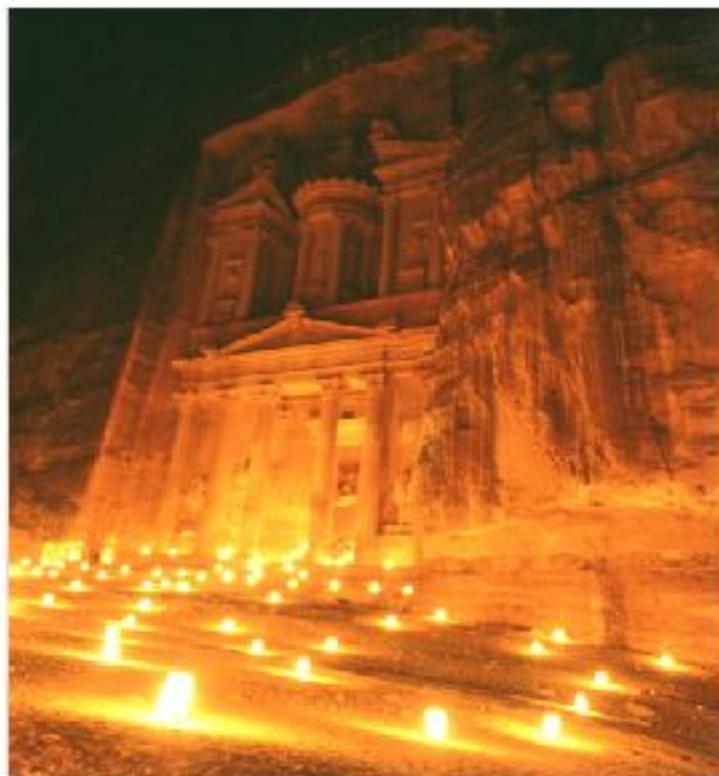


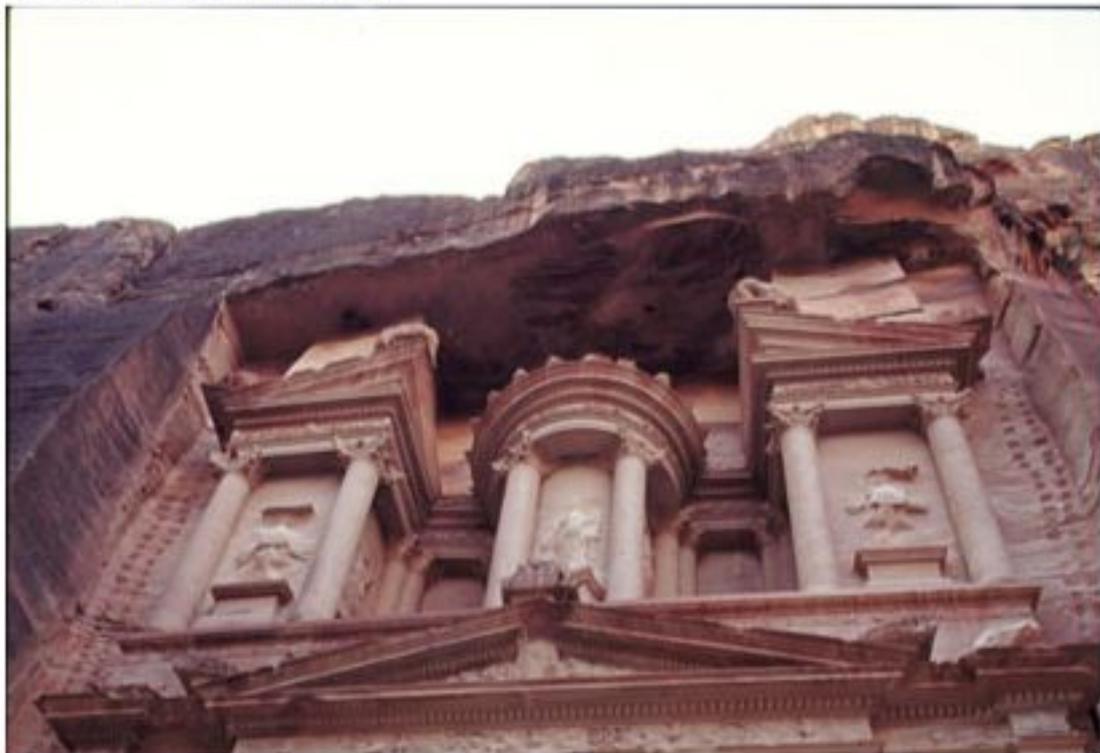
# Prospects of sustainable tourism development in Petra by 2020

By: Aliaa Ismail Abdul-Hamid



I have visited many interesting places around the world but Jordan has some which is very unique, such as the Dead Sea and Petra. Although Jordan has limited resources, it has grown rapidly in the last few decades and become one of the fastest developing countries with its own way of generating new knowledge and insight into the economic and political development arena and it responds logically and quickly to difficulties and changes facing the country and the Middle East in general.

