

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

ACADEMIC TOURISM IN LEBANON: TO WHAT EXTENT  
IS IT ECOTOURISM?

by  
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# AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

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# ABSTRACT OF THE PROJECT OF

Rima Assaad Maalouf

for

Master of Science

Major: Ecosystem Management

Title: Academic Tourism in Lebanon: To what Extent is it Ecotourism?

Academic tourism is defined as stays made in higher educational institutions in places outside their usual environment for a maximum period of a year or less. The purpose of this study was to conduct field work to try to collect primary findings that investigate the relationship between academic tourism and Ecotourism. To this end, a database of foreign students admitted for a year or less in various universities in Lebanon will be gathered to provide a sampling framework for our study.

Next, an online questionnaire will be designed and administered to a sample of those students looking into the drivers of academic tourism. Among others, ecological and eco-touristic motivations will be gauged, and data on lifestyle and consumption patterns will be collected. The data will be analyzed by means of regression techniques, and the extent to which academic tourism valorizes ecosystem preservation, boosts the eco-tourism sector and promotes rural development, not least in comparison to conventional tourism, will be developed.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Human beings have been known since ancient times to travel frequently and discover new places. Since humans have always had a constant passion for the love of knowledge and in discovering all that is new, they used all that they have learned to test and discover the limits of the place around them.

Tourism activity in the world is witnessing great growth and development at the moment, where tourism has become linked to the cultural aspects of humans and has become a bridge between societies and human knowledge of nations and people. It has also become a natural outcome for the development of tourism communities as well as the high standard of living of individuals. In addition to the fact that tourism has become one of the most important sectors in international trade.

Lebanon's tourism sector is also one of the most important economic sectors in the country and one of the most developed sectors. With a growth rate of 10% since 2014, this sector, which is considered a major source of income and job opportunities, formed in the year 2018, 19.1% of Lebanon's total domestic income which lead to an increase in the value of tourism revenues in Lebanon that reached US\$10.4 billion and the number of tourists at the end of the year reached nearly 1.9 million tourists. Although Europeans account for the largest proportion of this figure, accounting for 36% of the total number of tourists, Arabs follow right behind by up to 29%, and accompanied by this large number of tourists is a large amount of financial spending by them. The percentage of spending by Saudis citizens account for 14% of total tourist spending in 2017, followed by Emiratis at 12% and Kuwaiti 7%, The tourism sector



occupies an important place in the volume of investment sought with 1.3% of investment in the year 2018, the volume of these investments is expected to increase by 2.7% over the next decade. As a result, Lebanon's tourism sector has created 144,300 direct jobs, which is equivalent to 6.7% of the total available jobs in the country (LivingLebanon, 2019).

On the environmental level, tourism is considered an attractive factor for tourists who satisfy their desires in terms of visiting different natural places and getting to know their topography, vegetation and wildlife, as well as visiting local communities to learn about their customs and traditions. Eco tourism today is an industry and a science. It is subject to scientific standards and rules which, first and foremost, is a human right and an individual need. It is a standard for the progress of societies and a measure for the civilization of nations. It is as well a social need because of the national and economic income it provides and the millions of jobs it has made available in the world today, for it being a means of dialogue of cultures and people.

Ecotourism is a new phenomenon that aims to search and reflect on nature, provide comfort for humans, and contribute to the success of sustainable tourism. The advantages offered by ecotourism and the productive projects to the local community that are executed with environmental protection and the biological and cultural diversity of tourist areas, provide an effective role in the progress of sustainable tourism, provided that its various resources are beneficial and not worthless and can be utilized as an economic return, which increases the potential necessity to serve the community.

