

# Tourism in Iraq

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## ABSTRACT

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**Iraq, a land steeped in ancient history and natural splendor, beckons travelers with its captivating allure. From the snow-capped peaks of the Kurdistan Region to the serene marshlands of Amarah, Iraq offers a diverse array of tourist destinations that cater to every interest. This research delves into the heart of Iraq, uncovering its hidden gems and illuminating the rich cultural heritage that defines this remarkable country.**

**Keywords: Iraq, tourism, natural attractions, religious sites, historical landmarks, cultural heritage, Mesopotamia**  
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## I. INTRODUCTION

Mesopotamia is the oldest civilization on planet earth, located on modern day Iraq. Iraq is a large country with approximately half a million square kilometers in size, this large land contains a lot of beautiful city's and historical places to be visited by tourists. Iraq is special country it has forests and picturesque nature in the north, and it has a large desert to the west, and it has agricultural areas and a gorgeous sea coast overlooking Arabian Gulf, in addition to Tigris and Euphrates rivers, which extend from the north of the country to its south. Iraq is located in the middle east and it is surrounded by six country's: Iran, Turkey, Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait.

The history of Iraq extends to seven thousand years. Iraq is considered the cradle of civilizations and divine regions, as the people of Iraq were the first to invent writing and were to establish laws at the hand of the Babylonians. In addition to that it is the country of prophets. The prophet Adam Peace be upon him, prophet Abraham peace be upon him, and prophet Noah peace be upon him, where born in Iraq, and many other messengers and prophets. In our research, we will discuss the most beautiful and the best tourist areas that can be visited in modern Iraq, and we will show the geography and locations of these tourist areas, which we will divide into natural tourism areas and religious tourism areas.

## II. NATURAL TRUISM AREAS

In this chapter I am going to talk about natural tourism areas in Iraq, I will divide the country into three sectors, the north, middle and south.

### A. Mount Korek:

It is located in Kurdistan of Iraq – Erbil city, it is a very high mountain that tourists enjoy the view from the top of it. The top of the mountain contains restaurants, shopping centers, coffee shops and one of the most beautiful and modern teleferic. And it is 4 kilometers long and it is the

first and the longest ride in the region. It starts from approximately 650 meters from the sea level and reaches to the top station of Korek mountain at an altitude of 2000 meter, usually every year the snow covers the whole mountain, which gives the mountain a very special view.

### B. Erbil castle:

Erbil Citadel is a fortified settlement on top of an imposing ovoid-shaped tell (a hill created by many generations of people living and rebuilding on the same spot) in the Kurdistan region, Erbil Governorate. A continuous wall of tall 19th-century façades still conveys the visual impression of an impregnable fortress, dominating the city of Erbil. The citadel features a peculiar fan-like pattern dating back to Erbil's late Ottoman phase. Written and iconographic historical records document the antiquity of settlement on the site – Erbil corresponds to ancient Arbela, an important Assyrian political and religious center – while archaeological finds and investigations suggest that the mound conceals the levels and remains of previous settlements.

### C. Dukan Lake (or Lake Dokhan):

It is a lake in the Kurdistan region of Iraq. Located near Langya city, it is a reservoir of Little Zab created by the construction of Dukhan Dam. Dukan Dam was built between 1954 and 1959 as a multipurpose dam for water storage, irrigation and hydroelectric power generation. Before the flooding of Lake Dukan, archaeological surveys were carried out in this area to investigate as many ruins as possible. Archaeological surveys on the Langya Plain have documented about 40 sites with evidence of occupation from the 6th millennium BC to the present day. Five of these sites have since been excavated: Tel Bazumzian, Ed Dem, Kamalyan, Kalashna, and Tel Shemshara. Excavations at Tel Bazumzian have revealed a temple dating back to the 2nd millennium BC. At Tell Shemshara, an early 6th millennium BC village and an early 2nd millennium BC palace with a small archive of clay tablets were excavated. Residents of about 50 villages in the inundated area, about 1,000-1,200 households, have relocated to the west side of the lake. The lake has a surface area of 270 square

kilometers (100 square miles). In normal operation, the reservoir has a capacity of 6.8 cubic kilometers (1.6 cu mi), with a maximum capacity of 8.3 cubic kilometers (2.0 cu mi). Its capabilities will give it a surface altitude of 515 meters (1,690 feet) above sea level. The ground elevation must be between 469 and 511 meters (1,539 and 1,677 feet) to operate the power station. The watershed of Dukan Dam is 11,700 square kilometers (4,500 square miles).

