



**Evaluating Visitor Management in Heritage Sites  
(application at St. Simon Monastery)  
Ghada El-Emam**

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Cairo Higher Institute for Tourism and Hotels

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**Abstract**

There is a relationship between world heritage sites and tourism as the world heritage site represents an attraction for a large number of tourists, this causes huge deteriorations and a need for ongoing maintenance for these sites. There are many factors that threaten the archaeological sites. These elements affect the visitor's satisfaction and in the same time may cause deterioration to the site. This study aims to check the current situation of the Monastery of "St. Simon El Kharraz" visitor management practices, some results and some suggested recommendations to promote the area for visitor management. The results of the research have been conducted to determine what is necessary for visitor management to improve the services in the archaeological heritage sites. The research is recommended for the importance of "the Monastery of St. Simon" in "Mokattam" and the continuous improving services in it.

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**Key Words:** Visitor Management- Archaeological heritage sites- Tourist Impact.

**Citation:** El-Emam G., (2019), Evaluating Visitor Management in Heritage Sites (application at St. Simon Monastery)., No.26.-1(2) 19 – 36.

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## Introduction

Tourism is one of the largest and most important industries in the world, due to its great impact on the increasing of the national income. By the end of 2017, there were 1232 million international arrivals. Tourism has grown about average at around 4% per year for eight straight years (UNWTO, 2017).

Tourism constitutes a threat to cultural heritage sites. UNESCO leads the cultural site to renovate and develop the resources and services for tourism, but in some cases, the cultural sites don't adopt a tourism management plan. (De Ascaniis et al., 2018).

Heritage is divided into three sections: Physical, Intellectual and Social.

In this research we will focus on Physical heritage.

Physical heritage: Good examples of physical heritage are archeological buildings, fossils, and museums, all of which represent their antiquity in one form or another. They're divided into:

### 1- Fixed heritage

Examples of fixed heritage are the remains of historical cities, religious monuments, architectural monuments, fortifications, military, water and agricultural installations, landfills.... etc.

### 2- Movable heritage

A- For example: sculptures, engraved articles, manuscripts, coins, pottery, glassware, textiles, weapons, and decorations.

B - The literal, industrial and architectural heritage. The original handicraft products, which are barred by the traditional methods inherited by the people because they are distinctive heritage of the local identity and replaced by the production of automatic or consumed in the craftsmanship and the divergence in quality, technical value, and human endeavour. (Abdallah, 2010).

## Literature Review

Tourists are passionate about visiting the archaeological sites to gain knowledge about the practices, beliefs, strife, and prosperities that has had shaped the shared identity of a nation. Many of these tourists may



share a certain degree of origin with the people whom they care about their history. (Eltayeb, 2016).

The ICOMOS International Committee for Archaeological Heritage Management (ICAHM, 2001) reported that a lot of world's cultural heritage is endangered, so the archaeological sites should be managed to conserve them from deterioration caused by visitors or environmental factors to keep them in good condition for future generations.

“The Monastery of St. Simon El Kharraz” is one of these sites that needs an evaluation of its services to conserve the site and to guarantee the increase of tourist arrivals. This paper presents an evaluation of the services on that site and proposes some recommendations to enhance and improve these services.

### **The Story of the site**

By the end of 1969, the garbage collectors of Cairo were transferred to one of the hills of “Mokattam” to live there. Consequently, they built for themselves simple houses, just huts of tin that are named in their language “Zaraayib” (to be exact pigsties). They were thus named after the place where donkeys and pigs live, and all the other livestock they bring up; for instance, goats and bulls. On this site is “the Monastery of St. Simon, Al-Kharraz”. (St. Samaan, 2018).

### **Saint Simon the Tanner**

One can read about him in the biography of the Orthodox Pope “Abram IbnZar'a al-Syriani”, the sixty second Pope (975-978 AD), who was in his time the miracle of the moving of Mount “Mokattam”. (AnbaMtaos, 2010, p.27). Saint Simon was a tanner man and he was the man by whom the miracle of mountain transfer was achieved. (St. Takla, 2018).

### **Churches of the Monastery**

The Monastery of “St. Simon Al-Kharraz” consists of several Egyptian Coptic churches engraved inside Mount Mokattam in Cairo. There are six Orthodox churches (St. Shenouda Church, St. Bram Ben Siriany Church, The Church of the Angel, Mary and Hanna, St. Paul's Church and St. Anthony's Church). The Virgin and St. Simon, is the largest church in Egypt with a capacity of 20,000 people, with 76 engraved pictures. The

most significant of these churches is briefly explained below:

**1- Church of St. Abraham the son of Zarah the Syrian Patriarch**

This church was named St. Abraham the son of Abraham the Patriarch of the Church of St. Mark, in memorial of the miracle of the transfer of the mountain which took place during his reign. It is the smallest church in the monastery.