Ecotourism also has an active role in increasing Lebanon's national income by promoting new **tourism patterns** that have proven effective in many countries in Europe and whose natural environment is characterized by features similar to the nature

of Lebanon and its local population. **One of these tourism patterns would be academic tourism which is covered in this study in order to expand and develop the tourism area and to introduce a new tourism concept that is witnessing global growth in recent years.**

The original aim of this study was to conduct field work to try to collect primary findings that investigate the relationship between academic tourism and Ecotourism. Unfortunately, due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the unresponsiveness of students to fill the survey, this was not available. Therefore, this study will shift its aim towards secondary data, based on a thorough desk review with a more global perspective on the links between academic tourism and ecotourism. Finally, this study will be looking at the implications in Lebanon and what recommendations can be done by both the Tourism and Ecotourism sector to help promote academic tourism.

### **1.1. Methodology**

The original methodology had research that will rely on both qualitative and quantitative means to collect data for assessment. The former method will include in-depth interviews, where the participants will be contacted through e-mails to be asked if they would like to partake in the study. On the other hand, the latter method will rely on an online questionnaire specifically designed for the topic at hand. The target audiences are university students from notable universities across Lebanon, mainly: American University of Beirut, Lebanese American University, Balamand, USEK, Haigazian University and Notre Dame University. The questionnaire will be sent to a specific group of students (Targeted e-mail).

### ***1.1.1. Procedure and Timeline***

The data should be collected and analyzed during this summer semester 2021.

The data will be saved in a private PC and will be deleted after 3 years.

### ***1.1.2. Survey***

To study the reality of academic tourism in Lebanon, we have targeted six local universities from the best universities in Lebanon that adopt the system of exchange abroad study. According to QS's recent ranking of universities around the world for 2021 which ranks the top 1,000 universities in the world:

- 1- American University of Beirut (AUB):220 AUB
- 2- Balamand University (World Ranking: 501-510)
- 3- St. Joseph's University USJ (World Ranking:541-550)
- 4- Lebanese-American University LAU (World Ranking:551-560)
- 5- Holy Spirit University - USEK (World Ranking:601-650)
- 6- University of Our Lady of Louisa NDU (World Ranking:701-750)

We have distributed an online survey taking a sample of international students living outside Lebanon who have attended these universities in various international programs (student exchange programs, Erasmus program, and international studies).



**Academic Tourism Survey**  
*for Lebanon*

*Dear Visitor!*

*We would like to ask you for your help in evaluating your holiday in Lebanon. We hope that your help and cooperation can make your stay in Lebanon more enjoyable.*

*All data will be used exclusively for the needs of the present research. We hope after this research to be able to advise and steer future visitors in the right direction!*

---

*Preamble*

---

**1. How did you get information about this destination? (More than one answer allowed)**

- |                     |                          |                  |                          |                |                          |
|---------------------|--------------------------|------------------|--------------------------|----------------|--------------------------|
| Travel agency       | <input type="checkbox"/> | Internet         | <input type="checkbox"/> | Family/friends | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Newspaper/magazines | <input type="checkbox"/> | Travel brochures | <input type="checkbox"/> | Travel guides  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Radio               | <input type="checkbox"/> | Tourist fairs    | <input type="checkbox"/> | TV             | <input type="checkbox"/> |
- Other: .....

**2. How did you book your accommodation? (More than one answer allowed)**

- In person at a travel agency in your own country
- By phone at a travel agency in your own country
- Through the internet at a travel agency in your own country
- In person at a travel agency in Lebanon
- By phone at an accommodation in Lebanon
- Through the internet at an accommodation in Lebanon
- Through the internet (other)
- Directly at the hotel
- Other: .....

**How many times have you visited Lebanon before?**

- None  1 time  2 times  3 times  4 times  5 times or more

---

*Screening*

---

**3. What was the aim of your holidays in Lebanon?**

- |                          |                          |                  |                          |              |                          |                   |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|------------------|--------------------------|--------------|--------------------------|-------------------|
| Beach holiday            | <input type="checkbox"/> | Walking & nature | <input type="checkbox"/> | Diving       | <input type="checkbox"/> | Honeymoon         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> |                          |                  |                          |              |                          |                   |
| Cultural holiday         | <input type="checkbox"/> | Festival         | <input type="checkbox"/> | Nightlife    | <input type="checkbox"/> | Spiritual holiday |
| <input type="checkbox"/> |                          |                  |                          |              |                          |                   |
| Eco-tourism              | <input type="checkbox"/> | Active holiday   | <input type="checkbox"/> | Family visit | <input type="checkbox"/> | Work              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> |                          |                  |                          |              |                          |                   |
| Relaxing                 | <input type="checkbox"/> |                  |                          |              |                          |                   |
- Other: .....

