Impacts of Ecotourism in Jordan: Wadi Rum

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Abstract
Ecotourism is a growing industry all over the world and is renowned largely for its sustainable approach to the interactions between tourists and the local destination. Jordan is one of the few countries in the Middle Eastern region with sustainable tourism options. In fact, Jordan has one of the most widely recognized tourism options. One of the most successful example of eco-lodges in the world is located in Dana Biosphere Reserve in the Southern part of the country. Jordan is a destination for both outdoor enthusiasts and culturists interested in the Middle East. Thus, ecotourism has the potential to be the main economic driving point, especially among the Bedouin community because of their close interaction with the natural environment of Jordan. Since Jordan is a sustainable tourism industry, it can exemplify Jordan’s rich heritage to curious travelers. This study aims to understand whether the tourism activity in Wadi Rum has negative impacts on the preservation of the Bedouin culture. Examining the economic and environmental impacts alongside the cultural and social elements, the effects are evident. Is it possible that because of rising interaction between Bedouin population and foreigners, the Bedouins have become more accustomed to the Western world? Are the Bedouins straying away from their traditional roots due to foreign contact? (Haddad, 2013).

Keywords: Ecotourism, Jordan, Wadi Rum, Sustainable approach, Economic and environmental impacts
Introduction

Today, rather than purely focusing on their experiences as tourists, many individuals are growing increasingly aware of the impact on their destination environment and culture. Eco-tourists possess a greater awareness of their travel destination and emphasize a balance between internal and external influences. In the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, about 12-13% of country’s GDP comes from tourism and generating revenues of 3.4 billion USD (Centre, 2014). Jordan is proud to host several UNESCO World Heritage sites, including Petra and the Wadi Rum Protected Area, both of which attract the most amounts of tourists to the country. These sites have emphasized ecotourism in Jordan; with programs such as the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature (RSCN), Wild Jordan, and Baraka, they create sustainable ecotourism and a platform for cross-cultural education.

The Bedouin community of Jordan has certainly taken advantage of the development of ecotourism. Bedouins staff a majority of ecotourism programs largely as desert or hiking guides. It is most likely due to their close relationship and history with the environment of Jordan. Many young Jordanian Bedouins have left their traditional roles as herders and shepherds to become guides for tourists who are interested in the culture and environment of Jordan. For example, local Bedouins fulfill managing and staffing needs of Feynan Eco-lodge that is located in the Dana Biosphere Reserve in the south of Jordan entirely. The Bedouins mostly live in the Wadi and village near to the lodge. In Wadi Rum, local Bedouins lead nearly all of the tourism operations, from Wadi Rum to the Petra region (Kiss, 2004).

However, many people do not realize how tourism affects the Bedouin community. This paper intends to examine three different focal areas surrounding ecotourism and the Bedouins, including the economic, social, and environmental repercussions of the industry.

Assuming that ecotourism works the way in which it is intended to in Jordan, the industry brings economic opportunity to the Bedouins and also provides a backing for environmental education and sustainability within the country. The intention of this study is to analyze the impacts of the tourism industry critically on the Bedouins in Jordan. The specific case study of Wadi Rum would help to understand the implications of tourism on Jordanian heritage. During this study, using Wadi Rum is a focal point of this case study because of its massive popularity among outdoor enthusiasts and general tourists alike. Most importantly, choosing Wadi Rum is relevant because of its overall relative involvement of the Bedouin population in this region. Three main components outline the effects of ecotourism in the Wadi Rum area study. They include economic, social, and environmental components.

Economic Factors

Economically, ecotourism brings in a new type of tourism to the Bedouins that align with the Bedouin lifestyle of close interaction with the environment around them (Kiss, 2004). Ecotourism is an industry relatively accessible to the Bedouin and has the potential to bring in new forms of income (Kiss, 2004). However, there is a probability for the Bedouin population to become reliant on foreign forms of income, which is not sustainable, and deprives them from the traditional forms of revenue.