**2- Cathedral of the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Simon El-Kharraz**

This church was named after the Virgin Mary and St. Simon Al-Kharraz, in memorial of the miracle of the transfer of Mount Mokattam on November 27, 979 AD, in which St. Simon Al-Kharraz was used to complete this miracle. (St. Samaan, 2018).

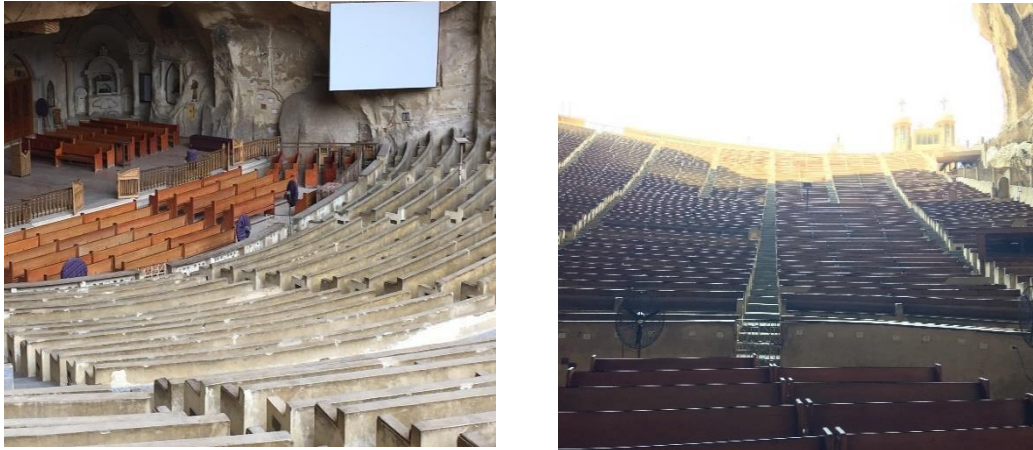


Figure 1: The Church of Virgin Mary where there are the remains of St. Simon El Kharraz ©Ghada El-Emam

**3- St. Mark Church and St. Simon Al Kharraz Hall**

This place was discovered in 1974 and was filled with huge stones up to the ceiling of the cave which now houses St. Mark's Church and St. Simon El Kharraz Hall. It consists of two floors:

In the lower floor:

The church was established in 1992 in the name of St. Mark Karuz of Egypt.

The upper floor:

The hall of Saint Simon El-Kharraz, which was prepared to accommodate two thousand people, is characterized by a number of exquisite paintings, reflecting spiritual events in the Bible. (St. Samaan, 2018).



Figure 2: The Story of the Mountain transfer's miracle in St. Mark Church and St. Simon Al Kharraz Hall ©Ghada El-Emam

#### 4- Church of Santa Paula

It was discovered in 1986 while working at the site. A large rock, which led to the discovery of a hole in the ground, revealed the entrance to the place, which was later prepared to be the church of St. Paula. (St. Samaan, 2018).

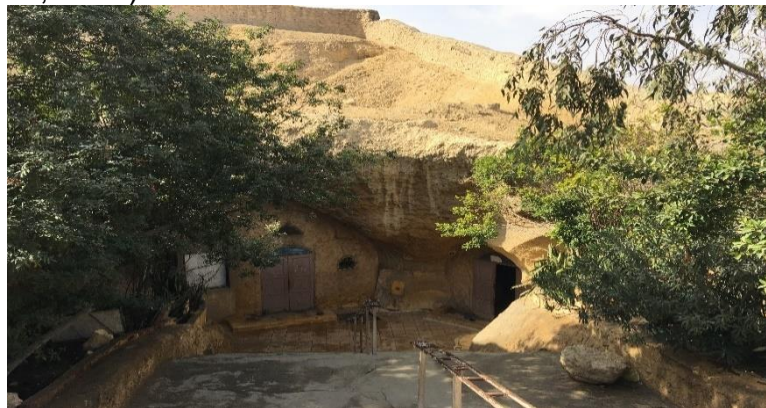


Figure 3: the entrance of Church of Santa Paula ©Ghada El-Emam



## **The Methodology of the study**

This study is aimed to evaluate the visitor management in the cultural heritage site (St. Simon Monastery), So, it is based on descriptive research. This is done by using direct observation and through the field visits to the site, as well as short interview with some of the staff at the site using the visitor management sheet obtained from Mustafa and Balaawi. (Mustafa & Balaawi, 2013). The research data is collected from books and scientific references, as well as periodicals, articles, studies, in addition to internet websites, published and unpublished scientific researches that are relevant to the research topic. The research was conducted between October 2018 and March 2019.