Jordan is centrally located in the Middle East, has a wealth of delightful historic attraction. Tourism is its major driver of economy and it's the largest export sector, also the second largest private sector employer, it represents 14.4% GDP (This information was provided by the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities of Jordan in 2004). The United State is the largest inbound market after the regional Arab tourism. As Jordan is one of the developing countries, it is estimated by WTO in 2004 that the growth in number of international visitors will grow five times than in Europe and USA in future. The apex authorities are keen in placing the country on the international focus as Queen Rania of Jordan, an active supporter of progress in Jordan, is involved in many social activities becoming UNICEF's first Eminent Advocate for children.





Petra is an icon tourist attraction located in south of Jordan; it was recognised as one of the Seven Wonders of the World by UNESCO in 1985, which made it a favourite attraction for many people across the world. The famous poet, Dean Burgeon, described Petra in his poem "Match me such a marvel save in Easter clime, a rose red city half as old as time" which reflects the beauty of Petra. It will be of immense significance to identify the challenges that Petra is facing today. In this article I will be providing a constructive framework and approaches that can be followed in Petra to build up sustainable tourism that is

economically viable at the same time protecting and preserving the resources for the future generations without altering the social fabric of the host community.

However, there is debate on the definition of sustainable tourism but it is clearly pointed out by many academics that sustainable tourism is a complex topic which needs appropriate consideration of the long term economic, environmental, social-cultural and political well-being of all stakeholders and they all should be involved in the production and consumption process.

Petra qualifies as a natural tourist destination; destinations share certain characteristics like attraction, accessibility and amenities to attract tourists by providing certain quality of these essential benefits.

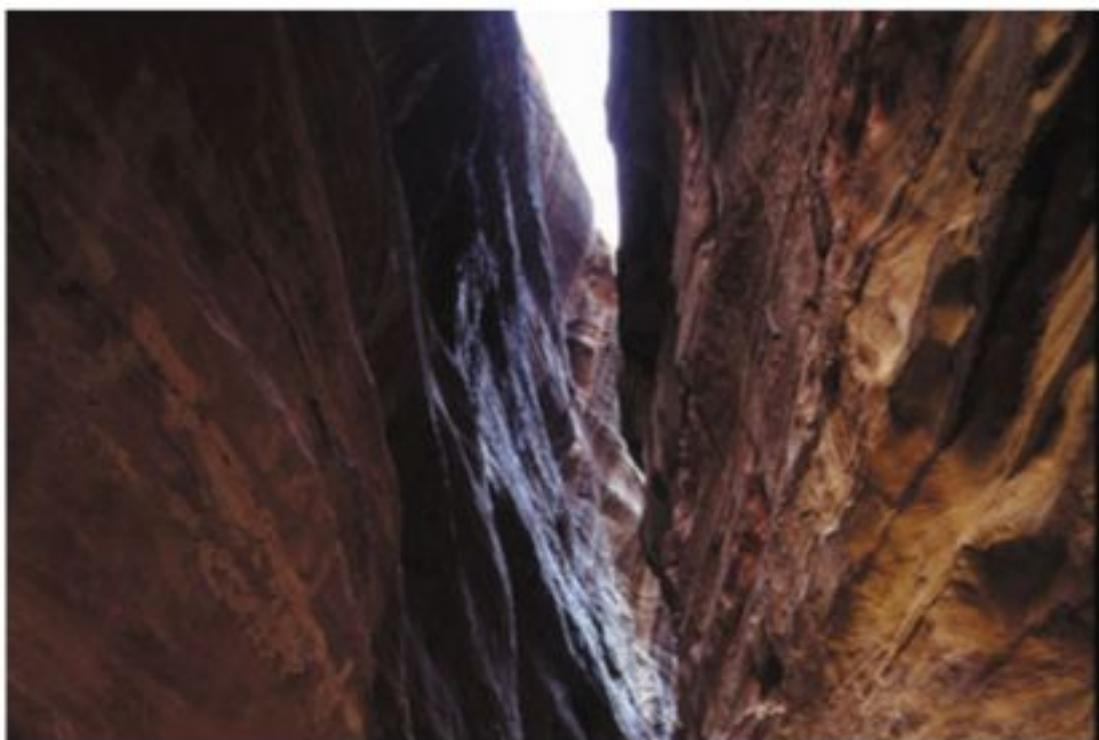
To identify the challenges that Petra is facing today, we need to analyse the current characteristics of the city.

Petra is a cultural heritage site, located in a valley and surrounded by mountains, which are part of a National archaeological park with villages

like Wadi Mousa and Oum Sayhoum. Most of the Bedouins who used to live inside Petra were moved there 20 years ago by the government; however, some of them still live and work inside the city as their culture attracts tourists.

Petra has 800 monuments carved into pink rock mountains, which were included on UNESCO's World Heritage list in 1985. It is also known as the Rose-Red City or the Lost City. Fourteen centuries ago, a series of earthquakes damaged the city. It is an ancient Nabotean Arab city aged 2200 years, and





was occupied by the Roman Empire in 106 AD, evidenced by the monuments which exhibit the mixture of civilisations.

