

## **Trends of Palestinian Hospitality and Tourism: 1995-2008 and a Comparison with Jordan and Israel**

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### **Abstract**

*The aim of this study is to examine the factors which have impacts on the trends of hospitality and inbound tourist flows in West Bank (Palestine) in the period between 1996 and 2008. One of the most important factors that impact on the trends of hospitality in Palestine is the Israeli occupation, which receives little attention. The Israeli occupation with all its facets, the ongoing construction of illegal settlements in the West Bank, movement restrictions of Palestinians as well as tourists entering Palestine, hundreds of checkpoints, surprising checkpoints, settlers attacks on Palestinian towns and villages, and the segregation wall that was built on Palestinians' land, using Israeli tourists guides are all have impacts on tourism industry in Palestine. The whole international flow of tourism is in the hands of Israeli authority, starting from visa issuing,, using Israeli guides and touring buses, and the whole structure of the tourism industry is within the state of Israel. These are all essential and important factors that impacts Palestinian tourism industry.*

*Tourism and hospitality indicators in Palestinian land have been affected by alternate periods of economic, political and social changes. This paper uses hospitality and tourism indicators for Palestine and tourist arrivals for West Bank (Palestine), and compared with those of Jordan and Israel. Time series and index number methods were employed to examine trends of such indicators. The findings show that hospitality and tourism indicators are highly affected by political and security conditions in the region and only just, comprehensive and last peace between Arab states and Israel will guarantee prosperous tourism in the region. This paper also addresses that political instability deters tourists from deciding to visit the region and consequently tourist activities will decline. In fact the political environment in Palestine is not the only determining factor in tourism indicators, but there are also factors such as global financial crises and political unrest in the Middle East. Public and private sectors should take into considerations the local, regional and political environments when designing their short and long tourism development plans. Furthermore, the study is one of the few that tackled hospitality and tourism indicators in the West Bank, Jordan and Israel.*

**Key Words:** Palestine, Jordan, Israel, Tourism, Calm periods, Index Numbers.

### **1. Introduction**

After the signing of Oslo Accords in 1993, the Palestinian National Authority was established. Throughout the period between 1994 and 2000 the West Bank and Gaza Strip "entered a period of relative stability; people and the freedom of moving and traveling from one place to another and internal tourism started to prosper." (Al-Rimmawi, 2003). However, by the end of 2000 the second Palestinian uprising (*Intifada*) was launched as a result of Camp David's stalemate of peace process between Palestinians and Israelis.

After the year of 2000 the whole land of Palestine witnessed severe turmoil. Israeli military closed the West Bank and enforced about 600 military check points which had severe impediments on Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza strip freedom of movement. In addition, since 2002 Israel has been engaged in the construction of a separation wall which also affected the Palestinian freedom of movement to a great extend. But, periods of calm were reached between the two sides in which Palestinians stopped their operations and in exchange Israel partially lifted its closure and siege of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Generally, hospitality and tourism declined in periods of violence and increased in calm periods. This study suggests that prosperous of hospitality and tourism could be obtained and perpetuated in case of achieved peace between the two sides at present and in future.

## **2. Geography of the Studied Area**

The West Bank is located in the mountainous area of Palestine and its area is about 5600 square kilometers and is divided into 12 district. According to 2007 census of population which was carried out by the Central Palestinian Bureau of Statistics the West Bank population was about 2350583 with an annual increase of 3.1%. However Gaza Strip's enjoyed higher population annual increase (4.2%). The average annual population in Palestinian territory is about 3.6% which is high and this is related to socio-economic, political and cultural reasons.

In 1994, the Palestinian National Authority was established and soon after several necessary steps was carried out to promote tourism. For example, on May 4<sup>th</sup>, 1994 an economic agreement was signed between both sides: Palestinians and Israelis. Bilaterally, the economic agreement states the basic principle of free trade with Israel. The Paris Protocol regulates the relations between the West Bank and Gaza Strip and the rest of the world. Palestinian products are not subject to any export restrictions. Trade to and from the Palestinian areas has full access to Israeli ports of entry and exit. In addition Palestinian imports and exports are granted equal treatment at the Israeli ports of entry and exit. The Israeli regulations on customs, purchase tax and standards apply to Palestinian imports (Palestine Trade Center, 2011).

