

# NEW PUBLICATION: “TOWARDS ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY TOURISM IN ARABIAN BIOSPHERE RESERVES”

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## Introduction

The UNESCO Office in Doha, Qatar, has published a new book called “Towards Environmentally Friendly Tourism in Arabian Biosphere Reserves”. The objective of this document is to raise awareness about out-door recreational tourism opportunities in the Arab Region. It further focuses on the need to encourage tourists, tour-operators, tourism-planners, developers and concerned authorities to develop and demonstrate environmentally compatible tourism practices in the Arab Region with a special view to outdoor learning laboratories: UNESCO’s global network of Biosphere Reserves.

An international team of experts contributed to this publication, looking into environmentally friendly tourism in general and providing best practice examples for sustainable tourism development and environmental education. Further, a case study covers the Qatari Al Reem Biosphere Reserve.

## The Benefit of Environmentally Friendly Tourism in Arabian Biosphere Reserves

Travel and tourism have a long tradition which may explain why the tourism industry is the world’s fastest growing economic sector. Tourism has grown over the past few years in the Gulf region. International tourists, as well as migrant workers and professionals, of all economic classes, contribute towards tourism and economic growth, when they decide to spend their holidays within the Arab countries. Consequently, the tourism sector is a promising economic activity to develop to help maintain the growing prosperity of the Gulf region. Tourism also promotes a good international image of the region as has been shown by the development of tourism in Dubai and Oman.

Most Arab States, especially the Gulf States, are economically dependent on their natural resources. One of them, the State of Qatar, located between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, has the highest per capita income in the world, mainly resulting from its oil and gas reserves. With regard to shrinking energy resources, as well as based on the lack of freshwater, especially in the Arabian Peninsula, it is tremendously important to raise environmental awareness and to promote a sustainable use of natural resources.

The objective of this work was to develop a proposal which provides an informative guideline to establish sustainable, environmental compatible tourism in established or prospective Arabian Biosphere Reserves and other designated areas, in order to conserve the diversity and beauty of nature, as well as to highlight alternatives to mono-structured economies.

As an introduction, the first chapter of the new UNESCO publication focuses on Environmentally Friendly Tourism (EFT) in general, as well as on the importance of community based tourism, local involvement and its contribution to environmental education. The articles provide elementary information about different forms of environmental tourism, like sustainable tourism, cultural tourism, nature based tourism, wildlife tourism and ecotourism.

The second chapter deals with the investigation area, the Qatari Al Reem Biosphere Reserve. This chapter provides information about the reserve, its natural characteristics, recent usage, tourism potentials and current conflicts and problems. Furthermore, the background and development of the declaration as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve is explained. One main finding of the case study concerning the Al Reem Biosphere Reserve is that it is a unique example of Arabian habitat and culture, and offers significant EFT opportunities and potentials, linked to development and conservation challenges. The diversity of fauna, flora and landscape, as well as the archaeological heritage and traditional architecture can be very attractive to domestic, regional and international tourists.

In the third chapter a variety of recommendations for EFT opportunities in Arabian Biosphere Reserves are highlighted. This includes general tourism activities, like recreational out-door activities, bird watching and camel riding, but



Fig1. Spiny tailed lizard in the Al Reem Biosphere Reserve, Qatar (by Henning Schwarze, 2004)



Fig2. Arabian village in the Al Reem BR (by M. Richtzenhain)

also GPS-guided interactive tourist and educational tours, environmentally friendly buildings, innovative camel farms, the traditional Hima system, as well as options for Quranic Botanical Gardens.

Finally the fourth chapter provides concrete recommendations for sustainable tourism project development in the Al Reem Biosphere Reserve and expected benefits to the regional economy.

The establishment of EFT is one possible solution to attract quality tourists and also to adhere to the rules and regulations of the Biosphere Reserves. Therefore, the new publication offers important information about different conservation and development opportunities for protected areas in the Arab Region. Furthermore, next to conceptual information about environmentally friendly tourism, the document develops innovative trends and ideas for future planning.

## Distribution

The e-Book is available as a PDF document and can be downloaded free of charge ([http://www.unesco.org/mab/doc/brs/BRs\\_Doha.pdf](http://www.unesco.org/mab/doc/brs/BRs_Doha.pdf)). For further information please contact Dr. Benno Böer, UNESCO Doha, Qatar (E-Mail: [b.boer@unesco.org](mailto:b.boer@unesco.org)).



Fig3. Frontpage “Towards Environmentally Friendly Tourism in Arabian Biosphere Reserves” (UNESCO, 2009)