

## Religious Tourism in Iraq, 1996-1998: An Assessment

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### Abstract

*This article is about the religious tourism agreement signed between Iraq and Iran for the period of 1996 to 1998 following eight-year Iran-Iraq war. It examines the application of the agreement and shows the negative aspects of the agreement on excellent and first class hotels in Iraq due to ignoring international hotel chain standards and government domination of tourism sector in Iraq. The article presents an assessment of this type of tourism, the needs and desires of such tourists, the availability of appropriate facilities, and the consequence on hotels' management and employees. The article wraps up with suggestions and conclusion to advance such kind of tourism, which has potentials in Iraq.*

**Keywords:** Religious Tourism, Hotel Management, Iraq-Iran Relationship, The Middle East.

### Introduction

The hospitality industry is modern and sophisticated industry, and grows and expands rapidly. It is one of industries that contribute to creating jobs and new careers. Hospitality activities covers variety of segments and contribute significantly to national income as a result of marketing and product development to meet the changing needs of customers (Hayes & Ninemeier, 2004, p. 2). The hospitality industry seeks to achieve satisfaction for the guests through a variety of services that are intangible in many cases.

#### 1. Tourism in Iraq

Iraq has tourist attractions based on natural and human resources. There is hardly any country in the world containing such elements of Iraq's tourism. It is a land of history of the oldest human civilizations that dates back thousands of years. Iraq provides a diversity of terrain and climate and is distinguished by the presence of two great rivers, the Tigris and the Euphrates. There are many lakes and bodies of water that provide different Kinds of tourism, such as recreational, therapeutic, and hunting tourism; added to that the existence of shrines<sup>(1)</sup> and religious sites of different religions as important source of religious tourism<sup>(2)</sup>. In addition to the shrines of the prophets of the Jews, Christians and Muslims, there are important temples and shrines of the Yazidis, the Sabians, and even of Sikhism.

The shrines and religious sites are distinctive and unique to the tourist arrivals. Iraq assumes prestigious status among Islamic countries. Its abundant sacred regions include remains of infallible Shiite Imams who could attract million Muslims around the world (please, see figure (1) for most important religious shrines in Najaf and Karbala). Unfortunately most of these sites still have not been exploited. If they are, they will help to prosper tourism in Iraq. This situation is due to the shortcomings in making the necessary means to support the existence and availability of other major components of tourism. The quality of services provided in such sites has to be upgraded and the need is to develop the human element (human resources) that are necessary to manage service operation. The low level of accommodation and catering as well as the deterioration of routes and means of transportation are obstacles to such development. Attention should be paid to the tourism marketing and its requirements. The administration is the driving force for the development of these facilities to increase and improve constantly Iraq's tourism. The presence of a sensitive management, which is characterized by good scientific reason and the power of observation and innovation, has an important role in the desired development of the society in various fields, including tourism, which represents an inexhaustible source, if properly exploited. Hotels<sup>(3)</sup> are the main pillars of tourism and hospitality industry, for providing many varied services to foreign tourists and the community (Walker, 2004, p.6). The hotels provide services to the tourism, which cannot be provided without fundamentals of physical and human resources. Hotels must be working to contribute to the provision of services at a level commensurate with the requirements of tourists and other customers.

At the end of the seventies of the last century, the stockholders in tourism sector in Iraq realized that Iraq is a tourist destination. A large point of attention was that tourism will increase the national income of the country by millions of dollars. There was a severe shortage in the number of hotels, especially the excellent hotels of five and four stars, which follow the chain hotel standards. A massive campaign to build modern hotels in the early eighties was initiated. Iraq was the first to build such hotels among the neighboring countries for the purpose of supporting tourism. On this basis was the construction of many excellent hotels in the cities of Baghdad, Mosul, Basra and some other provinces in order to meet the growing demand for accommodation. These hotels had good services and they provided, in addition to the accommodation, food and beverage facilities, and many other facilities like nightclubs and gambling. It is noticeable that the distribution of hotels in Iraq in general is built on the basis of tourist attractions. Most of them are concentrated in the capital Baghdad and some are distributed to other governorates. It is also noted the high numbers of hotels and accommodation in the provinces of Najaf and Karbala for their religious attraction. Most of these hotels are second, third and fourth class hotels, with a complete absence of the luxury hotels (five stars hotels).