Activities, like Nabatean Museum with a restaurant that has artefacts and a history of the region; courses in cookery and traditional food are run by locals. Nearly no night life in the city or surrounding villages, apart from a candle lit guided walking tours through Petra city for 2 hours only. Bird watching tours are arranged by The Royal Society for the conservation of Nature

(RSCN) because there are a large variety of wild life, in 1992 the inhabitants numbered 25000.

Petra is run by the Petra Regional Authority which is responsible for developing tourism in the area, and 25% of Petra's ticket revenue goes back to it for conservation and restoration. The private National Trust is responsible for training guides, studying the impact of tourism on the city, managing the number of souvenir stalls and arranging walking trails.

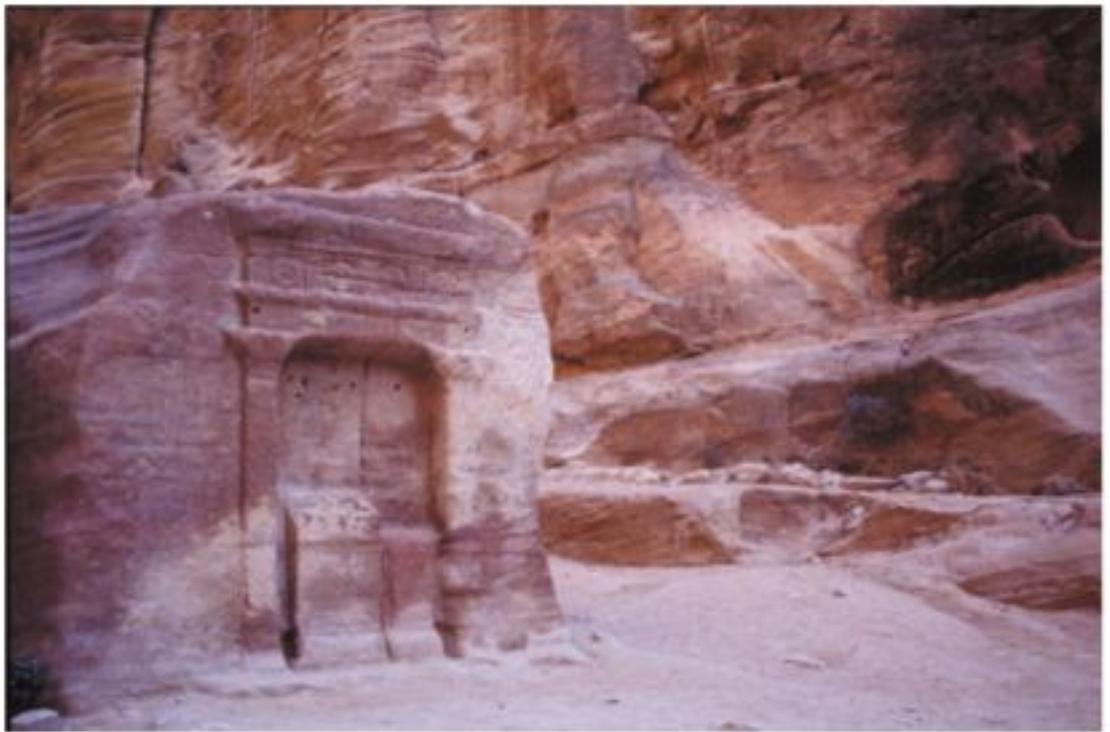
There is also the specialist German – Jordanian Conservation and Restoration Centre in Petra (CARCIP), which offers specialist advice on the technical reconstruction. Despite all these Jordan suffers from a shortage of educated and trained managers.

Most local Bedouins make their living from tourism activities such as tourist guides and craftsmen. The Government considers Petra as a national heritage site and the locals do not pay an admission charge, which is only

required from foreigners who pay JD 21. It's a government strategy to encourage and at the same time provide awareness to the residents about the importance of the area.

The size of the area is nearly 900 km<sup>2</sup> and about 264 km<sup>2</sup> is designated as an archaeological site. There are approximately 60 hotels in the area, ranging from luxury to lower scale. The busiest time is from mid October to the end of November and late January to the end of May, which indicates that tourism takes up 6





months of the year. The most popular places to visit are the Treasury, High Place of Sacrifice, Street of Facades, Theatre, Royal tombs and the Monastery. Sightseeing is by foot, animal or carriage.