Locations visited: .....

Means of transport used on holidays: .....

[Specify for each activity]

[Destination: frequency, transport cost, lodging cost, meals cost, guide/entrance cost]: .....

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

**4. Where did you use to go during holidays?**

- Urban areas  Remote areas  Beaches  Mountains

**5. Did your trip to Lebanon meet your expectations?**

Completely  For the greater part  Partly  Not really  absolutely not   
If answered "not really" or "absolutely not" please state, why: .....

**6. How long did you stay in Lebanon?**

2 months or more

Specify your arrival data ..... departure date:  
.....

---

*General Tourism*

---

**7. What inspires you to travel abroad?**

.....  
.....

**8. Would you visit Lebanon in the next 5 years?**

Yes  No (go to question 9)  I don't know (go to question 8)

**9. What changes would you like to see in your next visit to Lebanon?**

.....  
.....

---

*Eco-Tourism*

---

**10. In what kind of accommodation did you stay? (More than one answer allowed)**

Hotel	<input type="checkbox"/>	Apartment in a complex	<input type="checkbox"/>
Apartment in a complex with a pool	<input type="checkbox"/>	Own house/villa	<input type="checkbox"/>
Friends/family	<input type="checkbox"/>	Dorm	<input type="checkbox"/>

Other:

.....

Total cost:

.....

**11. What means of transportation did you use in Lebanon?**

Car rental  Own car  Taxi  Motorbike rental  Public transportation (bus)

Other:

.....

Total cost:

.....

**12. What were your costs for the trip and accommodation in Lebanon per person? (if you booked a package holiday) (in US \$)**

Under 250	<input type="checkbox"/>	250 to 500	<input type="checkbox"/>	500 to 750	<input type="checkbox"/>	750 to 1000	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
1000 to 1250	<input type="checkbox"/>	1250 to 1500	<input type="checkbox"/>	1500 to 1750	<input type="checkbox"/>	1750 to 2000	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Over 2000	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>

**13. What were your costs for accommodation only in Lebanon per person per day? (if you booked accommodation separately) (in US \$)**

Under 10	<input type="checkbox"/>	10 to 20	<input type="checkbox"/>	20 to 30	<input type="checkbox"/>	30 to 40	<input type="checkbox"/>	40 to 50	<input type="checkbox"/>	Over
50	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	

**14. How much did you spend in Lebanon per person per day for food and drinks? (in US \$)**

Under 10       10 to 20       20 to 30       30 to 40       40 to 50       Over 50

**15. Please evaluate the quality of your accommodation**

*1: Poor 2: Average 3: Good 4: Very Good 5: Excellent*

	1.	2	3	4	5
Overall quality of the accommodation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Value for money	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Behavior and professionalism of the staff and owners	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ambiance of the garden and surroundings of the accommodation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ambiance of the inside of the accommodation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cleanliness of the accommodation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Facilities/equipment of the accommodation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**16. Please evaluate the quality of restaurants, cafés and bars of Lebanon**

Overall quality of restaurants, cafés and bars you visited	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Customer service of restaurants, cafés and bars you visited	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Value for money of restaurants, cafés and bars you visited	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Behavior and professionalism of the staff and owners	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ambiance of the garden and surroundings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ambiance of the inside of restaurants, cafés and bars you visited	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cleanliness in general	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Toilets	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**17. Please evaluate the quality of our beach**