## **2. Iraq-Iran Tourism Religious Agreement<sup>(4)</sup>**

Tourism in Iraq played an important role in the national economy because of the possession of great tourist sites. Archaeological and religious sites represent centuries of civilization of Mesopotamia. The control of tourism based on personal relationships gave those who were incompetent management of this vital sector, which led to deteriorating tourism, especially in the reign of Saddam Hussein. This was reflected in a clear and negative impact on the excellent, first hotels in Baghdad, particularly during religious tourism agreement between Iraq and Iran (For a list of hotel classes in Baghdad that received this type of visitors, please see figure 2). Those agreements were signed between the two countries for the period years of 1996 to 1998. These visits were initially limited to travel and tourism companies in low numbers and then the two sides agreed to bring Iranians visitors<sup>(5)</sup> for an average of 1500 visitors per day. Then, the number reached 2500 visitors per day coming through the border port Al-Munthiriyah near Iran, due to the lack of airline travel at that time because of the air sanctions imposed on Iraq.

At the same time, Iranians visitors entered with a rate of (250-300) visitors a day from the border port of Al-Waleed near Syria, with identifying visit program for each group. The agreement signed between the parties stated that the program of visit should be (7) days divided as follows, two days for Baghdad city, which visitors could visit the shrine of Imam Mosa al-Kazim, and then to visit the shrine of Imam Ali-Al Hadi in Samarra town north of Baghdad. Two other days are to visit religious shrines in the holy city of Al-Najaf, the shrines of Imam Al-Husain and Abu Fathel Al-Abbas, and two more days to visit religious shrines in the city of Karbala, to visit the shrines of Imam Ali bin AbiTalib and shrine of Aoun in Kufa.

One day was to return to Iran from the same border crossing into the country. It was agreed that these visits would be continued on a daily basis until the end of the contract between the two parties, while ensuring all visitor's needs, such as accommodations and food and beverage, etc.

This phase has been accompanied by a lot of obstacles and problems relating to accommodation, due to lack of availability of qualified hotels especially in the cities of Karbala and Najaf on the one hand, and the technical problems in transportations, like buses quality and numbers on the other hand. It is known that Tourism Board in Iraq is the supervisor of distribution, accommodations, and the rest of the other tourism requirements and necessary services to visitors. The agreement terms stated that all visitors should be accommodated in excellent and first class hotels. The Iranian side had already paid for the visit on the basis that housing will be in those hotels. Actually, they used the hotels in Baghdad for the purpose of accommodating visitors. It was agreed that the share of each hotel from visitors will be suitable with the hotel rooms and its capabilities of the main outlets availability, such as restaurants capable of provision meals and beverage etc., whether in Baghdad or in the cities of al-Najaf and Karbala. This percentage was measured by the number of buses to be allocated to those hotels. Each bus consists of 40 visitors, in addition to the four persons who escort them, such as security, interpreter, and the driver. The average share of excellent and first class hotels in Baghdad was ranging between four to six buses.

## **3. Sample Study**

Hotel managers tried to sign contracts with government's created al-Huda Company to bring the Iranian visitors in an illusion of tremendous revenue estimated at millions and to improve their image at the Tourism Board, not caring about costs and expenditures for this type of visitors in the absence of a good cost control system.

For example special requests were demanded by the Iranians, like frequent menu changes and Iraqis accepted that without debate for the fact that the project was being blessed by the Iraqi government. This process was accompanied by some other important matters including:

1. Most visitors to the holy shrines in Iraq with this agreement were Shiites<sup>(7)</sup> who have martyrs in Iraqi-Iranian war and residents of villages and southern cities of Iran who were characterized mainly as elderly with lack of education. Their first concern was just to visit religious shrines in Najaf and Karbala (Bundhum, 2010, p.1).
2. This type of guests requires specific needs in line with Islamic law, which is not fit with this type of hotels, which are called full services hotels. The Iraqi side at that time had to approve all the Iranian side requests to ensure the success of the agreement, and the most important requests were:
  - A. Closing the health clubs at the hotels (if any), like sports hall and swimming pool services, for being incompatible with the visitors', performance of sacred religious ceremonies.
  - B. Requesting Eastern style toilet (style squat) in hotel rooms and in public areas, because most of these visitors didn't know how to use the Western style toilet, or thinking they are not in accordance with their religious beliefs. Eastern style toilet under the classification of tourist hotels in Iraq could be located in third, fourth, and popular class hotels and not in the five or four class hotels, which characterized Western international hotel standards.
  - C. Separation between the sexes to prevent intermixing of men and women.
  - D. The Iranian side required that most employees in the hotels be Muslims and to prefer the absence of any employees from another religion such as Christianity or Sabean, causing employee's shortage problem for some hotels.
  - E. A prevention of work not performed by a Muslim to be in accordance with Islam. It is not permitted to some Muslims to eat from a non-Muslim. Al- Hamladar<sup>(8)</sup> was checking such practice through entering to the production area at the kitchen to make sure of its implementation.
  - F. Conservative dress was required and a commitment to such dress for employees, which requires wearing the veil (hijab) by women. This means veiling employee, whether working in the front desk or housekeeping department. So in general, it gives a religious character to a hotel (Bundhun, 2009, p.1).
  - G. Meals and accommodation for Iranian visitors' escorts, like security officers, translators, and bus drivers, to be free of charge.
  - H. Closure of all banquet halls in the hotel (if any) and avoid the weddings and private parties events that the Iraqi citizen were accustomed to, because supposedly it opposed the terms of the contract.
  - I. The closing the nightclub in the hotel (if any) completely while the visitors are at the hotel.
  - J. Preventing the purchase, delivery, and sale of all kinds of alcoholic beverages in all hotels outlets during the stay of the visitors in the hotel (Bakr, 2008, p. 1).
  - K. Use only permissible (halal) meat (slaughter according to the Islamic manner) and the exclusion of all other meat products that are not in accordance with Islamic practices (El Shoush, 2010, p. 1).
  - L. The existence of copies of the Koran, the soil<sup>(9)</sup>, prayer mat, and an arrow pointing to the direction of Mecca, and ewer (pitcher) for prayer in each hotel rooms.
  - M. Requirement of a large oratory at the hotel for congregational prayer (For Study Model of Religious Tourism in Iraq please see figure (3) below).

The rush on this project and receiving this type of visitors in these kind of hotels without good economic plan has led to destruction of the infrastructure of many those hotels in terms of misuse of the hotel and its outlets by the visitors and the lack of regulation and sound planning costs. This project rather incurred financial losses mainly in rooms, food and beverage facilities as a result of recurring maintenance due to the Iranian request. Maintenance would take place when the visitors leave at the termination of the contract, in order to achieve the required quality of hotel services and the aesthetic side of the hotels.

My conclusions reached by studying this project were the following:

1. Failure of this experience, resulting from the weakness of those responsible for the administration of the hotel sector, despite the presence of the official tourism sector that was in charge. There was lack of specialized staff at all levels of management to find alternative solutions or proposals that could reduce significantly the losses that accompanied the experience.
2. Low investment and financing in tourism and hotel sector at that time and not drawing appropriate frameworks for private sector participation to build religious hotels for the terms of this type of visitors,

as is the case in Saudi Arabia during the pilgrimage season. It was essential to maintain the first class hotels, where the Iraqi government had spent millions of dollars on them. Despite the passage of more than fifteen years of this experience, we have not seen in Baghdad or other provinces this kind of hotels in terms of construction, design and equipment.

3. No stable tourism policies and procedures, resulting from the lack of political and economic stability, as well as the indirect control of the centralization, especially in first class hotels. Most of these hotels were of mixed sector. Tourism Board was the main hidden driver of the hotels and was vetoing the hotels' Board of Directors decisions. There was a lack of decentralization in the management of this mixed sector. The heaviest burden was the problems of operational management that was removed from its duties of tourism planning based on scientific grounds. This practice led to the contraction and the marginalization of the role of the private sector in the development process of tourism and hospitality. There was a lack of awareness and understanding of the importance of tourism, both at the economic, cultural, or civilization level through the present of tourism Board at the top of the pyramid of tourism. It is no doubt that the tourism sector in Iraq also suffered greatly from the instability of tourism policy resulting from the instability of economic policy that did not rely on firm foundations. In addition, there was a decline in economic development at the country level as a result of the impact of wars and economic sanctions, which greatly affected tourism sector in general and hotels in particular.