Social Factors

Socially, ecotourism provides an opportunity for cross-cultural dialogue and allows people from both sides to learn about one another (Kiss, 2004). The negative social impact of ecotourism could outweigh the positives, where there is a loss of culture and tradition within the Bedouin community. This includes a movement from 'BeitShaar' (hair house) to concrete homes, purchasing of more vehicles, alternative occupations, and marriage from outside the greater community (Gaul, 2003).
Environment Factors

Environmentally, ecotourism has few negative impacts. It helps sustain the ecosystem as well as provide a platform for environmental education. Although, the increase in tourism has the potential to amplify environmental degradation, visiting the said areas adds an overall awareness to the local community and permeates to the tourists as well (Gaul, 2003). The result is a growing awareness for ecotourism that is notable to have a positive impact on the Bedouin community. Ecotourism brings together environmentally conscientious practices, involves the local community to bring an economic benefit, as well as provides a cross-cultural bridge between the host culture and the visiting tourists (Gaul, 2003).

Literature Review

Sustainability and ecotourism in Jordan started with the vision set forth by the late King Hussein, when he began to notice the depreciation of the natural environment of the country. Wadi Rum is a region well known for its natural beauty as well as its famous Hollywood past with Lawrence of Arabia and draws visitors from every corner of the world, especially for those visitors seeking a more adventurous experience. Tourists have the option to participate in a number of outdoor activities, such as hiking, rock climbing, camel rides, sand surfing, jeep tours, and camping (Gaul, 2003). There is also a wide range of accommodations that visitors can choose from depending on the type of experience they are searching. There are all sorts of desert camps that claim to have the real “Bedouin experience”, that is infamous in the region. Aside from the adventure tourism that is highly represented in Wadi Rum, the Bedouin culture is a huge attraction for visitors (Gaul, 2003).

The way that Wadi Rum is marketed paints a picture of wide-open deserts, scattered with Bedouin encampments, untouched by the culture of the outside world, or as author Geraldine Chatelard (2001) puts it, “a lost paradise unspoiled by Western industrial and technological civilization (pp. 194-251).” In her paper, entitled Tourism and Representation: Of Social Change and Power Relations in Wadi Rum, she goes into great details about the tourism situation in Wadi Rum since it became exponentially more popular after the 1980’s (Chatelard, 2001). The growth of visitors increased more than seven hundred times between the 1980’s until 1996 (Chatelard, 2001). The exponential growth in the number of visitors has shown great changes economically, environmentally, and most particularly in cultural interactions.

Jordan is one of the very few countries in the Middle East with ecotourism options. Alongside attractions such as Petra, the tourism industry is one of the most important pillars that structure the Jordanian economy. It is widely agreed that ecotourism is one of the most effective way to create jobs and sustainable lifestyles as well as, reducing rural poverty (Abuamoud, 2009; Chatelard, 2001; Gaul, 2003; Kiss, 2004). Gaul (2003) regards this as one of the positive elements ecotourism brings for the locals of the environmental area. The increase in tourism has created jobs such as guides, managers, accommodation, food, transportation, and souvenir sellers that have enabled the locals to improve their comfort and living conditions. However, Gaul believes this creates some reliance on international cash flow (Gaul, 2003).

Regardless of the proposed dependence on foreign investment, the industry also promotes domestic investment from the local community caused by the upper class new interest in attracting foreigners to their home country. Agnes Kiss (2004) discusses the impact of ecotourism on the economy of the country in her article ‘Is Community – Based Ecotourism a Good Use of Biodiversity Funds’. In general, there is a lack of quantitative information on just how much cash benefit exists in ecotourism. However, Dirk (2003) shows that there is an improvement in the comfort level and living conditions for the natives. He further concludes that increase in tourism boosts the economy, which would improve education for young locals, improve healthcare, as well as food and drinking water provisions for locals (2003).
The positive lifestyle changes and socio-economic improvements are reflective of the increase in employment and job opportunity caused by ecotourism (Chatelard, 2001; Dirk, 2003; Kiss, 2004). This proves that Chatelard’s (2001) theory in her report is wrong. She states in her report that Tourism and Representation: Of Social Change and Power Relations in Wadi Rum, that ecotourism does not support the local community in Wadi Rum in the way that it should (2001). Many academics in the field have agreed that the local community benefits by keeping the environment clean and natural because, for most ecotourism destinations, the environment is the main reason as to why tourists visit (Abuamoud, 2009; Chatelard, 2001; Kiss, 2004).

