than 60 people have been killed in terrorist attacks in the country in the last two years.[i]

Americans would be wise to heed the warnings of the State Department rather than the urgings of the USAID and avoid vacationing in Lebanon at this time.

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- ¹⁷ Kimberley A. Phillips, M. Karen Hambricht, Kelly Hewes, Brian M. Schilder, Corinna N. Ross, Suzette D. Tardif, "Take the monkey and run," *The Journal of Neuroscience Methods*, June 15, 2015; <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/25835199> .
- ¹⁸ Kimberley A. Phillips, M. Karen Hambricht, Kelly Hewes, Brian M. Schilder, Corinna N. Ross, Suzette D. Tardif, "Take the monkey and run," *The Journal of Neuroscience Methods*, June 15, 2015; <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/25835199> .
- ¹⁹ Kimberley A. Phillips, M. Karen Hambricht, Kelly Hewes, Brian M. Schilder, Corinna N. Ross, Suzette D. Tardif, "Take the monkey and run," *The Journal of Neuroscience Methods*, June 15, 2015; <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/25835199> .
- ²⁰ Kimberley A. Phillips, M. Karen Hambricht, Kelly Hewes, Brian M. Schilder, Corinna N. Ross, Suzette D. Tardif, "Take the monkey and run," *The Journal of Neuroscience Methods*, June 15, 2015; <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/25835199> .
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- ²² Project information for project1ZIAAG000357-01, Research Portfolio Online Reporting Tools database, accessed October 6, 2015; https://projectreporter.nih.gov/project_info_description.cfm?aid=8931522&icde=26479829 .
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