Furthermore, Palestinian National Authority established its ministry of Tourism which took the responsibility of reorganizing the tourism sector in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. This ministry became in charge of developing basic tourism infrastructure such as rehabilitation of holy sites in Jerusalem and Bethlehem, internal transportation, tourism agencies, restaurants and laws and regulations for the purpose of creating the conditions for the emergence of modern tourism requirements (Al-Rimawi, 2003; Isaac, 2010).

Palestinian tourism suffers from the Israeli control of borders and it decides who enters Palestine and who does not. International tourists aiming to visit Palestine are allowed to enter because Palestinian borders are controlled by Israel. In order to visit Palestine, any international tourist must apply for his entry visa from Israeli consulates abroad. Tourists are issued visas in order to visit Israel rather than Palestine. In fact this was one of damaging consequences of Oslo agreement between Palestinians and Israelis. As a result, Palestinian revenue from tourism was about \$120 million, and to compare Israeli revenue was about \$2.6 billion (Abu- Dayyah, 1997) In the year of 2000, Israeli income from tourism jumped to \$3.1 billion. However, soon after such revenue declined to be around \$1.4 billion. In 2000, Israel received 2.4 million tourists but in 2004 tourist arrivals dropped to 1.5 million. Moreover, Israeli growth of tourism receipts and tourism expenditures were negative: -%10.9 and % -4.0 respectively (Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, 2004). Such declines resulted from prevailing violence and impasse of peace process between Palestinians and Israelis

## **3. Literature Review**

The aim of this paper is to analyze trends of tourism in Palestine since this topic has not been taken into consideration of researchers before. It also tackles the effects of political instability and the peace stalemate between Palestinians and Israelis on tourist arrivals and consequently the decline of tourism activities. The situation in Palestine is somehow different since it is not a matter of terrorism impact upon tourism as it may be imaged in some areas of Western hemisphere. In fact tourism in Palestine is not connected to terrorism, but it is related to the dominant political situation in the Middle East in general and Palestine in specific which has been under occupation since the year of 1967. Sulaiman and Mohamed (2011) carried out a study about profiles of visitors to Palestine: a case of Bethlehem City. They found out that most visitors were originated from Europe because they do not need visas to Enter Israel. Tourists to Palestine found in formation mostly from brochures and pamphlets, internet, travel agencies, tour operators and books.

However, few respondents gained information from Palestinian embassies. Authors concluded that tourism is needed to maintain local livelihoods and challenges to tourism must be removed. In addition, tourism is seen as helping to sustain the Palestinians as one society in the face of occupation, and to retain important links to their homeland. Suleiman and Mohamed (2012) found out that despite political instability European visitors were willing to visit Palestine as a part of their solidarity to Palestinian just cause.

Tourism in general is a global industry which has become important at all levels of economic development. The Middle East in specific is rich in its cultural and historical settings which also are considered a major attracting region for tourists all over the world. Tourism in the Middle East is being considered to be primarily a social and economic activity, and this topic has been tackled by researchers of different scientific fields in the Middle East as well as other areas of the World. Mansfeld (1994) and Newmayers (2004) found out that wars and civil unrest have negative impact on tourism development in many countries around the world. The willingness and motivation to visit tourist destinations diminish once a tourist realizes that his life may be put in danger. Aliza and Steven, (2002) reports that Israeli tourist activities faces reductions as a result of violence which takes place in Israel, but local market provides little buffer for drop-offs in foreign tourism. In Spain, Enders and Sandler and Sander (1991) found out that terrorist events had a negative impact on the number of tourists visiting Spain.