Monuments are open to the public without any security such as guards or cameras to keep visitors from defacing the walls. In 1999 when visitors were limited, the assistant director-general of the Petra Regional

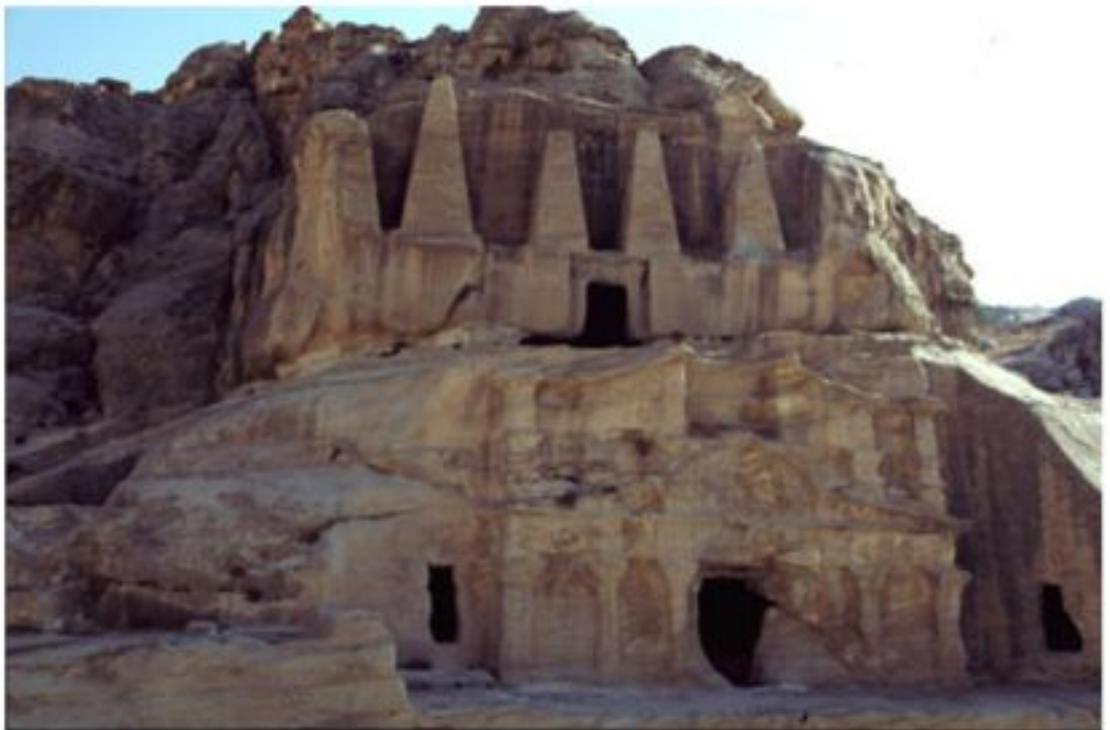
planning council (PRPC) stated that there is danger to the site and there is a lack of obvious structure in the preservation process. Some of the paths are dangerous when it rains or floods; authorities in the past have tried to reconstruct them but unfortunately caused more damage which led to criticism of the activities of some of the private organisations like the Petra National Trust.

Recently authorities felt the need to preserve heritage sites, particularly Petra. Jordan's Tourism Development project (Siyaha) joined the world Heritage Alliance for sustainable Tourism (WHA) and USAID as an associate partner, which sets programme to assist in strengthening the management of the Heritage site and economically support local businesses and communities. Terrorism acts in Jordan and the area in general, in the past few years have restricted travel to

the country. However, the USA gave Jordan more than half a billion (Dollars) to help fight terrorism. The Government also promoted international understanding and urged peace in the area for the well being of the population and to attract tourists.

There are lack of facilities and services, especially for disabled people, and the Public conveniences are limited compared to the size of the city, also are inadequate with bad water supply and sanitation.





There are only few banks; medical facilities available only in the village. Transports like Buses are limited and they are all privately run. In addition, there are no train services to the city. Car rental services such as Hertz are located in the village but there are few petrol stations in the southern part of Jordan towards Petra.

RSCN, with Jordan's major environmental agency are (NGO's), Non Governmental

Organisations, and raised public awareness programs to protect the environment but limited resources have done little to preserve wild life. Their habitats are being eroded by development and desertification. The protected areas in Jordan equate to about 1% of Jordan's total land area, which is small compared to the USA (11%) and Saudi Arabia (9%). The hiking groups and RSCN camp sites are limited due to over use.

Jordan is classified as one of the uninhabitable desert, with 10 most water scarce countries in the world. Jordan being mainly desert, there are limited pastures for live

Due to the small numbers of stock and crops and the Bedouins who still work in farms, they earn their living by grazing goats. They often consume 75% of the water inefficiently and that causes desertification which is a problem in Jordan and the surrounding countries according to RSCN. Millions of hectares have become infertile and Government has planted trees to halt it. Reforestation will help make the site more attractive and prevent unauthorised building, as the government realised that the area should be protected and building permits near Petra should be stopped.





The Evaluation of the city shows that Petra has changed more since 1985 than it did in the previous 14 centuries. Below are some of the important issues:

1) Caves are accessible and open to damage from the passage of thousands of tourists a day, increased humidity levels from their breath and their climbing over tombs and hill steps alliterates erosion, due to poor management.