Overall beach quality	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Beach cleanliness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Access to the beach	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Security/safety	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Behavior and professionalism of the beach staff	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**21. Please evaluate the different aspects of our area**

Nature in general	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Beach	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Historical sites	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mountain biking	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Diving	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sailing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fishing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Nightlife	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Shopping	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hospitality	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tourist information	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Feeling of safety	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Quality of medical services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**22. With how many people did you come to *Lebanon*?**

- Alone  with ..... children  
With a friend  with a group of ..... people  
With my partner  with my partner and ..... children

**23. What is your socio-demographic group?**

- Less than 18  18-24 years  25-29 years  30-34 years  
  
35-39 years  40-44 years  45-49 years  50-54 years  
  
55-59 years  60-64 years  more than 65

**24. What is your current status?**

- Student  Self-employed  Full-timer   
Part-timer  Unemployed  Retired

**25. In which country do you live?**

.....

**Thank You!**

**1.2. New Methodology**

The new methodology of this study will now focus on thoroughly studying the literature reviews that will offer a global perspective on the definitions of Academic tourism and Ecotourism, how did Academic tourism come to be and the links between Academic tourism and Ecotourism.



## CHAPTER 2

### ACADEMIC TOURISM AND ECOTOURISM

#### **2.1. Academic Tourism**

The mobility of international students in higher education has become a very famous phenomenon that seems to be becoming more known year after year. Some studies have defined this phenomenon as Academic Tourism (Rodriguez et al, 2012). First and foremost, we have to start by defining academic tourism. Some definitions vary according to how each country perceives it or is affected by it. In the study of “Academic tourism: A more sustainable tourism” the authors defined Academic tourism as a “distinct type of tourism that would include any stays in higher education institutions in places outside their usual environment for a period of less than one year” (Pawlowska et al, 2013). Others have defined Educational tourism as being another definition for Academic tourism. It is one of the types of tourism and is considered an approach to continuing education, research activities, and gaining knowledge in a period that is not more than one year.

##### ***2.1.1. Why Academic Tourism***

The purpose of this mobility is to pursue undergraduate and graduate studies in a foreign environment to experience different methods of education and hands-on practical exposure that is otherwise not present in the native country. But an important question might arise here, Why academic tourism? An answer to this question might be that Academic tourism comes with many benefits:

**Better academic performance:** Academic tourism helps students encounter different teaching styles.

**Global Perspective:** Academic tourism encourages students to expand their world view and learn about the cultures and history of different societies.

**Independence:** Academic tourism can help students adapt to live in different environments and cultures, contribute to building their future, develop their confidence and face some of life's challenges.

**Communication:** Academic tourism provides students with a global network of contacts and references, and it opens up new trends for lifelong communication.

**New friends:** Cultural immersion during academic tourism helps break down language barriers, as exploring new areas opens doors for relationships and new friendships while traveling.

At a first glance, academic tourism might seem similar to other forms of tourism. However, even though there are a lot of similarities, Academic tourism has its own set of characteristics that determine its sustainability. We will be looking at the economic, environmental and social characteristics.

To measure its economic impact, A Direct Economic Impact (DEI) was measured by multiplying the number of foreign students by the average annual expenditure made by these students (Rodriguez et al, 2013). After the data was collected, the average annual expenditure was then calculated. By considering several statistical figures, it was determined that “one foreign student is equivalent to 18 conventional tourists”, having their average expenditure over four times greater than that of conventional tourists (Rodriguez et al, 2013). From the results of this study we can conclude that, on average the foreign students undergoing academic tourism spend

more than regular tourists. Therefore, Academic tourism has a much greater economic impact than conventional tourism (Pawlowska et al, 2013).