The Royal Society for the Conversation of Nature (RSCN) which, established in the year 1996, geared towards the protection of animal species that faced extinction due to hunting activities (Chatelard, 2001). The target area for preservation of endangered species is in a region known as the ‘Badia’. The region of ‘Baldia’ is a semi-arid steppe region that makes up about 80% of the land (Abuamoud, 2009). This area is very sensitive, and with multiple changes, taking place in the country that is both natural and manmade. The changes occurring in the area are rapid growth in population, industrial pollution, and drought. These challenging factors makes preserving this environment increasingly difficult (Abuamound, 2009; Chatelard, 2003). With these challenges in place, the importance of designing a tourism industry that emphasizes the conservation of water resources is an industry that will prevail compared to a tourism model that uses an excessive amount of water such as the major hotel chains located in Amman and the Dead Sea (Abuamoud, 2009).

Ecotourism in Jordan faces the issues surrounding a plethora of environmental challenges that occur in an arid region. The challenges faced by ecotourism in Jordan relates to everything from water scarcity to endangered animals, to the proper disposal of trash and byproducts. Each reserve in Jordan attempts to focus on a different issue and offers education to the population on several different topics (Abuamound, 2009; Chatelard, 2001). The impact of environmental changes in 2001 is identified through the adoptions of the Zalabyeh Bedouin to the new state-sponsored projects have resulted in overgrazing, and degradation of natural resources. However, recent implications show strong measures taken by the authorities to preserve the cultural show progress in maintaining the authentic Bedouin experience recently (Chatelard, 2001).

In addition to the exponential growth in the past three decades reported by Chatelard (2001), Gaul (2003) discusses potential negative impacts ecotourism tends to have on the local community. Gaul (2003) highlights both the positive and negative impacts of ecotourism on the local community. Kiss (2004) explains the sensitive balance that incentivizes the local community to keep the environment clean and natural, which then doubles as preservation tool for the ecotourism sight. Although, there is an increase in overall employment, Gaul (2003) has found local’s overall satisfaction with their living circumstances decrease with the new exposure to the tourist’s lifestyle.

However, this is not the case for Wadi Rum, the primary factors for the authentic Bedouin culture is maintaining the culture as well as preserving the environment. Their deep connection to the environment is not something that marvels at in the way the tourists do, rather it is stripping them from their deeply woven aspect of their culture by the increasing influence of the “developed” world (Chatelard, 2001).

Research Methodology
The goal of this study is to assess the cultural, economical, and social impacts of ecotourism on the Bedouin community in Wadi Rum. The data collection is in the form of interviews and surveys conducted to a variety of people in the municipalities of Wadi Rum and Disi’s adjacent areas. Locals of the region, professionals in the capital of Amman, Bedouin camp owners and officials in the municipalities are the four main groups researched during this study. To obtain a full understanding from each party in Wadi Rum ecotourism industry of Jordan effectively, interviewees’ range from project managers to the young Bedouin guides. The purpose of the research is for analytical support,
not as a criticism tool. This promotes advancements as it enables to understand the ecotourism industry and the possible solutions to counteract the hypothesized loss of Bedouin heritage in Jordan.

**Surveys**

The distribution of survey was on one hundred individuals from different fields of work and backgrounds. The construction of the survey is specific towards the Bedouins who grew up in Wadi Rum and are working in the tourism industry. The main purpose was to discover how the Bedouin felt about the effects of tourism on the environment, economy, and the culture. Questions asked were like “Have you changed your lifestyle in any way because of your interaction with tourists?” and “Do you think tourism activities in Wadi Rum negatively impact wildlife and Fauna?” The questionnaire also inquired about their average income, other sources of income, and average family size.