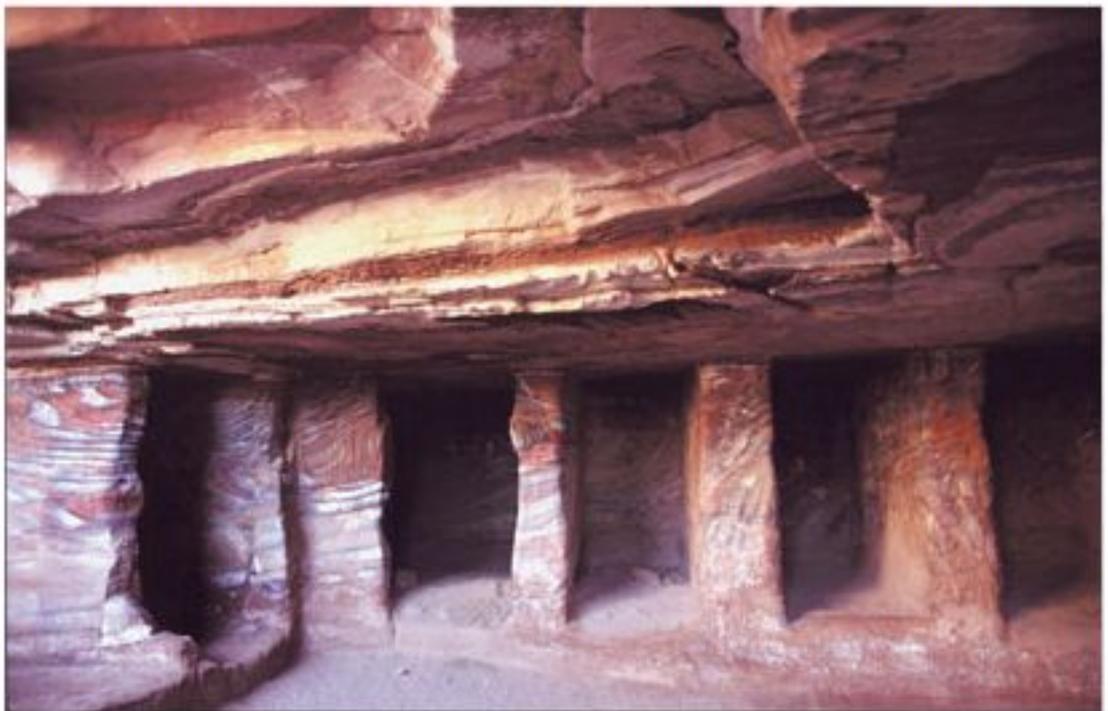
2) The number of visitors to Petra annually has gone up from 100,000 to 400,000 between 1980 and 1986. This dramatic increase owes to the declaration of Petra as one of the wonders of the world by UNESCO in 1985. The number of arrivals to Jordan in 1980 was 2.25 million and 2.73 million people in 1986. In 2007, the total reached 6,528,626, which indicates that the number of visitors has more than doubled since 1986. Therefore, the number now

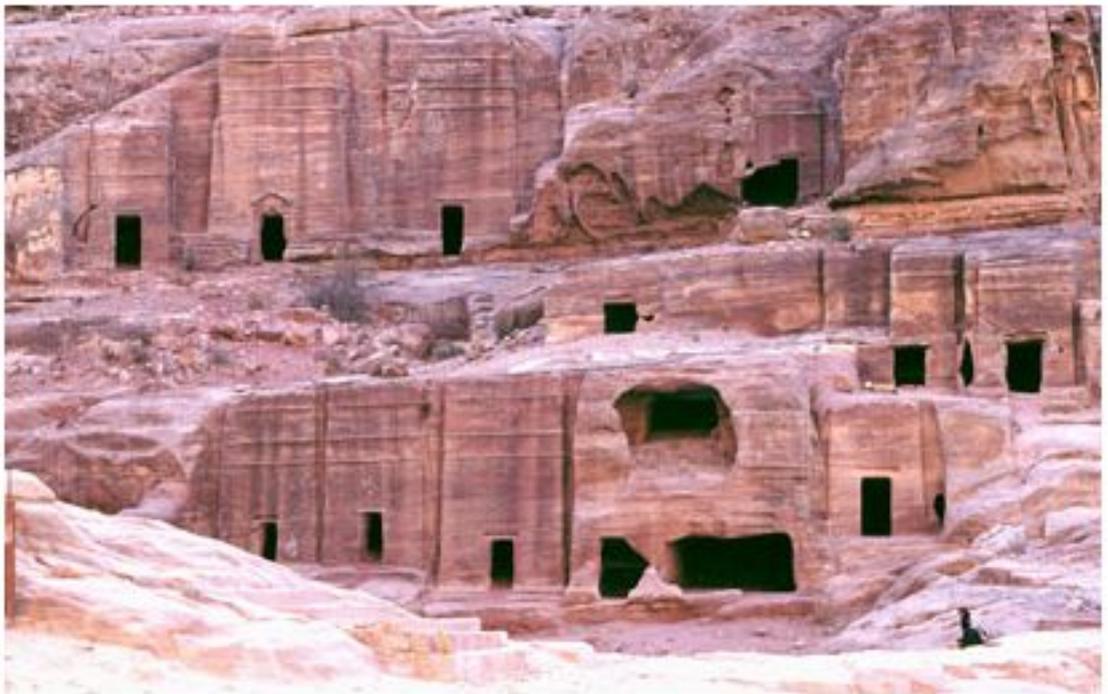
approximately is nearly one million visitors a year. As the area of Petra city is 636 km the intensity is about 1573 visitors per km which exceeds the carrying capacity of the area.