#### D. Mosul forest:

It is located on the left coast of the city of Mosul, which was named at the time the Al-Hadba Model Forest in 1954 on an area of ten dunums. Where a limited nursery was established to produce seedlings of forest trees, and work continued until 1955. About (200) dunums were afforested on the eastern bank of the Tigris River in the northern side of the city, and it expanded in stages until it reached an area of (900) dunums. Different types of trees were planted.

#### E. Malwiya Tower:

The Malwiya Tower is one of the top attractions in Samarra, Iraq. The tower is an iconic landmark that dates back to the 9th century during the Abbasid period. It is located within the Great Mosque of Samarra, which is an architectural masterpiece in its own right.

The tower's unique spiral minaret design has made it a popular tourist destination, attracting travelers from all over the world. Standing at a height of around 52 meters, it offers breathtaking panoramic views of the surrounding city and the *Tigris River*.

The intricate architectural details of the Malwiya Tower showcase the skilled craftsmanship of the Abbasid era. It features intricate geometric patterns, ornamental motifs, and inscriptions from the Quran. Visitors can explore the various levels of the tower and admire the detailed stucco work that has been remarkably preserved over the centuries.

Apart from its historical and cultural significance, the tower is also a popular site for photography enthusiasts. The unique shape and stunning backdrop make it an ideal subject for capturing memorable shots.

Visitors to Samarra should not miss the opportunity to visit the Malwiya Tower and experience its historical and architectural grandeur.

#### F. National Museum of Iraq:

The National Museum of Iraq is one of the top attractions in Baghdad, Iraq. Located in the city's Al-Karkh district, this museum is a treasure trove of ancient artifacts and historical pieces that provide a glimpse into Iraq's rich cultural heritage.

The museum was established in 1926 and has since become one of the largest and most important museums in the Middle East. It housed over 170,000 items before the 2003 Iraq War, and though many were looted or destroyed during the conflict, efforts have been made to restore and preserve the remaining collection. Visitors to the National Museum of Iraq can explore various sections that cover different periods of Iraq's history. The exhibits include ancient Mesopotamian artifacts, Islamic art, and contemporary artwork. Some of the highlights of the museum include the famous collection of Sumerian artifacts, including the impressive Warka Vase and the Statue of

Ebih-II.

The National Museum of Iraq is not only a place of historical significance but also a symbol of resilience and determination to preserve Iraq's cultural heritage. Despite the challenges faced by the museum, it has managed to rebuild and offer an enriching experience to visitors.

#### G. Baghdad Zoo:

The Baghdad Zoo is a popular tourist attraction located in the capital city of Iraq, Baghdad. It is one of the oldest zoos in the Middle East and attracts visitors from around the world. Despite the city's tumultuous past, the zoo has managed to maintain its charm and provide a unique experience for animal lovers.

The zoo spans over 200 acres and is home to a diverse range of wildlife species from various parts of the world. Visitors can expect to see animals such as lions, tigers, cheetahs, bears, elephants, giraffes, zebras, monkeys, and many more. The zoo also houses a large collection of birds and reptiles.

One of the highlights of the Baghdad Zoo is the recently renovated Arabian Wildlife Center, which showcases the indigenous wildlife of Iraq. This section of the zoo offers visitors an opportunity to learn about and observe local animals like Arabian oryx, sand cats, and gazelles.

In addition to the impressive animal displays, the Baghdad Zoo also features beautiful landscaped gardens, picnic areas, and playgrounds for families to enjoy. Visitors can take leisurely strolls through the shaded paths and appreciate the peaceful surroundings while admiring the animals.

The zoo is conveniently located within the city, making it easily accessible for both locals and tourists. It is a great place to relax, unwind, and learn about the fascinating wildlife of Iraq while enjoying a day out with family and friends.

#### H. Marshlands of Amarah:

The Marshlands of Amarah is one of the top attractions in Amarah, Iraq. Nestled in the southern Mesopotamian region, these marshlands are a unique ecological and cultural wonder. Spanning over 3,000 square kilometers, the Marshlands of Amarah are a series of interconnected wetlands, fed by the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. This thriving ecosystem is home to a diverse array of plant and animal species, some of which are rare and endangered. It is often referred to as the "Mesopotamian Marshes" or the "Garden of Eden".