4. When hotels accepted this kind of religious visitors, it led to the exclusion of all others guest categories, including local, foreign, or conferences guests for security reasons on one hand and for capacity reasons on the other hand. This led to loss of all categories of other guests in addition to loss the frequent guests who were permanent guest at those hotels, especially in Baghdad, and therefore a loss of diversity in guests who are wanted by successful hotel management. The Tourism Board and hotels managements had forgotten the important advantage of religious tourism as part of tourism in Iraq due to the presence of many tourist attractions in Iraq.

5. Deforming the architecture structure of the excellent and the first class hotels and the striking rise of the maintenance expenses, both in the rooms, floors, or in some outlets of these hotels. Some managements changed bathrooms of some rooms from the standard ones (western toilet) to the Eastern style toilet (style squat), or installed Eastern baths on each floor or outlet, like health club or swimming pool for visitors' use. This process has led to many problems in terms of sewer blockages and the emission of odors in the floors of the hotel, which were incompatible with basic health and safety standards rules in hotel industry.

6. The emergence of the discrimination on basis of gender, race, and religion because of the terms of the Iranian side to separate women from men, whether visitors or workers. They required female employees working on the floors to wear the veil and to prevent any non-Muslim to serve the visitor even in kitchen staff or service. This created a big problem for the managements of these hotels and thus to overcome that they were not calling the non-Muslims workers by their real names in front of visitors but by assumed Islamic names known to the Shiites pilgrims. Other emerging problem in housekeeping department was the refusal of non-Muslims women to wear forced veil.

7. Raising price and cost of the raw materials in the local markets, especially food and beverage raw materials, due to increasing demand for these materials daily by the hotels. Sometimes these products were missed from the market and increased monopoly of these suppliers, despite having contracts with suppliers. At that time, Iraq was going through difficult economic conditions under the sanctions imposed by the United Nations. This has led the hotel management to buy them in high prices or accept alternative substances for them. This had negative on average prices of daily meals for guests (breakfast, lunch, and dinner), with fixed prices provided for meals to Al-Huda Company and the Iranian side hoping that this will be a temporary period. With inefficient accounting system for most of these hotels, they could not calculate accurately the cost of food and beverage.

8. Loss of professionalism emerged at the time in the hospitality profession, especially in the housekeeping and Food and Beverage Department because of visitors' lack of interest in the importance of service, resulting in lack of interest by employees applying hotels standards during the service. This was also due to high work compression. One example was the serving of food and beverage meals to visitors just as it was serviced in schools or military. They service long tables, with average of 20-30 people for each table. The deal was to place food and beverage on the table before visitors entering restaurant's hall. There was no application of the service table standards but were under al-Hahamldar orders or the head of the group.

9. Increasing significantly the employees' turnover rate at those hotels, as result of work load and work pressure. This has led some employees to seek work at some other hotels that don't serve Iranian groups. This had a incurred negative impact on the hospitality industry in Iraq, where it caused the loss of skilled hotel staff, where some of the skilled staff had received some of their training outside the country. The employees' wages in hotels depend on the basis of the monthly wage (salary). This means that the employees are seeking tips as a source of second income. In the case of Iranian pilgrims, most bills were paid on credit under the agreement. This practice closed the door for employees to receive any second income tips of their service. Most visitors, as previously stated are people with old age category and with specific level of income. Their stay and meals are paid in advance.

10. The human resources departments beard significant additional burdens through the repeated recruitment process to fill in acute shortage in the number of employees, due to employees leaving work in hotels suddenly. Hotels had to hire employees who did not have a require level of training in order to avoid shortage manpower in a timely manner, especially in the food and beverage departments.