To measure its environmental impact, Picornell (1993) made an assessment of tourism and classified them into three categories. Indifference, when tourism has no impact on the environment. Symbiosis, when tourism results in maintaining the environment. Conflict, when tourism results in polluting the environment by building special infrastructure for tourists. He carried out a survey which proves that Academic tourism fits in the first two categories discussed above. Most foreign students tend to stay in dorms, shared apartments, with friends, families or student university housing. This behavior is very different from regular tourists as they usually stay in big hotels which lead to greater environmental impacts. Also, universities as important educational centers promote recycling and the use of recycled products. This means that the way of living at campus is considered more ecofriendly than living at homes or hotels (Picornell, 1993).

Lastly, to measure its social impact, it is increasingly noticeable that students have developed an interest in educating themselves in a more global context. They have become interested in learning new languages, experiencing other cultures and making new friends coming from different backgrounds. Looking at the long run, this characteristic is very important because it means that with this current mix in diversity it will help future generations to meet and interrelate more in the future (Rodriguez et al, 2013).

### ***2.1.2. Why Classify Student Mobility as Academic Tourism***

After discussing the various definitions of Academic tourism and its characteristics, we stop to question why did people think that it is important to classify academic tourism as academic tourism? As we have discussed above, there are certain characteristic that shape academic tourism to be different from other forms of tourism. As we have seen, Academic tourism students are not only short term students but they behave differently from regular students. Their expenditure, eco-friendly stays and social life does not comply with regular tourists. And so, it can only be fair to classify such a form of tourism in its own unique category.

## **2.2. Ecotourism**

The term ecotourism emerged in the early 1980s and reflects the environmental-friendly tourism activity practiced by humans.

The World Environment Fund defines ecotourism as traveling to unpolluted natural areas where its natural balance has not been disrupted in order to enjoy its landscapes, plants and wild animals, and this type of tourism is very important for developing countries because it represents a source of income in addition to its role in preserving the environment.

As stated in the Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm in 1972, the concept of the environment was stated as "everything that surrounds man" and this includes four basic elements: water, air, food and the surrounding.

Ecotourism has also been known by "its focus on sports participation, wellness care, seaside resorts and social networking in recreation areas". These areas are promoted through social media, which plays a key role in attracting people to these places to take

part in multiple activities such as skiing on the slopes, going to beaches, and exploring natural reserves.

### ***2.2.1. Elements of Ecotourism***

Ecotourism is based on vital elements and systems and what mother-nature fully offers, such as the earth's surface, mountains, valleys, forests, rivers, reserves, types of observations and extensive experiences involved. And on the other hand, there are those that human beings have worked on, such as gardens and parks, as well as the succession of seasons and their elements, potential and transformations in the four seasons. These elements become essential touristic components, such as sunsets on the seaside, snowmobiling in the mountains or stargazing at night without forgetting the plant and animal diversity, like flowers, trees, plants and mineral water, birds, fish and other marine and wild creatures.

### ***2.2.2. Goals, Importance and types of Ecotourism***

#### **Ecotourism Goals**

Ecotourism gains its own importance from being progressive and working towards achieving a full set of objectives:

1. Ecotourism maintains ecological balance
2. Ecotourism manufactures behavioral rationalization controls in the consumption or use of materials in order to maintain public health and safety.
3. Ecotourism provides a simple easy life, free from disturbance and anxiety by reducing every day worries that affects human life.

## **The importance of Ecotourism**

1. The economic importance of ecotourism: It is represented by its safe economic security, where the places that practice ecotourism are among the scarcest resources in the world.
2. The political importance of ecotourism: Its environmental security.

## **Types of Ecotourism**

- Visit reserves, forests and valleys
- Skiing and other winter sports
- Walking and Hiking
- Bird watching
- Contemplation of Nature
- Setting up camps
- Cruises and fishing
- Visit archaeological excavation sites
- Visit historical areas (castles, forts, palaces, and monasteries)

## **2.3. Evidence of Academic Tourism as Being a Large Extent Ecotourism**

### ***2.3.1. Links between Academic Tourism and Ecotourism***

Academic tourism is considered one of the best ways to help students and adults gain a good perspective around the world. It helps them come across new cultures and experiences since traveling to different countries develops an individual's information about the countries he visits, through communicating with the local people, visitor center, getting to know their culture, visiting their favorite areas and especially areas that are rich in nature reserves. Therefore, we see that ecotourism is closely linked to

academic tourism or academic tourism can be said to be a complementary factor in the revitalization of ecotourism in Lebanon after the recent recession in this sector.