By using Time series method, Mehmet (2009) examined the effect of terrorism on tourism in Turkey and found out a negative but small impact of terrorist attacks on tourism if they were carried out a year earlier. But Turkey witnessed a reduction of six million foreign tourists and tourism industry lost \$700 million in the period from 2000 to 2009 as a result of terrorist attacks. Furthermore, Sonmez and Graefe (1998) and Sonmez (1998) have studied the influence of international attitude, risk perception level and income of a tourist on international vacation destination choice. But touristic experience and education have their indirect influences. Henderson (2000) found out that Vietnamese certain places may become tourist attraction spots by foreign visitors. In Palestinian case, similar situation may be observed. Foreign supporters visit Palestinian spots which witness weekly demonstration against Israeli separation wall. War tourism may be considered as a dynamic factor in attracting more tourists to Palestine since it is a living example of an area which suffers from the longest military occupation for the last hundred years.

On the other hand, Hazboun (2006) reports that tourism was thriving in other countries of the Middle East despite violence and political instability because of increasing petrodollars, new patterns of regional travel and consumer tastes, shifting business and tourism development strategies and extraordinary success of tourism development specially in Dubai. In addition Countries in the Middle East received visitors of diverse profiles and many of the countries are enmeshed within networks of global tourism economy. In their study about the impact of the perception of risk on international travelers, Kozak, and others (2007) found that travelers appear to be sensitive towards any type of risk in their evoked destinations. Richter and Waugh (1986) tackled the social and political objectives of terrorist groups in carrying their attacks on tourists and facilities. Pizma and Smith (2000) discussed the magnitude of the impact of terrorist attacks on host destinations and the tourism industry worldwide using several variables such as date, location, victims, weapons used, severity of damage, motive, effect on tourism demand and length of effect. Drakos and Kutun (2003) found out despite the fact Greece, Turkey and Israel enjoy significant tourism activities but they are subject to terrorist attacks which also affect each country's of market shares. Llorca-Vivero (2008) analyzed the impact of domestic and international level terrorism on the flows of international tourism, Therefore, a successful industry with beneficial consequences on economic development.

Yildirim, and others (2010) report that reducing interregional disparities reduces terrorism and enhancing economic growth and increasing education levels and employment hinder terrorism. Flint (2003) report that to understand the causes of contemporary terrorism it is important to consider geo-historical context, spatiality of terrorist attacks and the potentiality of negative efficacy of counterterrorist policies. Ioannides (1999) found out that Turkish-Cypriot had difficulties in attracting international tourists because of international boycotts while Greek-Cypriot was witnessing an economic boom because of its rapid tourism development. Isaac (2009a; 2009b, 2012) believes that an alternative tourism may arise as a result of Israeli acts of establishing the segregation wall that was built on Palestinian land. Tourists may also be attracted toward Palestine in solidarity to Palestinian cause which has been taking Place since the end of First World War. Palestine is characterized by its historic past and spiritual significance for the followers of monotheistic religions. For the last two centuries Palestine were visited by pilgrims who were inspired by religious emotions and impulses.

Moreover, Palestine offered pilgrims chances to fulfill their preparation for salvation, cultural and educational enrichment and desire of new experiences. Nowadays, modern tourists are interested in Palestine's indigenous Islamic and Biblical habitat, geography, history, customs of local inhabitants (Bar and Cohen-Hattab, 2003). On the other hand Cohen-Hattab (2004) states that after the First World War Palestine started to receive secular tourists. Palestinians and Zionists used tourism to promote ideological goals, an opportunity to influence public opinion and to gain support for their ideological objectives under British mandate which extended between 1920 until 1948. In addition, under British mandate tourism developed greatly in Palestine because of its unique and diverse attraction factors (Cohen-Hatab and Katz, 2001). Under Jordanian rule, (1950-1967) the West Bank, witnessed tourism prosperity, but during the years of Israeli occupation 1967-1994, most of the West Bank's tourism activities faced severe decline since it became locked out of the rest of the world (Al-Rimmawi, 2003). However, different kinds of tourists, but few in number, were attracted by Israeli occupation authorities such as "alternative tourists" who used to visit the area in order to understand the Arab Israeli conflict. On the other hand and in late 1980's Palestinians developed their own alternative tourism groups (ATG) for the purpose of realizing the reality of Arab Israeli conflict (White, 2009).