11. The hotel management endured astronomical losses due to free rooms and food and beverage service to escorts like security personnel, translators and bus drivers. Under the agreement, an average of five people per bus was to get free service. The price for breakfast was (\$ 5) per person, while the price of lunch or dinner was (\$ 7) per person, so the average will be (\$13). The price of accommodation was (\$ 22) per room of two people, which averaged (\$ 45) per person for room and food. By calculating the cost of meals and drink, it means:

- Food (For each Bus):

5 people x 2 meals (daily) x 6 days a week x 4 weeks x 6 months = 1440 meals

1440 meals x 13 dollars (average) = 18720 dollars

While the housing was free for two people for each bus of 40 passengers, and the calculation is follows:

-Rooms (For each Bus):

2 people x 1 bus x 1 room x 6 days a week x 4 weeks x 6 months = 144 rooms

144 room x \$22.00 = \$ 3168.00 worth of free rooms.

The outcome: the meals with the residence are as follow:

\$18720.00 + \$3168.00 = \$21888.00

This situation continued for a period of six months, which the hotel bear these expenses free of charge to ensure the continuation of these visitors in hotels to ensure a constant daily income, let alone other accompanied hospitality expenses.

12. The closing of bars and preventing the provision of alcoholic beverages during the period of the Iranian visitors had great negative impact on these hotels in terms of revenue, for which a great loss was a result of this closing alcohol sale revenue. All kind of beverages are easily stored and are non-perishable items, unlike food items. The rate of profit in beverages is high in contrast to food. Hospitality standards require accompanying beverage with food in meals.

The closure of recreational outlets in the hotel, like swimming pool or health club to regular guests and visitors, subscription cancelation, and transformation of these hotels from full service hotels to limit service, is disproportionate to its reputation and tourism classification, where they used to be filled with guests in the regular days and holidays.

13. Unfortunately this experiment was considered at the time by some hotels management a great lucrative. Most management was from outside the hotel and tourism sector and valued the magnitude of daily income without regard to the net profit. Some managements achieved higher revenues than others by increasing the number of daily buses ignoring or overlooking the net profit of the rooms or food and drink. The accounting staff of these hotels showed comprehensive general figures without showing proper financial situation of the hotels.

14. It was clear the administrative confusion of the hotels managements in that period. In some cases, there was a decision by the hotel management and another one by Al-Huda Company and Shams al-Sabah Company. At other times, it was clear interference in the hotel policy or failure to meet the visitors' demands properly, which generate a lot of difficulties on the operational and administrative departments, making the hotels managements stands sometimes idle fearing making decisions.

15. The hotel management beard additional burdens beyond the terms of the agreement, costing the hotels management's additional funds that included under complimentary section,

For example, sending meals constantly (lunch and dinner) for free to al-Huda company patrol officers<sup>(10)</sup> on daily basis fearing company's procedures or pressure not to pay their financial obligations to the hotels.

16. The nature of the contract and the terms of the agreement it's vague, and there was no copy of the agreement at any hotel management, and no management looked at its terms. It was clear that its provisions were not properly studied and not based on economic feasibility. Its content contains a lot of faults, which was of al-Huda side, which was the biggest beneficiary of this process. This was reflected clearly in terms of room, meals and transportation charges.

17. The exploitation of al-Huda Company of the agreement was from one side through its interference and violation of the paying bills agreement on the pretext of a lack of services or lack of conformity of meals to the menu agreed between the two parties. It unilaterally reduced the amounts of some bills but even writing off some of them, as a way to pressure the managements of those hotels, to acquiescence to the demands of the company, despite the fact that most of these hotels were mixed sector. The state has a share, which reflects the intervention of the state and its security apparatus in all aspects of life, including the tourism sector.

18. Under a security direction, a lot of meetings and conferences in many of those hotels were canceled because they violated with security and the presence of the Iranian pilgrims, which had a negative effect on hotels. These events are a free identifiable tool for the attendees and invited people to introduce them to hotel facilities and services. It is known in the hotel industry that most or part of the hotel outlets are invisible to the eye, and these events are the best way to help attract the largest proportion of society to the hotel and then to identify its services. Therefore, this window had been closed permanently for the society and thus the loss of prospect customers.

19. Most hotels, specially the excellent and first class hotels, adopt hotel chains procedures of the financial indicators system for financial situation and measure it with competitors, especially at peak times. Unfortunately these were not available from the Tourism Board or from the managements of these hotels to have statistics or accurate data for this period of operation. Therefore, it is hard to highlight other negative aspects of the financial indicators for the period. Also, there is a lack of accurate statistics in the Iraqi border for the number of visitor entering Iraq in the period in question, which causes another obstacle for the research.