## **Background about the risks in cultural heritage sites**

### **Risks to Archaeological Heritage**

There are specific worldwide risks to archaeological heritage. Archaeological heritage not only suffers from many of the same threats that affect other forms of heritage areas, but also certain threats special to them. These threats demonstrate the importance of valuation, safety and conservation either out of ignorance or violation. The widespread risks to archaeological heritage sites are discussed below. (Heritage at risk, 2001).

### **Tourism and Site Conservation**

The threats in the heritage sites range from the damage caused to decorated surfaces to uncaring behavior of some visitors. This is in the case of the monastery, where tourists often climb walls to take better photos. In some cases, they like to collect pottery fragments or to take it as souvenirs. These actions happen due to the lack of facilities at the heritage site: the lack of signage, clear tracks and conservation undoubtedly have a psychological influence on visitors. An "uncontrolled" site, offers the visitor an "everything is allowed" attitude, which often translates into manners that leads to destruction. The destruction is often linked to terrorist activities, in the form of graffiti, a free breaking of objects, and so on. (Teutónico et al., 2000).

### **Cultural Heritage Management**

The Cultural Heritage Management System supports to manage and conserve a certain property or some properties in a way that keeps its cultural values. Especially distinctive universal values if the property has a



global heritage. Cultural property is more economical, accessible, and environmental further than the limits of each value of cultural heritage, and also enables the occurrence of these harmful performs. The wider contribution of cultural heritage in helping human development will improve the heritage role of the property and support it. (Wijesuriya et al., 2013).

**The following elements summarize the visitor management in cultural heritage sites:**

### **Accessibility**

This issue of accessibility will be discussed from two approaches:

First: the existence of a material way to arrive at the site.

Second: the availability to reach the site from various people, particularly the disabled ones (who suffers physical or intellectual impairments).

Considering the material mode, there are some regulations that must be considered;

- a) If the visitors can reach the site using their own vehicles or public transportation.
- b) If the road itself is usable by all type of transportation.
- c) If there is public transportation or the site is accessible by walking from the main accommodation.
- d) If the way to reach the site is signaled, so it can be reached easily by anyone. (Ascaniis et al., 2018).

Regarding the heritage sites managed by the private sector, the risk of the exploitation to achieve profit goals is higher in the private sector than the public sector.

### **Visitor Centre**

The visitor centre is the first point that visitors make contact within the site. It offers visitors a glimpse of the situation. Visitors can find the print out media about the site like; flyers, pamphlets, maps, booklets. Also, they can watch a short clip about the history of the site to awake visitor's curiosity. (Sevan, 1997).

A visitor's centre is located close to the site that information can be made accessible. The great amount of information is available through many performances-animated films and holograms interpretations in attractive



ways. These films and presentations at the center should provide the visitor with sufficient information that makes the contact with the site more pleasurable. (Sevan, 1997).

The importance of the visitor center is as follows:

- a) It reduces the duration of the actual visit to the heritage site, allowing a large number of visitors to be accommodated throughout the day.
- b) The reduction of the effects and damage of heavy vapor resulting from the breath of the amount of visitors, the dust raised by the feet inside the site and the effects of reflections on the walls and other images.
- c) It offers visitors panoramic views of tourist sites from multiple viewing angles or aerial imagery for better view of the area. (Eissa, 2007).

### **Tourism and visitor facilities**

Due to the increasing importance of presenting heritage sites to the public, there should be suitable facilities for visitors inside or close to the sites in addition to some facilities that serve the tourist during the tour visit like (adequate restaurants, car parking, shops, toilets, etc.).

Also, it is important to establish good relationships with the local communities (Cleere, 2010).