**Interviews**

The interviews conducted with fifteen officials in the municipalities of both Wadi Rum and Disi is in an attempt to uncover new sustainability and ecotourism methods. Ten Interviews were conducted from to the workers in Wadi Rum, some of whom are guides, others worked in the local government, and lastly investors. Beyond collecting information from individuals on the ground, interviews were also conducted in Amman. In the capital, the researcher conducted five interviews from professionals in the ecotourism industry. With this extra information, the total interviewees’ fully captured each section of the ecotourism industry in Wadi Rum. The two-day trip was widely successful and what was uncovered was telling just how the individuals viewed the industry, its potential, and its future.

Using previous experience in other areas of Jordan, such as Petra and WadiMousa, it was determined that the majority of Bedouin people have accommodated their traditional lifestyle to fit the mass demands in the tourism industry. The descriptive results and responses provided qualitative results that were able to answer the proposed question sufficiently if this generation of Bedouin in Wadi Rum would be the last of its kind.

**Research Findings**

Each respondent provided the researcher with important insights regarding the research study. The results varied between those who believe that this generation is going to be the last of Bedouins with the sorts of specific traditions that people associate with the culture. Others believe there is currently no negative impact on Bedouin culture. While others quickly concluded that Bedouins are losing their heritage largely due to unsustainable tourism. The Small Grants Program’s country manager in Jordan, who has worked very closely with Bedouin populations over the years, believes that the Bedouins are not losing sight of the heritage. Rather, tourism has influenced them, just as globalization has done to cultures in every corner of the world, in such a way that they are changing with the times while retaining their culture.

**Survey Results**

Taking a closer look at the results from the survey, it has been determined that observations fit along that the Bedouin in Wadi Rum involved in ecotourism believe that the ecotourism is an asset to the community. Of the respondents, 81% of Bedouin questioned said that they interact with foreigners at least once in a day. Whilst 75% of those surveyed believed that tourists were interested in learning about the Bedouin lifestyle, and 83% believed the ecotourism in Wadi Rum helped to educate tourists on the cultural and environmental preservation of the area. These statistics indicate positive effects from the ecotourism industry. However, when asked about a change in lifestyle due to touristic activities, 57% of people answered that they have changed their lifestyle in favor of modernization with no specific indication on what type of modernization.
Source of Income and Education

Discussing the income, a majority answered that they made less than 50 dinars per week, with a family size ranging from 3-5 members to look after. The average age of Bedouin working in tourism was in the 20-30 years old, and 100% of who answered the survey said that they either dropped out of high school before graduation or completed only a high school level education. No one acknowledged attending college for any period, which reflects the tourism industry’s distraction from continued education. Regarding the economic impact of tourism, 76% of Bedouins questioned said that tourism was the only source of income for their family, indicating that traditional forms of income, such as pastoralism, are no longer relevant.

The results showed that the tourism industry is deeply affecting the Bedouins economical and social conditions in Jordan. The Bedouins that are involved with tourism need to interact with tourists on a daily basis. Therefore, there are bound to be effects of the increasing interaction with foreign culture. However, alongside socio-economic advancements and the positive preservation of the Wadi Rum protected Area, the Bedouins are preserving their heritage and culture despite the change in source of income due to the eco tourism industry.

Analyzing Ecotourism

The environmental effects of ecotourism are rare. The main goal of ecotourism is to create a sustained environment in which, tourism can thrive without compromising the integrity of the surrounding ecosystem (Abuamound, 2009). In Jordan, the main concern with tourism is an increased amount of visitors, which leads to land degradation, increased waste, and lack of clean water. Ecotourism attempts to eradicate these issues by offering less detrimental options for tourists. For example, at FeynanEcolodge in the Dana Biosphere Reserve, serves the guests with water in reusable ceramic pitchers that are re-usable by the staff (Abuamound, 2009). This reduces the need for water bottles that are frequently not being disposed of properly.

To control the amount of traffic heading in and out of the lodge a collection service is offered to the tourists. The tourists can leave their vehicles is the reception area by the nearest town that is picked up by a local Bedouin. This not only helps to reduce the amount of vehicle traffic in the reserve, but it also gives more employment opportunities to the Bedouin population.