20. Unilaterally and without any prior notice the agreement was canceled when tensions began between Iraq and the United States, emerging under the pretext of the intransigence of Iraq and the failure to cooperate with the committees of international inspections for weapons of mass destruction and the threatening letters by the U.S. administration and the possibility of military strike against Iraq at any time. Indeed, the decision came from the Iranian side to pull out quickly all Iranian visitors from Iraq. This affected the hotels in terms of low revenue to its lowest level for a long time till the hotels had to recover from the effects of this experience and then the return of some of the hotels' regular guests. There were also great difficulties in re-opening the other outlets like night clubs, health club and swimming pool, etc.

### ***Conclusion***

Hotels those are in compliance with Islamic law are the preferred means for religious type of tourism. It is important to pay well attention to Iraq's religious tourism, especially in the Shiite Islamic holy cities of Karbala and Najaf. We are witnessing a growing demand for such type of tourism and its infrastructure of hotels services. Religious tourism is a new market in the growing of international tourism, where thousands of Muslims travel overseas to perform religious norms and customs. The problem faced by the management of the Iraqi hotels had to be overcome in order to have a successful tourism business. The Iraqi-Iranian 1996-1998 experience had to be taken into account in order to learn from it and have a successful modern religious tourism. Iraq is the right place for such tourism because of its ancient history, modern Islamic culture and its geographical location. It has a potential of tourism growth in conjunction with its new policies based on free market economy.

### **End Notes**

<sup>(1)</sup>Shrine or a tomb: the tomb or the part that makes the middle of the grave is the graves of holy shrine infallibles and the saints, like Zainab , or Abulfazl Abbas or Imam Husain of Shiite.

<sup>(2)</sup>Religious tourism: It is a type of tourism of visiting sites and shrines for religious purpose. It is called dry tourism (Sinclair, 2010, p.1), or Halal tourism (Grzeslik, 2010, p.1). This Concept was developed in accordance with the services and facilities offered to Muslim tourists in terms of food, prayer times, the purpose of the visit, etc.

<sup>(3)</sup>Hotel: a building with different in terms of size and services provided from hotel to hotel, and offers accommodation and food and beverage service primarily, in addition to other services such as laundry, health club, business services and other services (Hayes & Ninemeier, 2004, p.2). I see that the hotel is an economic project that provides details based on its ranking and represents the city's best image and interacts with the outside world. Hotels classified under the world-class varies from one country to another and they fall into five categories, the five-star hotels, the four-star hotels, the three star hotels, the two star hotels, and the one-star hotels.

<sup>(4)</sup>Iraq/Iran Tourism religious agreement: It is an agreement signed between the Iraqi side represented by al-Huda Company for religious tourism, which was affiliated with the Iraqi Intelligence Services at that time as a government sector and the Iranian side representing Shams al-Sabah Company and was also a government sector, to bring Iranian pilgrims to visit the thresholds holy sites in Iraq, particularly al-Najaf and Karbala, for the period of 1996 to 1998. This agreement lasted only for six months and was canceled by Iran.

<sup>(5)</sup>Iranian visitors: visitors entering Iraq from Iran to perform rituals and religious ceremonies and pilgrims are Shiite Muslims. This type of tourist group was in accordance with an agreement signed with Iran in 1996 during the reign of the Iraqi president Saddam Hussein as the first goodwill gesture to improve relations with Iran after its war with Iraq, which lasted eight years. These were agreement with political significance more than being of a religious nature. This move was a gesture to facilitate the visit of Iranian pilgrims to Shiite shrines in Iraq with financial support from the Iranian government.

<sup>(6)</sup>Part of the sources of these figures are from the Tourism Board and the other part is from the memory of the researcher being a contemporary of the period where he worked as a member of board of directors of Baghdad Hotel and Director of the Foods and Beverage Department of it.