### **Carrying Capacity**

The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) defines the carrying capacity as the maximum number of visitors that visit the site at the same time without causing deterioration to the socio-cultural, economic and physical environment, also without causing a decrease of visitors' satisfaction. If the site has short opening hours, visitors will concentrate their visits at the same time, this will increase the harm to the site which leads to the increased cost of restoration and maintenance. Furthermore, in some places, visitors need more supervision, as they may take small pieces (coral reefs, pottery, and rocks.... etc.) from the site as souvenirs because they don't have awareness of the harm they cause to the site.

Some places made an agreement with tour operators to organize the visits tour on different days and different times. This will make the visits more enjoyable and comfortable. Some other sites sell the entrance tickets in a specific time to guarantee that the spaces don't get crowded. In addition to the control of the number of visitors daily whom entering the site (this's





applicable to the entrance of the queen “Nefertari” tomb in Luxor). While other sites, especially fragile sites limit the number of days for visitors, this will allow maintaining the site as well as the encouraging of the repeated visits. (Ascaniis et al., 2018).

## **Bulletin Board**

Bulletin Board is an important component in outdoor sites, as it gives the visitors useful information about the site and the best way to start the tour inside the site without causing any threats and in the same time make the tour enjoyable. It contains a description of the site through many tools like; drawings, photos, and texts.... etc. It provides the visitors with the data they need during the tour such as; orientation, facilities, and regulations of the site.

Regarding this issue, the bulletin board must be attractive to the visitor to achieve its benefit, so all its elements must be suitable to the visitor personality like; the design of the bulletin, the written message (its size, font & color, the used vocabulary), in addition to the choice of its location where the board is placed. (Sobee, 2017).

## **Ownership and Management**

Once the owners of the site or the stakeholders who share in the site management are known, this gives a view of their expectations and the practices that they will adopt.

Public and private sectors adopt different practices depending on their goals. If the site owned by public sector or government, the conservation represents an explicit priority. However, public ownership is not guaranteed to conserve and maintain the heritage site because the resources may be limited and the site may be in a remote area that is not a priority to the public administration. (Ascaniis et al., 2018).

## **Guidebooks**

Guidebooks available on site are valuable. Well-informed tourist guides are often excellent diplomats who describe the archaeological site, the importance of preserving it, the correction of archaeology itself, and the host country. Putting interpretive panels in specific areas on the site can guide visitors to areas away from fragile areas and safe for walking. (De la Torre et al., 1997).



## **Pricing policy strategies**

Entrance-fees represent the most direct way to get the money needed for maintenance and operations; however, these entrance fees must not be a barrier to access the site. Thus, managers must not calculate entrance fees according to the foreign tourists as it will be very expensive for the local tourists. In this way, people couldn't enjoy their own heritage. Also, local communities contribute to the site conservation by paying taxes, volunteering.... etc.

Hence, some sites set different prices for locals and tourists. There's another way to get money without raising the entrance fees by offering tourist services inside the site like; restaurants, souvenir shops, and special activities. (Ascaniis et al., 2018).

## **Guardians/Security site personnel:**

People who are seeking to protect the site are named guardians. They must be experts in protecting the heritage sites, as it's necessary to work with guards with experience in that field. They will identify the additional problems and know of suitable solutions or where to seek advice. (Bsia, 2014).

## **Interpretation tools**

Interpretation tools have an important role in site conservation. It can be used to increase people's awareness. It's noticed that the more engaged a visitor personally feels, the more he adopts a respectable behaviour towards the site. Also, interpretation tools can be used to design tourist programs and guided tours of different tourism segments, so the tourists will be in the adequate place and avoid the crowding of the site. Some sites allow the entrance only to the groups accompanied by a tourist guide. This makes the control much easier.

Also, interpretation is a tool for telling stories about the heritage site to visitors. Personal interpreters or tourist guides are an aspect of tourism interpretation. Tourist guides have a powerful influence on visitor's behaviours because visitors can ask him/her questions and get quick replies. (Sobee, 2017).



Figure 4: The only sign in the monastery (in a bad condition) written only in Arabic ©Ghada El-Emam



Figure 5: The sign at the entrance of the church Mar Morkos ©Ghada El-Emam

## Results and Discussion

### • Accessibility

Visitors can arrive to the monastery via the Autostrad, which is a highway via Salah Salem road till you reach “Ezbet El Zabaleen”. From this place the road is not paved, thus it is not suitable for pedestrians or disabled, and very difficult for vehicles. Tourists arrive through tourist minibuses or coasters.

