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Dispatch, Jordan: Brainstorming

By Nadine Godwin



Nadine Godwin is visiting Egypt and Jordan with a delegation of travel professionals and journalists. Her fourth dispatch follows. Click to read Nadine's [first](#), [second](#) and [third](#) dispatches.

Today was the last day of a whirlwind review by U.S. travel professionals of the situation for tourists in Egypt and Jordan. The tourism ministries of both countries hosted the U.S. delegation in the expectation they would spread the good word that both countries are open for business (which they are).

In Jordan's case, recent tourism losses have largely stemmed from turmoil in other Middle Eastern countries. Nayef Al-Fayez, managing director of the Jordan Tourism Board, said U.S. business this month won't be much different from March, when arrivals were off 11.7%.

The visiting trade association leaders and tour operators participated in a forum staged for Jordanian travel professionals, offering advice, trading ideas and taking questions. ([Click here to view a slideshow from Nadine's trip to Egypt and Jordan.](#))

They urged the Jordanians "to get engaged" with the U.S. trade associations. The alternative, silence or invisibility, "would be deadly," said Shannon Stowell, president of the Adventure Travel Trade Association.

Terry Dale, president of the U.S. Tour Operators Association, suggested that travel companies work together to create programs that can be sold easily and on short notice. As an example, he cited the New York City Freedom Travel packages developed jointly by the city's tourism industry after 9/11.

In the same vein, ASTA CEO Tony Gonchar said it is not good enough to tell agents that Jordan is a good and safe destination. "We need to know there is a product, the price, the value-added opportunities."

Catherine Greteman, CEO of the National Tour Association, asked the Jordanians to propose unique and meaningful tour features that can provide added value and facilitate sales.

Mohanad Malhas, managing director of A&K Jordan, reported that "the first thing" local



Tony Gonchar, ASTA CEO, is interviewed by a reporter from CNN.

operators did in Egypt was reduce prices. As a result, he said, he is under pressure from his overseas partners to do the same thing.

Although his business is off 60% to 70%, he said he believes cutting prices would be a mistake. "I don't think that will get more tourists."

Greteman, a Carroll, Iowa-based tour operator, said, "I'm looking for the special, not cheap rates. I ask you to dream big."

CNN was among the press covering the event. Planners were optimistic that some part of the session and one-on-one interviews will make it to the TV screen.



Schoolgirls perform a circle dance at Jerash.

Our day was a mix of serious conversation and additional visits to sightseeing attractions. We had just enough time for the world's shortest visit to the Greco-Roman ruins of Jerash outside of Amman. There weren't a lot of traditional tourists around, but our visit coincided with a field trip for hundreds of schoolgirls, evidently from several schools.

They spontaneously broke into a circle dance soon after we entered the grounds. They also practiced a lot of English on our group and were just as eager to be photographed with us as we

were to pose with them.

Jordanian tourism officials talk about the friendliness of their people. Our experience today seemed to ratify that.

Our hosts hope reports from delegation members to their constituencies will help give the country's industry a boost. But they are heading into this weekend hoping for the ultimate testimonial. They have reason to hope William and Kate will choose Jordan for the royal honeymoon.

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