Economic Impact

Economically, tourism in general offers the Bedouin population in Jordan a steady income. Yet, tourism often leaves out the utilization of the skills that Bedouin acquire from the local community and upbringing. Skills such as desert navigation, herding, and broad outdoors skills are some of the key skills that are undermined due to growing tourism industry. Ecotourism, however, bridges that gap and allows the Bedouin to utilize their skills as outdoormen and provide a steady income. Ecotourism emphasizes a sustainable interaction with the environment that is similar to the Bedouin traditions in a number of ways. Thus, the Bedouins can retain a constant supply of income using traditional ways to take advantage of the economic opportunity offered by ecotourism.

Environmental Impact

Mentioned previously, referencing Chatelard’s (2001) article, ecotourism and herding have many comparable aspects because the two have roots in the environment and emphasize an understanding of the natural surrounding environment. The main issue with using ecotourism is that communities can become dependent on the money given to them as compensation to switch to ecotourism. One of the most prominent examples of this is the situation in Wadi Rum. Notably on multiple occasions, people offer capital investments to Bedouin population in order to kick-start their ecotourism industry.
Instead, the Bedouin would pocket the money and not use it to buy the appropriate solar panels or an improved wastewater system in their desert camps (JRED).

It is necessary to approach Bedouin communities with some sort of economic incentive to participate in ecotourism. However, the Bedouin do not always use the money to serve its purpose. This leads to a serious possibility of becoming dependent on the money handed out for ecotourism projects by using it for personal advancement. Along with this issue, a complete reliance on income generated by ecotourism takes away from other, more traditional forms of income, such as herding and pastoralism.

Social Impact

Lastly, this leads to the social effects of ecotourism, which in by personal encounters, are the most important and relevant. Carrying out the survey on a wide range of Bedouins in Wadi Rum indicated that almost everyone believes tourism has had effects both personally and on the community as a whole. When asked what sort of effects, many answered by saying ‘improved English,’ ‘organization skills,’ ‘cleanliness’ or even ‘timing,’ which is a well-known problem in the Jordanian community as a whole. One of the more interesting answers received from the survey was that the young Bedouins involved in tourism in Wadi Rum are straying farther and farther from the traditional lifestyle. Many of them have decided to exemplify a more modern lifestyle, by way of dressing, use of technology, and linguistics.

Intercultural Shift

Another issue is that many young Bedouin men express interest in marrying someone from outside of their community. The idea of marrying a person outside the communal settings is not a widely adapted concept in the Bedouin society. This, of course, is not necessarily a negative effect as it shows the world is constantly changing and developing. However, at the same time, the preservation of the Bedouin culture is imperative because of its uniqueness and its role as the foundation culture in Jordan and the Middle East.

Disrupting Education

One of the more negative impacts that the tourism industry has had on the Bedouin population, especially the younger generation, is the creation of an incentive to not finish schooling and begin working in the industry as soon as is possible. For many Bedouins in Jordan, schooling is regularly available and encouraged but because there is an industry that offers reliable pay and needs little or no training, many young Bedouins drop out of school at an early age.

Local Guides

Tourism in Wadi Rum seems fairly straightforward and relaxed. Tourists come to the Visitors Center, located at the entrance to the Wadi Rum protected area, pick up their reserved desert guide or choose one from among the young Bedouin boys looking for work, and set out into the desert to experience “Bedouin life." Most tourists are unaware of the intense competition between guides and camps and the geographical separation of Wadi Rum and the surrounding area. When one arrives at the visitor center, they may notice the immense structure that partially seems out of place in comparison to the desolate towns and desert surrounding. The center is relatively new and represents the efforts of development projects in Wadi Rum; a new element attempted to integrate itself into the ecotourism projects.