Visitors to the Marshlands of Amarah can embark on boat tours or canoeing excursions to explore the labyrinth of water channels, reed beds, and floating islands. The serene and picturesque landscape offers breathtaking views, especially during sunrise and sunset.

The marshlands are also known for their rich cultural heritage. The area has been inhabited by the Ma'dan or Marsh Arabs for thousands of years, who have adapted to the unique environment. Visitors can interact with the Ma'dan people and learn about their traditional way of life, including their distinctive houses on stilts, known as "mudhifs". For birdwatchers, the Marshlands of Amarah are a paradise. The wetlands serve as a major stopover for migratory birds, including flamingos, pelicans, herons, and

cormorants. Birdwatching enthusiasts can spot numerous species in their natural habitat and capture stunning photographs.

To ensure a memorable visit, it is recommended to hire a local guide who can navigate the marshes and provide valuable insights into the flora, fauna, and cultural significance of the area. The best time to visit is during the cooler months, between November and April, when the weather is more pleasant.

### I. Basra International Stadium:

Basra International Stadium, located in Basra, Iraq, is an iconic attraction that appeals to both sports enthusiasts and tourists alike. This state-of-the-art stadium is a must-visit destination for those visiting Basra.

One of the main highlights of Basra International Stadium is its impressive capacity of over 65,000 seats, making it one of the largest stadiums in the country. The stadium's modern design and world-class facilities create an unforgettable experience for visitors.

Basra International Stadium is not only known for its architecture but also for its vibrant atmosphere during sporting events. The stadium frequently hosts football matches, including local and international competitions. Attending a live match at this stadium allows visitors to witness the passion and excitement of Iraqi football, which is deeply ingrained in the country's culture.

Beyond sporting events, the stadium also serves as a venue for various concerts and cultural events, attracting a diverse range of visitors. Its open-air design provides an excellent setting for unforgettable performances and entertainment.

The location of Basra International Stadium is convenient for visitors, as it is situated in the heart of the city. Within the vicinity, there are various amenities such as restaurants, cafes, and shopping centers, allowing visitors to make the most of their visit to Basra.

Visiting Basra International Stadium is a fantastic opportunity to immerse oneself in the local culture, witness thrilling sports events, and create unforgettable memories. Its impressive facilities and vibrant atmosphere make it one of the top attractions in Basra, Iraq. Make sure to add this iconic stadium to your must-visit list when exploring the city.

Basra Sports City is also home to a range of eateries and cafes, offering a selection of local and international cuisines. Visitors can refuel and grab a snack or a refreshing drink after a day filled with activities.

### Shatt Al-Arab Waterway:

Located in Basra, Iraq, the Shatt Al-Arab Waterway is a must-visit attraction for tourists. This historic river is formed by the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, offering breathtaking views and rich cultural significance.

The Shatt Al-Arab Waterway is not only a natural wonder but also holds immense historical importance. It was a major trading route in ancient times and has witnessed the rise and fall of civilizations. Today, it is a popular destination for leisurely boat rides, fishing, and exploring the picturesque

surroundings.

Visitors can rent traditional Iraqi boats known as shanas or choose modern speedboats to experience the mesmerizing beauty of this waterway. As you cruise along the river, you can marvel at the scenic landscapes, serene palm-fringed shores, and charming villages nestled by the water.

The Shatt Al-Arab Waterway is also a paradise for nature lovers. The river is home to diverse flora and fauna, providing a habitat for numerous bird species. Bird watching enthusiasts can spot a variety of migratory birds, making it a perfect destination for bird photography and observation.

When visiting the Shatt Al-Arab Waterway, it is recommended to explore the surrounding areas as well. Basra, the second-largest city in Iraq, is famous for its historic architecture, vibrant marketplaces, and cultural heritage. You can discover the Basra Grand Mosque, Basra Museum, and the bustling Basra Souk.

## III. RELIGIOUS TOURISM AREAS

In this chapter I am going to talk about religious tourism areas in Iraq, I will divide the country into three sectors, the north, middle and south.