### ***2.3.2. Investigating Academic Tourism as Conducive to Ecotourism in Lebanon.***

There is no doubt that Lebanon was ranked first in terms of touristic destinations in the Arab world and the East in 1975, according to international reports in this regard (Lebanese Ministry of Tourism). However, today it is no longer the case. Lebanon lost its first position after the entry of Dubai and Jordan in the arena of competition, especially since both countries are known to have a stable economy as well as a stable and secure environment. So this is where academic tourism in Lebanon comes to restore the glories of the ecotourism sector in this field. This tourism has become an important economic resource for Lebanon, especially since the regular touristic season which relies on hotels, restaurants, nightclubs and parties, has been so low in the last two seasons that a number of hotels and restaurants have closed their doors and dismissed their employees due to the deteriorating economic conditions.

Fifteen Lebanese nature reserves have entered the list of world-class nature reserves and tourism guides in the world. Including eight fully equipped reserves to attract people from Lebanon and the world, but Lebanese visitors (i.e. inland tourism) make up 95% of the total number of people of these reserves (the Al-Shuf cedars Reserve, Tannourin, Qanupin, the Palm Islands Reserve in Tripoli, the Islands of Tyre, Batroun, Ehden and Bentaal).

## **2.4. Tourism and Ecotourism in Lebanon and Applicable Policy Implications**

Tourism is a growing economic sector at a global scale. According to the OECD, 7 international tourist arrivals grew to over 1.2 billion in 2016. Much of its success depends on the ability of the countries to adapt to current and upcoming social, economic, environmental, security and technological challenges. In other words, countries and international organizations need to focus more on the development of tourism governance and incorporate it within their development strategies. However, Lebanon is not among the countries that have developed and currently implement a comprehensive strategy for the tourism sector. Although there have been sporadic initiatives in the past, the lack of political and economic stability has deprived the government and the businesses from the creation of administrative, cooperative and inclusive policy orientation for the long-term.

In order to better promote and encourage Academic tourism in Lebanon there are a series of applicable policies that we will study that can have an impact on the number of tourist and Ecotourism in Lebanon.

The first policy is to have marketing campaigns that are not limited to universities only, but that are communicated and dealt with on a state level to promote the availability of Academic tourism. Where people in charge of cities that contain institutions of higher education promote their resources and their universities in order to attract more international students (Pawlowska et al, 2013). By having the government or the people responsible promote the available chance to study at one of their universities as well as showcase the beautiful Eco-touristic attractions will definitely boost the number of academic tourism students wanting to choose Lebanon as their place of study. This is true because it was found to be that the main reason that drives



students to study abroad obtaining a higher education is not the sole purpose for the students' mobility but it's actually the attraction to the country and its touristic destinations that initiate the desire to travel within their academic study period (Bento, 20). The following policy can be applied through the help of the ministry of education as well as the ministry of tourism.

The second policy is to have the ministry of tourism and the ministry of culture set up Touristic Guides that are responsible for showcasing the best tourist site attractions in Lebanon. This is very important since it ensures that students that are new to the country do not feel lost or feel as if they are outliers in a foreign country. By having touristic guides, the Academic tourism students can see the beautiful Eco-touristic sites in Lebanon and so this will leave tourist with a positive feedback about their stay in the country. When students have enjoyed their stay, they will go back home and share their experiences with their friends and family. This sharing of experiences works as another type of promotion to attract more students into academic tourism.