In addition some Israelis looked at Arab tourists after peace treaties with Egypt, Jordan and Palestinian Liberation Organization as a threat to Israel with Arabization (Stein, 2002). As a result of Palestinian second Intifada which started late 1999, tourism to Israel has sharply declined (Rick, 2001). For example (Joshua, 2002) reports that in 2001, Israel recorded only 1.2 million visitors, a decline of 55%. The situation was worse in Palestinian areas in which all hotels in Jerusalem and most of West Bank hotels were empty. Rosenfeld, and others (2004) report that Tourist arrivals to Israel were in steady increase until the year of 2000, but in 2001 such arrivals showed sharp decline until the year of 2004 in which tourist arrivals started to increase. For example, number of tourists retreated by 11% in November of 2009 but it was 28% in January. Furthermore, the touring visitors in Israel declined from 40% in 2000 to 25% in 2004. In 2002, income from tourists in Israel amounted to 0.9 billion dollars compared \$1.4 billion in 2004 and \$5.5 billion in 1999. The decline in every aspect of tourism activities are related to the political instability in the Middle East in general and to the impasse of peace process between Palestinians and Israelis (Al-Mashad Al-Israeli, 2009; Isaac, 2010).

In order to reach a 4 million arrival tourists the Israeli ministry of tourism put a new promotion plan in order to reach a 4 million visitors target through increasing promotion budgets, new budgets for basic infrastructure, new investments in tourism projects in Gulf of Aqaba, establishment of tourism police and boosting internal tourism. Regarding the mutual cooperation between Palestinian National Authority and Israel a mutual project is considered for the purpose of promoting tourism in a pilgrimage site along the banks of the Jordan River (Softer, 2009). Palestinian National Authority and through its Ministry of Tourism and Antiquity is trying to develop the Palestinian tourism sector benefitting from the calm period which is being witnessed in the West Bank. First, the ministry is working on three axes and if they are implemented Palestine will be promoted as a tourist attraction state worldwide.

First, the promotion of Palestine as independent tourism attraction unit by participating in tourism world fairs and inviting tourism groups concerned with tourism such as tourism agencies. Second axis, is by establishing museums and development of archeological sites and promotion of youth and environmental tourism. Third axis, Palestinian Ministry of Tourism is trying to convince private sector to invest in tourism projects. For the purpose of promoting Palestinian tourism, the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquity is also working with International quartile, a former British Prime Minister, and the United States envoy George Mitchell. However, The Palestinian side is not getting anywhere because of Israeli full control over tourism sector and it does not consider Palestinian National Authority as complete partner despite the fact that the West Bank has 70% of religious places which attract tourists and pilgrims. By its acts Israel is violating the famous Paris economic accords with Palestinian National Authority (Duaibes, 2009).

#### **4. Trends of Tourism Indicators in the West Bank**

Figure (1) illustrates hospitality and tourism indicators in the West Bank during the period between 1996 and 2008. These indicators such as number of hotels, hotel rooms and beds, room occupancy, bed occupancy, number of visitors, number of sleep nights, and duration of stay, illustrate that the base year of 1996 was the best in which the numbers of every indicator was the highest and this was due to calm periods between Palestinians and Israelis as a result of Oslo Accords implementations of both sides and high expectations from all over the world that a just peace was approaching and coming true.

However, peace between both parties witnessed its first set back in 1996 in which Israel opened a dangerous tunnel (*Nafaq*) under Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem. Palestinians confronted the Israeli unilateral acts, 65 Palestinians were killed, 1772 were injured and 65 Israelis were killed. It seems that the honey moon of Palestinian National Authority and Israel started to deteriorate. In addition, Palestinians prospects to reach an independent state by 1999 became far away. As a result the area witnessed fewer tourists and curves of other tourist indicators became under the line of base year. But, line indicators of hotels, and tourists duration of stay were above base year line. In fact line of duration of stay kept increasing. It is true, that the number of tourists declined but those who visited the West Bank managed to stay more nights.