### A. Great Mosque of al-Nuri:

The Great Mosque of al-Nuri, located in Mosul, Iraq, is one of the main tourist attractions in the city. This historical mosque has a rich cultural significance and is known for its distinctive architecture.

The mosque was constructed in the 12th century and is famous for its leaning minaret, known as the "hunchback." This iconic minaret stood tall for centuries before it was destroyed during the battle of Mosul in 2017. However, restoration work is currently underway, and visitors can still admire the mosque's magnificent structure. The Great Mosque of al-Nuri is not only a place of worship but also a symbol of Iraq's rich Islamic heritage. Its grand prayer hall and intricate designs showcase the architectural brilliance of the Abbasid era.

Visitors to the mosque can explore its courtyard, which features beautiful gardens and fountains. The interior of the mosque boasts ornate details, with stunning calligraphy and geometric patterns adorning the walls and ceilings.

While the destruction caused by the war has impacted the mosque, the restoration efforts reflect the resilience and determination of the people of Mosul and Iraq. The reopening of the Great Mosque of al-Nuri will serve as a testament to the country's rich cultural history.

Travelers are advised to check the current situation and security measures in Mosul before planning a visit to the Great Mosque of al-Nuri. It is important to respect the religious significance of the mosque and dress modestly while visiting.

### B. Al-Kadhimiya Shrine:

Al-Kadhimiya Shrine is one of the top attractions in Baghdad, Iraq. Located in the Kadhimiya district, this magnificent shrine holds immense religious and historical significance. It is the final resting place of the seventh Shia Imam, Musa al-Kadhim, and his grandson, Imam Muhammad al-Jawad.

Visitors to Al-Kadhimiya Shrine are captivated by its

stunning architecture, which showcases a blend of Persian and Islamic styles. The golden dome and intricate tilework are particularly mesmerizing. The complex also includes a mosque, courtyards, and a mausoleum.

The shrine is not only a place of worship but also a hub of religious and cultural activities. Millions of Shia Muslims gather here during the pilgrimage season to pay their respects and partake in religious ceremonies. The atmosphere is buzzing with devotion, making it a unique experience for visitors.

When visiting Al-Kadhimiya Shrine, it's important to respect the religious customs and dress modestly. Both men and women should ensure their shoulders and knees are covered. Shoes should be removed before entering the shrine.

Apart from the religious significance, the surrounding area offers a bustling market where visitors can immerse themselves in the local culture. There is a wide range of shops selling religious items, traditional crafts, and delicious Iraqi street food.

Overall, Al-Kadhimiya Shrine is a must-visit for those interested in exploring Baghdad's rich history and religious diversity. Its spiritual aura, stunning architecture, and cultural activities make it one of the top attractions in the city.

### C. Imam Ali Shrine:

Imam Ali Shrine in Najaf, Iraq is one of the most significant religious sites in the world and is a must-visit for tourists exploring the city. It is a mausoleum that houses the tomb of Imam Ali, who is considered as the first Shia Imam and the cousin and son-in-law of Prophet Muhammad.

The shrine is not only important for religious purposes but also holds historical and architectural significance. It features a stunning blend of modern and traditional Islamic architecture and serves as a symbol of Iraq's rich cultural heritage. The golden dome of the shrine is an incredible sight to behold, shimmering in the sunlight.

Inside the shrine, visitors can explore the exquisite interiors adorned with intricate calligraphy, elegant chandeliers, and beautiful artworks. The atmosphere is serene and spiritually uplifting, making it an ideal place for reflection and prayer.

The complex surrounding the Imam Ali Shrine is equally captivating, with vast courtyards, peaceful gardens, and ornate entrance gates. There are also numerous shops and market stalls nearby where visitors can purchase souvenirs and religious items.

As a religious site, it is important to dress modestly and respectfully while visiting the Imam Ali Shrine. Women are required to cover their heads, shoulders, and wear loose-fitting clothing. It is also advised to remove footwear upon entering the shrine.

Visiting the Imam Ali Shrine in Najaf is not only an opportunity to soak in the religious and cultural significance but also to witness the deep devotion of the local Shia Muslim community. Whether you are a religious traveler or someone interested in history and architecture, this shrine is truly a top attraction in Najaf, Iraq.