3) Visitors outnumbered the locals, there were 400,000 tourists compared to the 40 local families in the middle of eighties. At that time, this high figure had a social impact on the area but as the city attracted new comers from other regions, the families increased from 40 to 350. Even

after the growth in the local population, the number of tourists is still high, which is having a negative impact in some ways on the host community whilst also benefiting them by providing them with jobs and increasing their income.

4) Shortage of water is the biggest problem facing the city and the country. With a threat of desertification, over grazing and mismanagement in water consumption the country is facing an extreme imbalance





between water demand and availability. Water supply is a key issue and there is international fear of water shortages, which might lead to conflicts in the future.

5) There is a lack of facilities for disabled people and undeveloped services at the site.

6) The locals are divided in opinion, one group is happy with the change and lifestyle whilst others prefer to adhere to Bedouin traditions so there is a clash of social values, which

affect their traditions. The Bedouins are facing an increase in the price of land and restrictions on expansion around Petra. Some are not satisfied with the work in the area and have moved to find another source of life. Unemployment has gone down in Jordan from 15.2% in 2005 to 14.3% in 2006. 1.4% of jobless people are illiterate according to a survey by the Jordanian General statistic Department, the number of unemployment has declined by a slight margin due to the efforts by authorities but it still remains high.

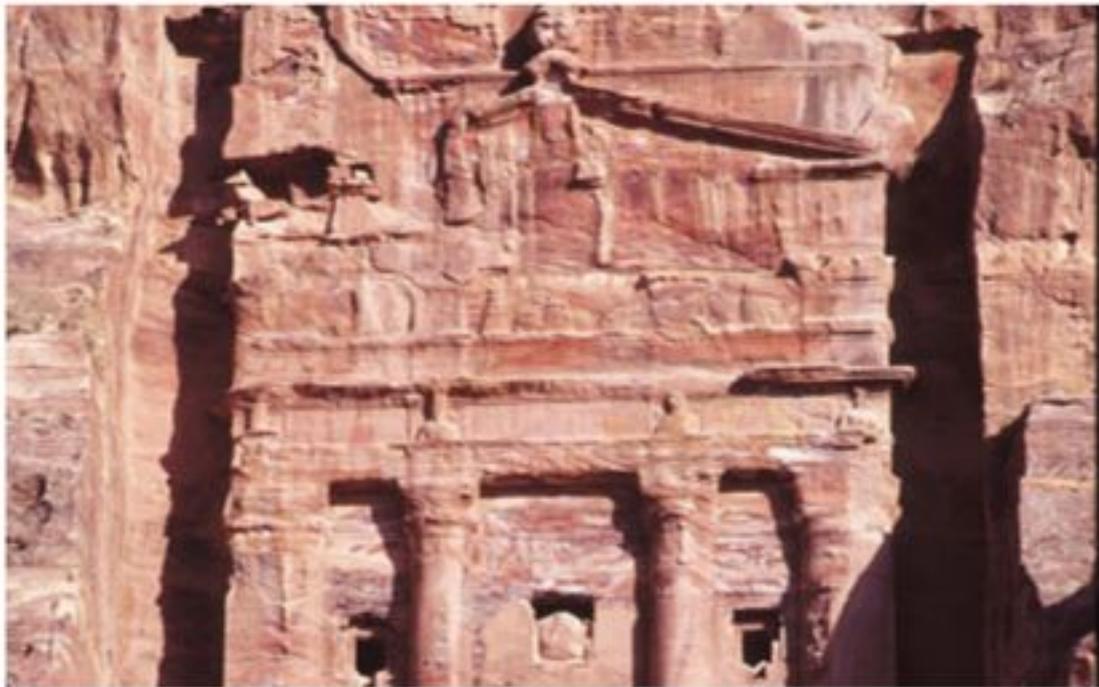
7) Poverty in the country has been reduced from 21.3% in 1997 to 14.2% in 2002, which has been reflected by the growth and stability in the GDP. From 2000 to 2004, the growth average was 5.4% and the population growth averaged 2.9%.