<sup>(7)</sup>Shiites community: It is a community that follows the Shiite sect and follows Ali mores, the cousin of the Prophet Muhammad. It is the second largest group in Islam with 10-20% in the Muslim world. It is found primarily in Iran, Iraq, Bahrain, and Lebanon (Kittler & Sucher, 2008, pp.96-98). A desideratum of every individual Shiite is to visit al-Najaf to complete the Pilgrimage. The Shiite Iranians look at these shrines in a sanctity look.

<sup>(8)</sup>Al-Hamlidar: an ancient word that might come from Persian language which affected the local dialects in the Gulf region, like other words that have become part of it. A word al-Hamlidar is person responsible for the management of the campaign to Hajj and the management of its affairs. The religious advisor of the campaign is called the teacher and often called Sheikh, Al-Mutawa, or (Al-Saed) (Al-Shams, 2008, p.1).

<sup>(9)</sup>The Soil (al-Turba): It is the soil used in the Shiite prayer. It is a sample from the dust of holy Karbala, prostrate in prayer and called the (Al-Turba Al-Husseiniya), where they consider it a complements of prayer as stated in many of their sacred books in the statement of virtue and the necessity of prostrating on this soil.

<sup>(10)</sup>Patrol officers: They are the employees who were working at the headquarters of al-Huda Company for late hours to regulate visitor's matters and create hotels invoices, contracts, and transport contracts, etc.

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- 1- *Baghdad Hotel*, Accounting Department, Baghdad, Iraq.
- 2- *Tourism Board*, Information, Baghdad, Iraq.

No	The name of the religious site	Region
1	The shrine of Imam Ali ibnAbiTalib	Najaf
2	Holy shrine of Imam ZainalAbidin	Najaf
3	The shrine of the prophets of God (HUD) and (Saleh)	Najaf
4	Holy shrine of Imam Al-Mahdi	Najaf
5	Holy shrine of KamilibnZiyad	Najaf
6	Alhananp mosque (the subject of Ras Al-Hussein	Najaf
7	Al-Kufa mosque	Najaf
8	The shrine of Muslim bin Aqeel	Najaf
9	The shrine of Hani bin Arwa	Najaf
10	The shrine of the Mokhtar Al- Thaqafi	Najaf
11	The shrine of Prophet Adam	Najaf
12	The place of Prophet Noah	Najaf
13	The place of Prophet Ibrahim	Najaf
14	The Place of the angel Gabriel	Najaf
15	Bench of the judiciary (in the mosque of Kufa)	Najaf
16	House basin (in the mosque of Kufa)	Najaf
17	Temple of the martyrdom of Imam Ali in Kufa mosque	Najaf
18	Enlighten the flood (in the mosque of Kufa)	Najaf
19	Mosque Easy	Najaf
20	Mosque Sasap bin Souhan	Najaf
21	Mosque Zaid bin Souhan	Najaf
22	Maitham Al-Tamar shrine	Najaf
23	The house of Imam Ali	Najaf
24	The shrine of Imam Al- Hussein	Karbala
25	The shrine of Imam Al- Abbas	Karbala
26	The shrine of the martyrs of Karbala	Karbala
27	The shrine of Habib Ben Mothaher	Karbala
28	The shrine of Imam Ibrahim bin Kadhim	Karbala
29	The Shrine of the Al-Hour Bin Yazid Al- Riahi	Karbala
30	Aoun shrine	Karbala
31	Camp site of Imam Al-Hussein	Karbala
32	ZainabiyyaHill	Karbala
33	The shrine of Muslim bin Aqeel children (Mohammad & Ibrahim)	Karbala
34	The shrine of al-Qasim bin Hassan (a.s.)	Karbala

Table (1) shows the most important religious shrines in Najaf and Karbala frequently visited by Shiite pilgrims  
Source: Tourism Board of Iraq

NO.	Hotel Name	No. of Rooms	Class	Stars
1	Ishtar Sheraton Hotel	380	Excellent	5
2	Palestine Meridian Hotel	420	Excellent	5
3	Babylon Oberoi Hotel	291	First Class	4
4	Baghdad Hotel	160	First Class	4
5	Al-Sadeer Novatel Hotel	280	First Class	4
6	Burj Al-Hayat Hotel	100	First Class	4
7	Ekal Hotel	49	First Class	4
8	Al- Farabi Hotel	80	First Class	4
9	Baghdad Tower Hotel	114	First Class	4

Figure (2) illustrates the most important excellent and first class hotels in Baghdad that received this type of visitors:

Source: Prepared by the researcher being a contemporary of the Iraq / Irantourism religious agreement <sup>(6)</sup>.