The third policy is to have an Academic tourism card that covers the Eco-touristic site visits for the students enrolled in the program. The idea of this card is to benefit from the fresh dollars that international students have to boost the Lebanese economy especially in the current crisis. Academic tourism students can purchase a card in dollars that includes three to four visits to Eco-touristic sites that include transportation, the entrance to the Eco-touristic site and lunch at a chosen restaurant. The benefit of this card is that it makes it easier for tourists to go around without having to worry about exchanging their money to Lebanese Lira and having to deal with confusing money interactions.

The fourth policy was inspired by the first three policies and it is to have an Academic tourism office in every university that wants to be involved in Academic tourism that will manage all of the above policies. The office will be responsible for presenting the offered courses in the Academic tourism program as well as managing the marketing campaign with the ministry of tourism to reach the maximum number of students abroad. The Academic tourism office will also be responsible for assigning touristic guides and selling the Academic tourism card for the interested students.

In search for proper implementation of the above policies, I have reached out to the following ministries: The Ministry of Education, Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Culture, and the Ministry of Tourism. Every Ministry requested a letter of proposal to each respective minister. The proposal is then discussed with one of the minister's advisors and then sent to the concerned people in the ministry such as the general managers to prepare an agreement letter of partnership between AUB and the respective ministry.

In order to provide better marketing campaigns about Academic tourism, I have reached out to the General Director in the Ministry of Tourism, Mr. Amin Zebian, who welcomed the idea of Academic Tourism and clarified that the Ministry of Tourism seeks and encourages Academic Tourism and are always looking for new ways to promote and to attract new students to Lebanon. The Ministry believes that it should understand better the needs of tourists in the twenty first century and proceed into a daily production process active in all Lebanese regions, which corresponds to the core idea and objective of our study. Mr. Zebian then proceeded and asked to submit the project to the minister for discussion and in order to work on its implementation in cooperation with the Ministry of Tourism and other relevant ministries like the Ministry

of Education and of course the American University of Beirut. The Ministry of Education in return has also liked the idea of the project and asked that the proposal of the project be sent to the minister for further discussion and approval so that the project can start its implementation phase in accordance with the ministry of education.

In order to provide Touristic guides, and having already had the approval of the ministry of tourism, I have reached out to the General Director, Mr. Antoine Fishfish, in the Ministry of Culture, who welcomed the idea and offered to help by discussing the project with the Minister of Culture and accelerate its implementation through the Ministry, as well as offered his assistance by discussing the project of Academic tourism with the Kaslik University since he was a graduate at the university and could help by discussing the project idea with the board of trustees because he is a member of the board.

In order to provide an Academic tourism card, The Ministry of Environment has asked to submit a proposal of the project to the minister for further discussion. Ms. Manal Mousallem is responsible for funding such projects in the ministry.

Finally, in order to implement Academic Tourism offices, we have reached out to the targeted universities in our study to inquire about the mechanism of implementing an Academic tourism office in each of them. All universities require the approval of the board of trustees of each one to participate in the launch of the academic tourism project on campus. The execution phase is to be done through the Provost office, Deans office and Admissions office.

By having an Academic tourism office in Lebanese universities that collaborate and work together, as well as promoting these offices in all Lebanese embassies abroad, this will help to promote all the available tourism activities in Lebanon. Most Lebanese

people living abroad don't know what Academic opportunities are being provided in Lebanon and by using the above policies it will help them stay in touch with their country and if they do decide to undergo an Academic tourism program, they will have a very satisfying experience that will then lead to an increase in both the tourism and the ecotourism sector.

### **2.5. The Difficulties Faced in this Study**

1. Some universities (like: NDU and USEK) refused to disclose the mails of the students that fit the criteria of the study, considering them their own property. Even though they were formally informed about the study and how vital their participation is.
2. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, university administrators are not in their offices and do not have access to student mails remotely. They promised us to prepare a list of names that will be available by end of September 2020.
3. The unwillingness of AUB students to participate in this study. Out of 100 targeted mails sent, only 5 students have participated. The reason is not clear, but it may be caused by the pandemic or the invalidity of the student mails.

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