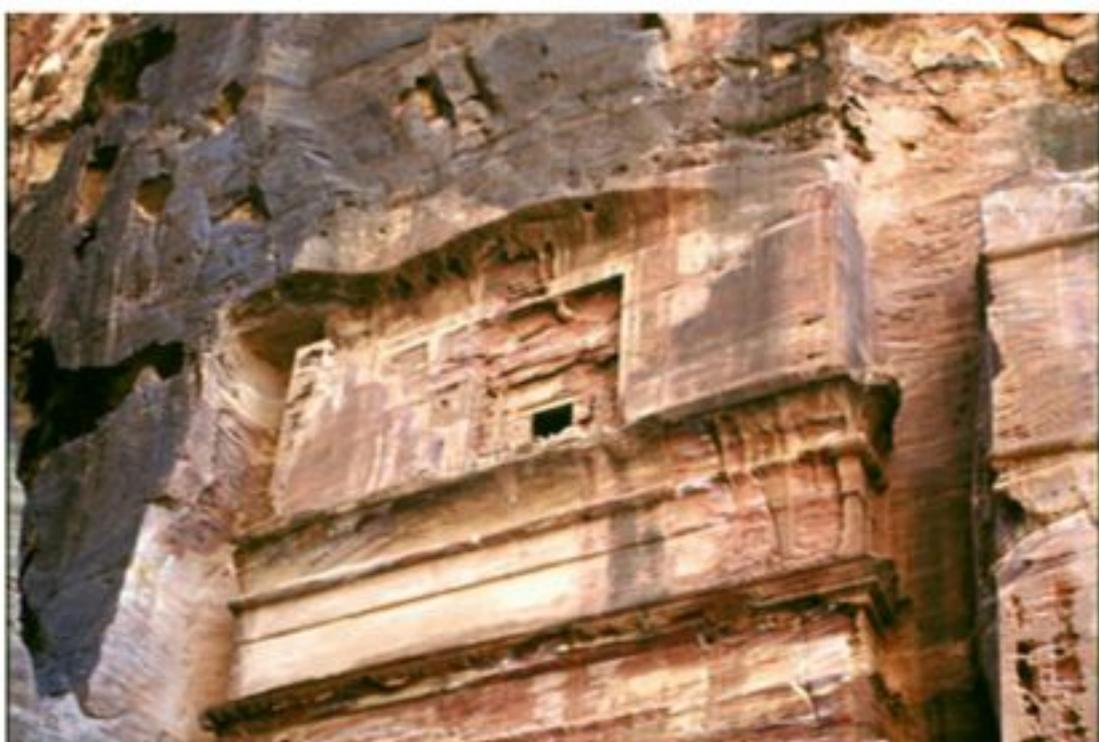
8) 33,000 Jordanians directly work in tourism and 120,000 are indirectly employed in Jordan. The country mostly depends on tourism as an industry and increasing tourism growth is the

aim of the government.

9) The programmes set by the Queen of Jordan with UNICEF have reduced the rate of poverty, diseases and orphaned children. The Government has helped reduce poverty and unemployment and protect heritage sites.

10) Jordan's government depends on the private sector and non government organisations in a big way. There is a need for balance between public and private





sectors and NGOs to strengthen the Government's role in preserving heritage sites and supporting communities. This problem has been identified by the authorities and there is a need to monitor progress of any programmes that is going to be executed.

11) The Government is using a strategy of inaccessibility to limit transport services and to reduce the number of visitors so that they don't exceed the carrying capacity.

**The objectives that should be achieved to fulfil to aims of sustainability are:**

1-Train and educate managers to act quickly to reduce congestion, environmental stress, and preserve and protect the monuments.

2-Improve the services and facilities.

3-Generate jobs and income for local communities and raise the living standard and quality of life.

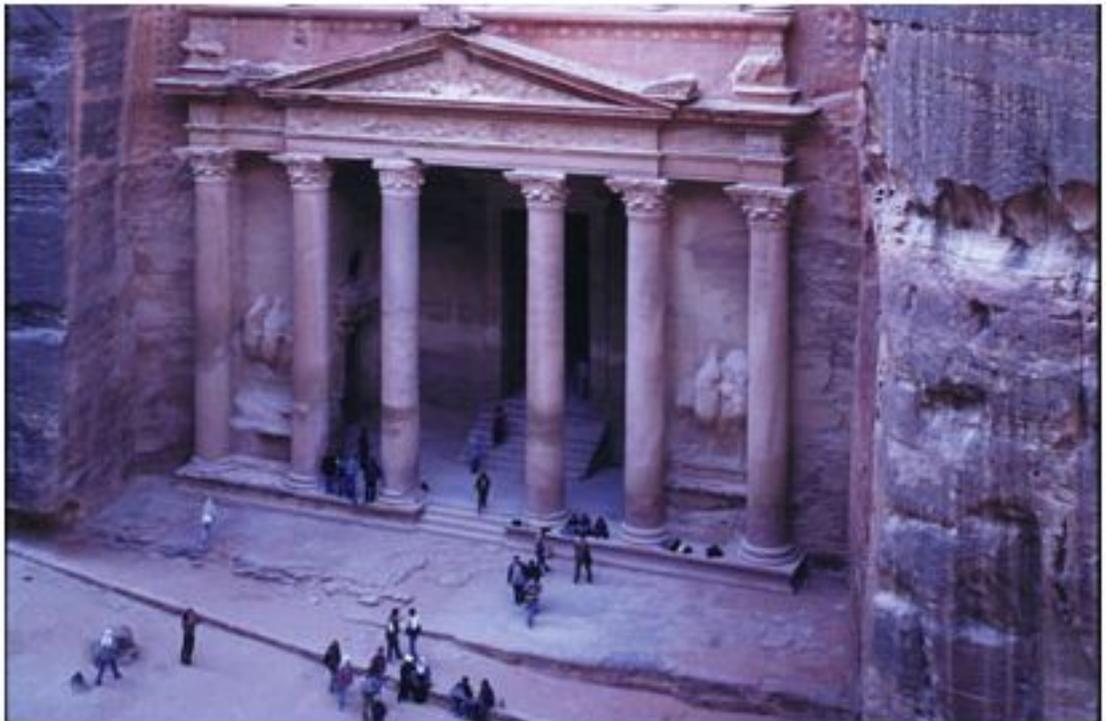
4-Find solutions for water problems.