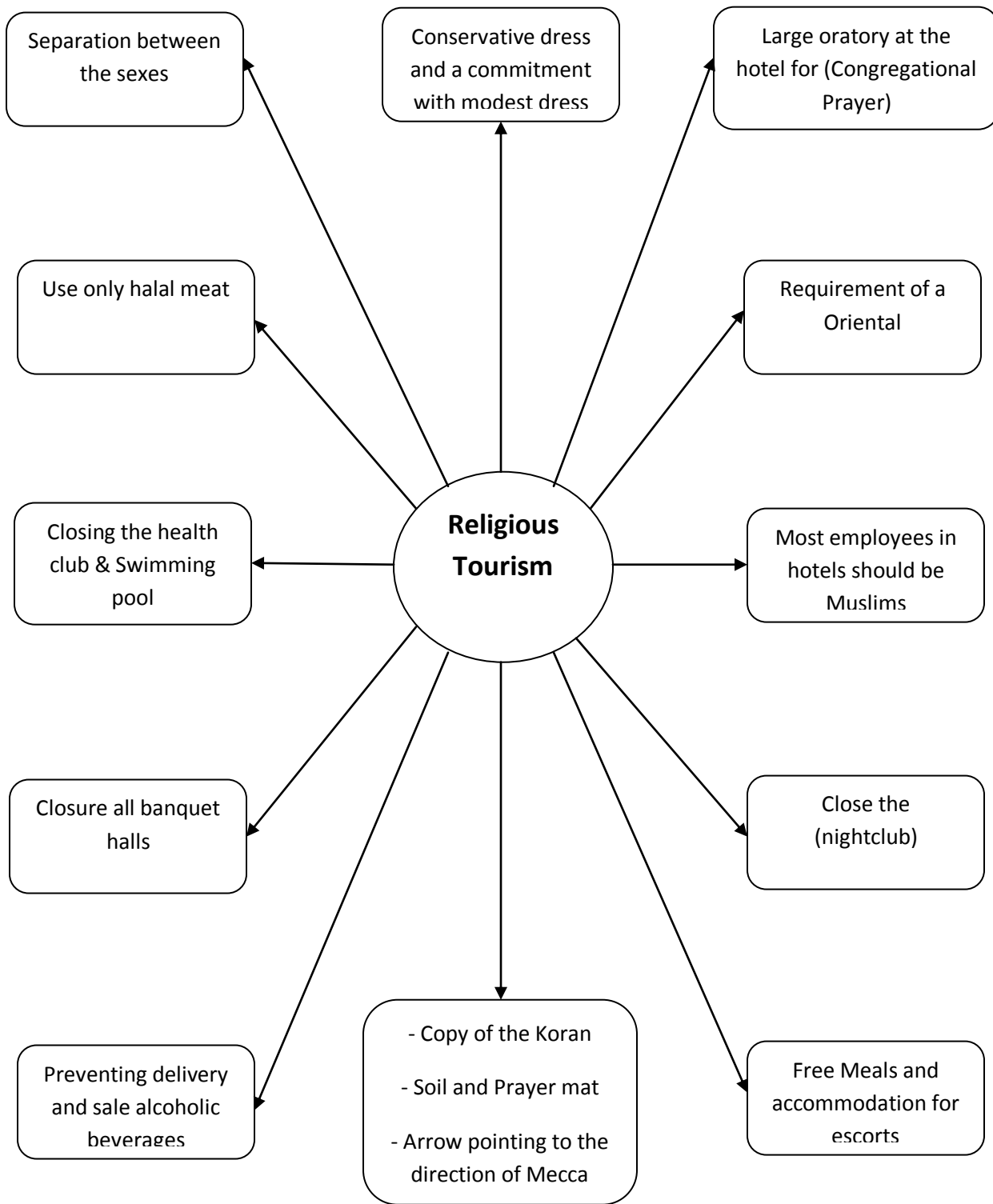


Figure (3): The Study Model of Religious Tourism