It's very difficult to reach the site, as it's located inside “Ezbet El-Zabaleen” (the area that belongs to Garbage Collectors) in “Mokattam” in front of “Salah Eldin Citadel”, and it is not appropriate for tour buses and cars to enter the area because the streets and roads leading to the monastery are very narrow and unpaved. People who visit the monastery take small golf cars to reach the site. In addition, the bad smell that comes from the garbage.

### • The Visitor Center

There isn't a visitor center in the monastery, only some booklets can be found in the library on the site which exists inside the monastery.



- **The Carrying Capacity**

In the monastery, there are no restrictions on the number of visitors since the place is dedicated to worship, and the visiting hours are from 9 AM to 4 PM. (This may differ in the feast periods).

- **The facilities within the site**

The site suffers from the lack of any tourist facilities. There is a humble souvenir shop that sells some booklets about the history of the site and its churches as well as some accessories and souvenirs. There are no medical or health support area. Also there were no facilities for handicapped or disabled visitors, and no parking areas on site. On the contrary, there is a small cafeteria to sell some drinks and food and there is a small lounge nearby for visitors to eat food and drinks.

- **The Bulletin Boards**

There's not any bulletin board in the monastery. So, visitors may find difficulties to start the tour except for the visitors accompanied by a tourist guide. Sometimes, a security guard may lead the visitor through the tour inside the site.

- **Ownership and Management**

As for the monastery, it is a public property as it is a place dedicated to worship, but it does not follow the Ministry of Antiquities or the Ministry of Tourism, therefore it is noted the slow maintenance work. Moreover, it is difficult to count accurately the numbers of tourists who visit it.

- **Pricing Policy Strategies**

The site is dedicated to worship. Therefore, there are no entrance fees. The fixing and maintenance operations depend on the resources allocated by the province for the conservation of the houses of worship, in addition to contributions from both the local community and visitors.

- **Guardians/Security site personnel:**

In the Monastery, there are not efficient security guards resided on site. We just found them at the entrance of the site, In addition to the lack of a monitoring system for visitors' attitude during the visit.

- **Interpretation tools**

In the monastery, No interpretation signs were found except the sign of (NO SMOKING), written only in Arabic and in a bad condition.

Regarding the signs that explain the site and tell its story, we find it very modest and does not match the importance of the place and its history. Most of the signs are pale and dusty, as well as ruined by rain water.

- **Visitor's behavior on the site**

The fact that there are 6 churches in the monastery made lots of people visit to pray and worship. They are behaving badly as they are touching the walls and writing on fragile or untouchable objects on the site. They throw their garbage such as plastic bags, paper containers, tissues, food preservatives and others on the floor. Despite the existence of places dedicated to throw their residues inside the monastery.

- **Signs inside the area**

There are no track signs inside the area to indicate the start point of the tour and the directions from church to another. The boards are in poor condition, as the labels are so dull and there are some old banners in the monastery.

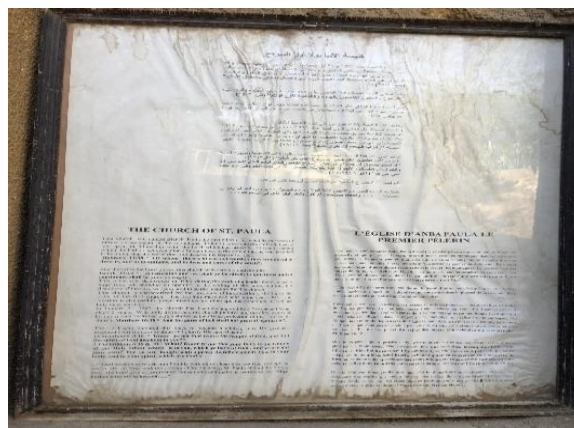


Figure 6: banner of description of the Cathedral of the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Simon El-Kharraz(paper is wet and not clear) ©Ghada El-Emam

- **Penalties for undesirable behavior**

There are no penalties for destructive, or writing, drawing, inscribing, painting, and designing with objects or attaching banners or posters.



Figure 7: Graffiti on stone (a prayer is written with a marker) ©Ghada El-Emam

- **On-site transport systems**

The road that leads to the monastery is extremely damaged due to Sewage works. The road is full of random shops and houses. Besides, these roads are very narrow, unpaved and surrounded by piles of garbage from each side. Moreover to the absence of any signs indicating the site of the monastery inside “EzbetEl Zabaleen” except one sign at the beginning of the entrance.