## **Strategy suggested towards sustainability:**

Jordan has repeatedly undertaken targeted efforts to improve its economy, education system and other sectors of society with mixed success. Many of these efforts were developed and achieved; the Government set strategic goals in 2004 to double tourism receipts by 2010, which they achieved in 2008. Petra's management and government are aware of the issues stated above but a few suggestions to help improve the site are set out below:

1.Lack of managers: they need special courses to train and educate them; authorities have to use control techniques to alleviate the pressure from large numbers of tourists. Intensify measuring the number of tourists per sq km to indicate that the number of tourist has reduced the impact on the environment, and indigenous culture, which has an effect on host community life style. It helps re-urbanizing locals and their well being. Tourism highly contributes to the economy and has increased due to the increase in ticket prices and enhancing the businesses of locals, which leads to satisfying





the locals and, at the same time, satisfying the tourists through the good services provided for them. Management has to become stronger and wiser in their decision to improve the site.

2. To ensure natural resources are protected and sustained, emphasis should be on low-volume and high yield tourism through raising ticket prices and attracting Eco tourism, as it depends upon small groups of tourist activity; bringing into practice the similar principles to

sustainable tourism by harnessing positive benefits for the environment and communities. Attracting Eco and rural tourism generates small groups of tourists; usually well educated with high income, they will encourage locals to produce organic food in their farms; protect the environment in a responsible way, the number of plants, spaces will have increased and the threat of desertification will have been controlled and pollution reduced by restricting transport.

3. Restoration programmes should come with a clear structure and proper monitoring, to be identified by authorities to ensure there is a restoration programme to maintain and restore monuments. If Petra is well managed that will help protect and preserve it for future generations.

4. Improving services and facilities is essential, as the site has a high market at present and there is a demand for it. If they are not up to the standard tourists' expectation, demand will deteriorate in the future. Medical and emergency services are necessary because thousands of people visit each day and also require an exchange rate desk at the visitor centre with an ATM. Furthermore, provide accessible paths for disabled visitors to the most popular sites; Improve and increase the number of public conveniences and provide staff to keep them clean.

5. Generate additional income for

the city by holding highly organised events like musical plays and folklore dances in areas that do not affect the monuments and return the life to the Theatre of Petra.

6. Provide jobs for the Bedouins by setting up cafes and restaurants in a traditional way on the motorway sides towards Petra and not in the city or nearby villages, following the idea to reduce mass tourism by encouraging rural tourism towards traditional farms staying in the tents of the Bedouins

7. Set projects to solve the problem of water by using public awareness programs to educate the public as a way to increase understanding about water scarcity and to achieve long term awareness and changes in attitudes about water use. The Government should be urged to apply gauges and legislation to reduce water consumption and to put restrictions on hotels to follow responsible usage of the water. Improvements in the rules

will help make better use of limited supply and satisfy water demands.

In summary, cultural and heritage tourism is a vital industry in Petra city's future, with the key considerations being the managerial and capacity limitation of the site and resources. This article has analysed the influences that have an impact on the city and used indicators and approaches.

It has also suggested objectives and proposed a strategy to achieve objectives that should be considered to make Petra more sustainable by 2020 by trying to preserve the monuments, present the city in a way that satisfies tourists whilst benefiting the host community and reducing the negative impact on it. I found that the management have exceeded the carrying capacity threshold and damage has been done to the





Petra Peter  
Margerison  
Fotoseeker

site requiring them to re evaluate this and set a new figure, which must be met to avoid further damage. Once restoration work has been done, there will be a better infrastructure allowing the threshold to be changed to allow more tourists. Furthermore, all stakeholders should get involved in the development process to achieve better results that could last for a long time. The economy in Jordan has become stronger by its entry to the world Trade Organisation in 2000 and by a free trade agreement with the US, as a long term ally and donor, and is mostly led by the private sector and government depends on this sector in a big way.