The year of 2000 was a true turning period in which peace talks between Palestinians and Israelis in Washington reached a dead end. Soon after incidents were becoming dramatically, former Israeli Prime minister Ariel Sharon visit to Al-Aqsa mosque " was seen by many to be a provocative gesture aimed at inciting the Palestinians because the mosque is considered the third holiest site for Muslims" (Global Security, 2013). In five days period of clashes between both sides 47 Palestinians were killed and 1885 were injured. Israel locked out the West Bank and Gaza Strip, consequently, less tourists arrived to the area. After 2004, calm periods were reached between both sides, gradually international attitude toward the area started to change and more tourists poured to the region. But after the Palestinian political split in 2007, and Israeli attacks on Gaza Strip in December of 2008 and January of 2009 most of hospitality and tourism indicators went down with the exception of duration of stay which is related to international activists who spend weeks in solidarity and support of Palestinian demonstrations against the separation wall which is being established by Israel (Ben-Simhon, 2010).

Figure (2) illustrates index numbers of tourists' arrivals in Palestine, Jordan and Israel. In Palestine, tourist arrivals showed continuous decrease since 1996, but in Jordan, tourist arrivals kept the pace of increments since 1996 until 2008. Tourist arrivals to Israel fluctuated with the dominated political environment, but after the year of 2006 tourist's arrivals showed considerable increase and this were due to calm periods which took place for the past couple of years. Furthermore, the West Bank continued receiving overnight tourists either from Jordan as well as the rest of Palestine. Palestinian Bureau of Statistics (2012) reports that in 2012 the West Bank was visited by 1.8 million local visitors (99% from the West Bank and 1% from Gaza Strip)

On regional level, table (I) also illustrates that Palestine is lacking behind each of Jordan and Israel in most hospitality and tourism infrastructures. Palestine is not an independent state, does not control its borders, and East Jerusalem which fosters the holy places of three monotheistic religions is not in its hand. Oslo agreement of 1993 between Palestinians and Israelis did not give the Palestinian part any control of its borders and a decision to such an issue was left to the final negotiations which were to take place in the year of 2000. Negotiations of final status between both sides went in vain and Israeli military kept controlling the Palestinian borders. As a result the political situation deteriorated in which Palestinians launched their second uprising (*intifada*) in Late September of 2000 after Ariel Sharon's, former Israeli Prime minister visit to Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. In the year of 2002 Israeli military reoccupied the West Bank and restricted to movements of Palestinians and any foreign visitor. In fact Palestine lacked behind because it witnessed five types of occupying and ruling governments such as Ottoman Empire up to 1917, British Mandate 1920-1948 , Jordan 1950-1967, Israeli occupation (1967- 1994) and Palestinian National Authority 1994- present). As an occupying power, Israel did not put tourism development as a part of its priorities (Isaac, 2012).

The West Bank is annually visited by Palestinians who live and work abroad. Usually they visit their homes and relatives in summer. They travel from Jordan to the West Bank through Allenby Bridge which is built over River Jordan during World War I for British troops stationed in Palestine and Jordan. During wars of Arabs and Israel the bridge was blown several times but it was rebuilt. In addition, this bridge is the only outlet used by Palestinians in their outward or inward traveling.

Figure (3) illustrates Palestinian and Israeli passenger traffic at Allenby Bridge in index numbers in the period between 1999 and 2008. It is clear that index numbers curve fluctuates with the dominating political conditions in the area. In addition, in the years of 1999 and 2008 the index numbers curves of Palestinian passenger traffic were under the line of base year. It seems that the world financial crises also had its effects in which many Palestinians who work abroad were discouraged from visiting Palestine trying to minimize their expenditures. Despite the pessimistic facts regarding tourism and hospitality indicators, Palestine is still visited by people who love the area. An Israeli Airport Authority (2010) source also furnishes data regarding passenger traffic through Allenby Bridge.

Such a data includes Palestinians and international passengers. Index numbers curve of figure (3) illustrate that passengers traffic was rising. In fact international passengers are responsible for this rise. Most of them are tourists who visit the region in arranged groups. They usually visit countries like Greece, Turkey, Egypt and Jordan. As part of their tour they cross Allenby Bridge from Jordan to Israel. Such groups do not visit the West Bank and they only show up at Israeli border authorities, that why Palestinian authorities do not have records of such visitors. In addition, some Returnee Palestinians take transportation caps or busses and leave toward their homes without showing up at the offices of Palestinian Authorities. Israel has benefitted from rising tourists in Jordan in which many of international tourists who visit Jordan prefer to cross Allenby Bridge on their way to Israel (Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, Jordan, 2010).