- **Visitor safety on site**

There are a lot of possible dangers that may happen in the area as there is no staff in charge of controlling and guiding visitors. Besides, there are not any safety or security signs to inform visitors about the places that have maintenance operations. The local visitors enter the area without any guidance. Moreover, there is danger that threatens the visitors as there's not any road dedicated to the wagon inside the monastery. In addition to the lack of first aid inside the place.



Figure 8: The Pergola in front of the cafeteria ©Ghada El-Emam



### • Services within the monastery :

All services within the monastery need improvement and development, for example:

1. The cafeteria is very modest and small, it is not appropriate for the monastery's importance.
2. The bookshop is dedicated only to sell Coptic books, it doesn't contain any books about historical periods that passed through Egypt such as: Pharaonic, Greek, Roman or Islamic.
3. There is not any service for handicapped or disabled visitors such as; toilets, cliffs...etc.
4. Inside the churches, there are no trash bins. Visitors can find some of them in the paths that lead to the churches.
5. The parking area exists in the center of the monastery and it is not surrounded by a wall, thus posing a danger to visitor's lives.
6. The staff and the guardians inside the area are not trained enough to deal with foreigners. They also are not trained to make the first aid in case there's an accident. The security people are not professional as most of them are volunteers from the area.
7. Although interpretation has an important role in improving visitors' behavior, there are only a small number of them and in bad condition.
8. There are no signs in the way that leads to the monastery. Inside the site, we didn't find any signs that pointed out the starting point of the visit. Also, there are no bulletin boards to guide visitors in the site. There is not any sign to control the visitors' bad behavior except "No Smoking" in Arabic.
9. The site has no visitors' center to provide the visitors with information about the history of the site and to tell them the story of the Mountain transfer.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

There is a great relationship between tourism and cultural heritage sites, as the latter represents an important cultural asset. Tourism is considered both a chance and a risk to heritage. So, visitor management in cultural heritage sites must be implied to conserve and maintain the sites. Visitor management is an essential tool in leisure and protected areas. As increasing use level and carelessness can negatively affect the quality of amusement experience as well as natural resources.



According to the field study, some recommendations must be taken into consideration. The roads surrounding the site must be paved and the garbage must be removed and collected in places designated for it, not to spread its bad smell in the roads leading to the monastery.

The road should be expanded to accommodate tourist buses of different sizes. The cafeteria should be expanded and a dining hall should be included. The food and beverage service should be varied. There must be toilets for handicapped and physical impaired people, besides the slopes to help them move easily, the number of trash bins should be increased and spread throughout the monastery, in addition to increasing its number inside the churches. The parking area is preferable to be located in the entrance of the monastery and to be surrounded by a fence to prevent accidents to the monastery's visitor. It is also important to set up a visitors' center next to the entrance of the monastery and to include many maps and booklets for the monastery, in addition to the use of security officers to protect the site beside the guards. There is a must to make training to the staff in the monastery on first aid.

It is necessary to pay attention to the signs, bulletin boards, interpretation signs ... etc. whether to guide visitors or to evaluate their behavior inside the monastery to conserve and maintain it. It is important also to use the latest technologies in this regard and writing all signs in Arabic and English. In addition to the necessity to improve the book shop to sell books on Egypt from different eras beside the souvenirs.





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## تقييم إدارة الزوار في مواقع التراث

### (التطبيق في دير القديس سمعان)

## الملخص العربي:

هناك علاقة وثيقة بين مواقع التراث العالمي و السياحة ، فهي تمثل أحد أهم الأصول التي تقوم عليها صناعة السياحة ، كما أنها مصدر جذب سياحي لملايين من السائحين و الذين قد يتسببوا في حدوث تدهور كبير لهذه المواقع ، بالإضافة إلى العديد من العوامل التي تهدد هذه المواقع و التي قد تؤثر على درجة رضاء السائح أثناء الزيارة.

يهدف هذا البحث إلى تقييم الوضع الراهن بدير الأنبا سمعان بالمقطم باعتباره أحد مواقع التراث الحضاري التي يجب الإهتمام بها و صيانة المرافق الخاصة بالزوار ، و قد تم التوصل لبعض النتائج و اقتراح بعض التوصيات الخاصة لتحسين الموقع لإدارة الزوار.

و قد تم تحديد بعض العناصر الضرورية لإدارة مواقع الزوار من أجل تحسين الخدمات في الدير، كما يوصى البحث بأهمية دير القديس سمعان في "المقطم" وضرورة التحسين المستمر للخدمات من أجل جذب المزيد من الحركة السياحية إليه.