Young boys working as local guides in Wadi Rum, still raising sheep and largely live a traditional Bedouin lifestyle. Among those young people who have gotten involved with tourism, an interview with a group of them revealed that there were not many other options for young Bedouin boys. The answer consisted of ideas like “If you are from Wadi Rum and you are Bedouin, you become a desert guide for tourists as tourism is the best source of income here.” Later researched showed that
each member of the group had dropped out of school at the elementary or middle school level. Their thought surrounded providing a better income for their families rather than continuing education. The influence of tourism in Wadi Rum has created a dependable job market that seems more promising than continued schooling. Hence, due to these reasons, there is a major school dropout rate in the region.

Two Touristic Sites

To clarify, majorly, there are two touristic regions in Wadi Rum. The first being the Wadi Rum protected area that is the best preserved and has the harshest restrictions regarding the amount of desert camps, the amount of Bedouin settling in the area, the amount of vehicles, and major constraints on hunting and animal grazing. This area of Wadi Rum is the background in which most tourists anticipate Wadi Rum to look like. The environment is close to pristine; the rock formations are something to be marveled and the rare desert camps are to be appreciated.

The other major region in touristic Wadi Rum is known as the Disi area. Disi, being the name of the nearest village, is a region of Wadi Rum in which most tourists visit. Without realizing, most tourists do not visit the Wadi Rum protected area. Because the restrictions in the protected area are so stringent, most Bedouin guides do not bring tourists there (Abuamound, 2009). The reason is surrounding many tourists interested in a more involved experience at Wadi Rum, with activities like jeep tours, DJ’s at their camp, and lodging that offers the comforts of home, none of which can be found in the protected area of Wadi Rum.

The Disi region, because of its location directly outside the protected area, can offer a more appealing experience for most tourists who are uninterested in the environmental side to Wadi Rum. The interviews with locals gave a better perspective on the issues surrounding competition in the area between Wadi Rum and the Disi area. One of the greatest effects from tourism in Wadi Rum is the competition that has come out of the economic need to attract tourists.

Local Competition and Rivalry

Ever since tourism became popular in Wadi Rum, which it has been for hundreds of years, the Bedouins in Wadi Rum have become intensely competitive with their camps. The terminology of being camaraderie within the Bedouin community is now replaced with fear of competition and monopoly over the tourism industry in Wadi Rum. A situation described from one of the camp owners is as such: “When foreign tourists come to Wadi Rum, they expect a certain experience. If those expectations are not met, either bad service or inadequate accommodations, the foreign tourists do not return and subsequently write bad reviews online or to their travel agency.” Therefore, in order to replace the income generated from foreign tourists, desert camps will entice local Jordanians to come stay at the camps. The tourists are offered the camps for a much lower price; this creates unfairness in the competition and creates an overall loss of tourist income in Wadi Rum, eventually negatively affecting all of the camps.

The paranoia that has stemmed from the tourism competition in Wadi Rum has truly taken a toll on the relationship the Bedouin of Wadi Rum have with one another and their environment. Getting to the top of the tourism totem pole has become the main concern, which has taken away from what traditionally mattered in a Bedouin community, which is family ties, friendship, hospitality, and shared experiences.

The attempts to embody the ecotourism industry in Wadi Rum have been more successful than previous thought about the region. Though Wadi Rum is an eco-touristic region solely because tourism is based on of the environment, not all touristic endeavors should be given the label “ecotourism.” Practices like jeep tours, camping, and noise pollution lead to the conclusion that not everyone in Wadi Rum is deeply concerned about the environment or the effects tourism has on the local people.
Therefore, a few instances embody what tourism in Wadi Rum should be like. They are to have a true Bedouin experience, a real connection with the people, and respect for the surrounding environment.

However, to counter the problem an innovative, economical, and social program was initiated by one of the local camp owners in Wadi Rum that is known as the exchange program. The owner said that he started the exchange program within his camp in order to offer foreigners a chance to live like a true Bedouin for a few weeks at a time. He came up with the idea because he noticed that there was a desire expressed by visitors in his camp to have the chance to learn more about the Bedouin culture, and not just visit Wadi Rum as a tourist. He then created a cross-cultural program that allowed people to stay at his camp, participate in running the camp, and learn about daily tasks like collecting firewood, making tea and food, understanding the geographical layout of Wadi Rum, and other skills that Bedouins in Wadi Rum grew up learning. The camp owner said his program has been a success, and truly offered both sides a chance to learn about another culture.