## 5. Conclusion

According to the research findings of time series and index number methods, hospitality and tourism indicators are affected by the dominant political environment in the area. Very few studies have tackled fluctuations of such indicators in the region using index numbers. Almost all violent or calm period regardless of its length have a higher impact on hospitality and tourism activities. The Israeli occupation with all its facets, such as the on-going of illegal settlements, movement restrictions of Palestinians and tourists entering Palestine, hundreds of checkpoints, surprising checkpoints, increasing settlers attacks, the segregation wall, and using of Israeli tourists guides and tourist buses are all have impacts on Palestinian tourism industry.

Globally speaking, for their quiet state of minds usually people seek safe countries in order to spend their seasonal or annual vacations. In addition, peaceful or violent conditions in any Middle Eastern country are often spelled out toward other countries in the region. Palestine has the most fragile political conditions in the region because of Israeli occupation since 1967 and its authorities do not have full control over the West Bank or its borders. The authors believes that political instability in the Middle East in General and in Palestine in specific is the cause of tourism decline. Tourists try to visit safe places and political instability deters them from visiting the area. This research paper suggests that only perpetuated peace and equality between Arabs and Israelis are the guarantee for future development of hospitality or tourism activities in the region.

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**Table (I): Tourism Fact Sheet: Regional Comparison**

Infrastructure	Palestine (E. Jrs)	Israel	Jordan (MOTA)
Hotels (Guest Houses)	82 (38)	331	481
Rooms	4,110	47,572	22,507
Beds	8,848	114,242	43,922
Tour Operators	45	128	
Travel Agents	200	246	585
Guides	290	7,150	873
Workforce	6,144		38,294
Visitors / arrivals	1,300,000	3,030,000	7,100,483
Number of overnights	673,458	11,277,900	2,800,000
Tourism Recipients (2007)		2.4 billion	2.39 billion
Contribution to GDP	3.70%	2.30%	10%

*Source: Khoury, 2009.*

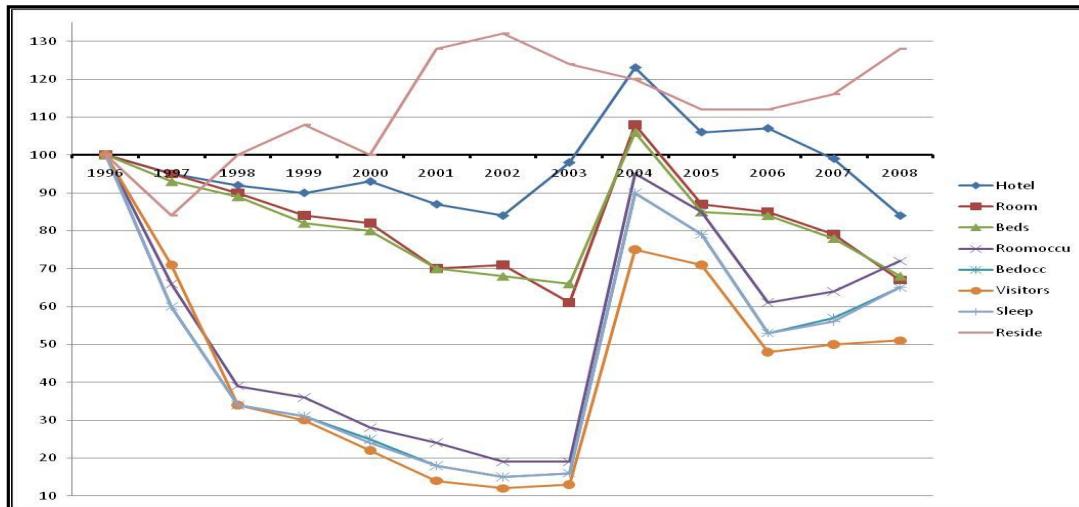


Figure (1): Index numbers curves of Tourism Indicators in West Bank, Palestine: 1996-2008