### D. Imam Hussein Shrine:

Imam Hussein Shrine is one of the most sacred and

significant religious sites in Karbala, Iraq. It is the burial place of Imam Hussein, the grandson of Prophet Muhammad and a central figure in Shia Islam.

The shrine complex is located in the heart of Karbala, attracting millions of pilgrims and tourists from around the world each year. It comprises two main areas: the mausoleum and the surrounding courtyards.

The mausoleum is a beautifully adorned structure with a golden dome that dominates the skyline. Inside, visitors can find the tomb of Imam Hussein and his half-brother Abbas ibn Ali. The area is rich in intricate Islamic architectural details and exquisite calligraphy.

The surrounding courtyards are expansive and offer a serene atmosphere for reflection and prayer. They are adorned with stunning mosaic art, fountains, and lush gardens. Visitors can also explore the numerous smaller shrines dedicated to other martyrs and important figures in Shia Islam.

Important events and rituals take place throughout the year, with the most significant being the annual commemoration of Ashura. During this period, the shrine witnesses a massive influx of pilgrims who come to pay their respects and participate in religious processions and mourning rituals.

Visitors to Imam Hussein Shrine can expect a deeply spiritual and culturally enriching experience. As it is a religious site, it is advisable to dress modestly and respectfully, covering shoulders and knees. Photography is generally allowed, but it's important to be mindful of the religious significance and to seek permission when capturing certain areas or individuals.

The shrine complex is easily accessible with various transportation options available. Local guides and tours can be helpful in providing a deeper understanding of the historical and religious significance of the site.

Overall, the Imam Hussein Shrine in Karbala is a must-visit destination for those interested in exploring the rich cultural and religious heritage of Iraq.

### Shrine of Imam Al - Abbas Ibn Ali:

The Shrine of Abbas ibn Ali is one of the most important religious sites in Karbala, Iraq. It is a major attraction for both Shiite Muslims and tourists from around the world. This shrine is dedicated to Abbas ibn Ali, the half-brother of Imam Hussein, who was martyred during the Battle of Karbala in 680 AD.

Located near the Imam Hussein Shrine, the Shrine of Abbas ibn Ali is known for its stunning architecture and religious significance. The shrine's golden dome and minarets are visible from afar, creating a breathtaking sight. The interior is adorned with intricate designs, chandeliers, and calligraphy, adding to its grandeur.

Pilgrims can visit the shrine to pay their respects and seek blessings. The atmosphere inside is filled with reverence and devotion, making it a truly spiritual experience. Visitors are advised to dress modestly and maintain the sanctity of the place.

Adjacent to the shrine is the Euphrates River, known as Al-Qa'im in Arabic. Pilgrims often make a point to visit this sacred river as well, as it holds historical and religious significance.

It is important to note that the Shrine of Abbas ibn Ali

attracts a significant number of visitors throughout the year, especially during religious events and commemorations. To avoid large crowds, it is recommended to plan your visit accordingly and consider visiting during less busy times.

Overall, the Shrine of Abbas ibn Ali is a must-visit attraction in Karbala, offering a unique blend of religious significance, architectural splendor, and cultural heritage.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Tourism in Iraq refers mainly to tourism in the Western Asian. Iraq was and still one of the main tourist destinations for many years, however it changed dramatically due to many conflicts, but after the year 2020, most of the global tourist reports considers Iraq a very safe area to visit and enjoy the natural and historical pleasures that the country has. The tourism in Iraq has faced many challenges, however, in recent years there has been improvements. The capital city Baghdad is the second largest city in the Arab world and the 4th largest in the Middle East. Iraq has several World Heritage Sites, dating back to ancient Mesopotamia, most notably Babylon Iraq. Iraq is considered to be a potential location for ecotourism. Erbil was chosen as "Arab Tourism Capital" in 2014 by the Arab Tourism Committee. Iraq is open and welcoming tourists once again. The Iraqi government is supporting all kinds of tourist activities since the country has a very safe environment to reserve tourist from all around the world, many Iraqi tourist companies supported by the government - have tours plans to Iraqi Kurdistan in the north and Baghdad and beyond in the south. All tours start and finish in either Baghdad, Basra or Erbil. All three have major airports which can easily be reached directly or through transit from Turkey, Germany, Lebanon, Egypt, Jordan or through the countries of the Arabian Gulf.

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Mr. Mohammed Ali Hussein, article at -  
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