These examples, among others, are the types of programs that need to become more prevalent in Wadi Rum. Not only do they live up to the goals set forth by ecotourism, they also offer another layer of education through cross-cultural exchange that would be difficult to unearth otherwise. Education and exchange can create a sort of an ecotourism industry in Wadi Rum that would lead to a sustainable lifestyle. During an interview with the Mayor of the Disi region, the effects of tourism on his community were discussed, and what his thoughts on the loss of culture were. He disagreed, saying that there were no negative impacts of tourism that he saw, at least none that were large enough to have an effect.

Regarding the dropout rate for young Bedouin in Wadi Rum and Disi he hesitantly replied saying that, “yes it was a problem, and he did not think anything was being done about it at that time.” There is a desperate need for the establishment of a permanent education center, one that emphasizes work in ecotourism, as well as general education in the tourism and environmental sectors. If there were a place that the locals could go to for support in their personal businesses, the tourism industry in Wadi Rum would be greatly improved, which would in turn improve the economic, social, and environmental situation. Education, in any context, is the root in which change can take place. Improvements for the Wadi Rum situation can be realized when the locals are able to make change for themselves as opposed to the current system that relies on educated professions from Amman to dictate a management structures or provide funding.

Finally, travel and tourism can change a person’s perspective on many issues, including subjects from home and abroad. The more a person travels, the easier it becomes to adapt to different conditions and situations, and along with this comes the ability to understand multiple cultures at once. One of the major problems that Bedouin in Wadi Rum and all over Jordan is that they are exposed to other cultures by way of visitors to their country. Rarely do they get the opportunity to travel to another country to get a sense for the culture first hand.

Table 1:  Monthly Number of Visitors to Wadi Rum by Nationality 2012-2013

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<th>2012 Total</th>
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Source: (Ministry of Tourism & Antiquities, 2014)

One of the biggest benefits that ecotourism presents, is an incredibly memorable experience for both the tourists and the locals. Ecotourism is not an average mode of tourism, it does not cattle around tourists on big buses, it does not hide the difficult lives of the workers, and it does not waste precious food and water resources to please the guest. Ecotourism is sustainable; it is an exchange of cultures, a learning experience, a memory for a lifetime.

**Conclusion**

The original hypothesis of this study that tourism has negative effects on the Bedouin population, and was leading them to lose their culture was incorrect. Rather, it is the tourism industry’s effects that
have caused the Bedouin population involved to stray from their traditions, and that it is in fact, ecotourism that has the potential to solve this issue and possibly reverse the effects that mainstream tourism has had.

Ecotourism in Jordan has been exponentially popular over the last few years and is believed to increase continually in the coming years (SGP). The study in Wadi Rum shows only a few camps offered a true “Wadi Rum experience” on the smaller and more sustainable scale, with camps accommodating 25 guests at a time. The business model revolves around environmental and cultural preservation. The owners of these smaller camps in Wadi Rum all believe that the tourism industry in the area was ruining the true charm to Wadi Rum, which was serenity, environmentalism, and cultural preservation. The ecotourism businesses run by local Bedouin in Wadi Rum all made a concerted effort to maintain the uniqueness of Wadi Rum all the while presenting their homes to weary visitors.

Based on the above factors, it is easy to conclude that the perception whether this is the last generation of true Bedouins in Jordan has been determined to be untrue. The course of this research also proves that the Bedouin culture is changing with the times, and this is in part due to the tourism industries contempt for the preservation of cultures in Jordan. Foreign influence from unsustainable interactions between tourists and locals affect the economic, environmental, and social conditions of the Bedouin populations involved in tourism.

Education when accompanied as a pillar of ecotourism, by way of classroom setting, cultural exchange, or travel, is the solution to these issues surrounding tourism. Education for both the locals and the tourists widens perspectives on differences between cultures and creates an appreciation for one’s background and home.

References