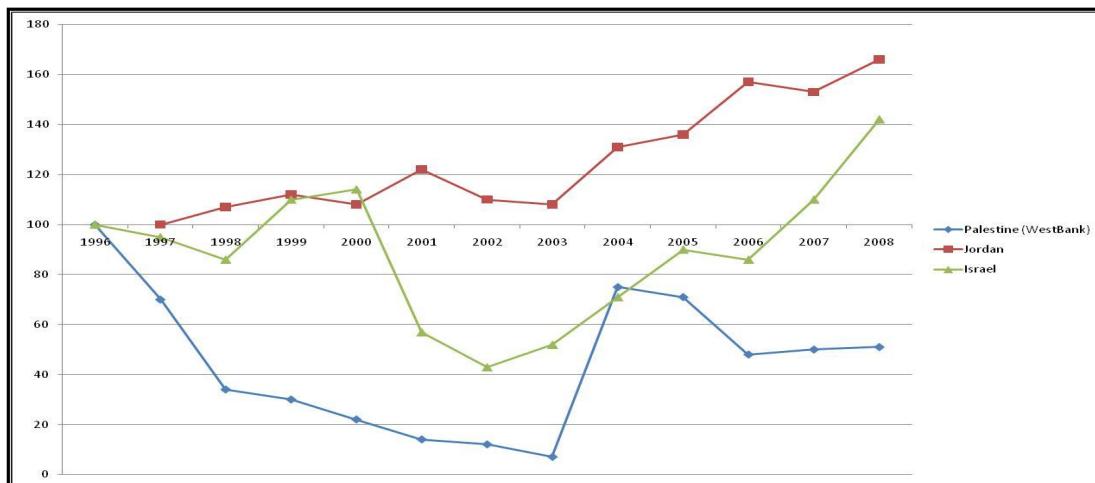


Figure (2): Index numbers curves of Tourists Arrivals: West Bank (Palestine), Jordan and Israel, 1996-2008

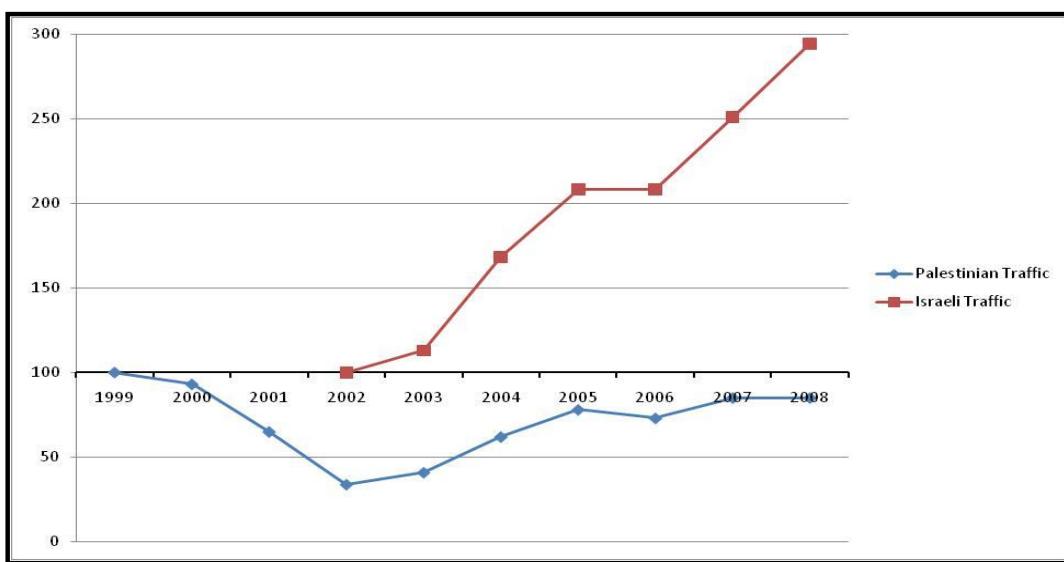


Figure (3): Index numbers curves of Palestinian and Israeli Traffic at Allenby Bridge, 1999-2008