

Tourism in the Service of Colonisation: Jerusalem under the British Mandate

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In 1917, having captured Palestine from its erstwhile Ottoman rulers, Britain remained in the country, administering it for the next thirty odd years. The years 1917-1948, commonly known as the Mandatory Era, were a revolutionary period in Palestine's history. After four centuries of lackadaisical Ottoman rule, Palestine, increasingly modern and westernised, became a much more accommodating and appealing place, both to live in and to visit. Working hard to improve the country's infrastructures and cognizant of its historical and religious significance, the British authorities set the stage for the birth of modern tourism in Palestine. This was particularly evident in Jerusalem, where, appreciating the city's extraordinary historical heritage and conscious of its unique spiritual importance, the British did much to help create the conditions for the advent of a modern flourishing tourist industry.

A critical examination of the growth of modern tourism in mandatory Jerusalem may serve to substantiate a number of hypothesis regarding the influence of colonial rule on the development of tourism; for example, the notion that the western imperial powers, by encouraging tourism and constructing modern tourist infrastructures, were, in fact, seeking to manipulate the colonies, by, among other things, imposing upon them western norms and customs.

This paper will pinpoint, and amplify upon, the various links between colonisation and tourism. It will do so, at first, by examining, within the context of British colonialism, the evolution of Jerusalem's tourist industry. It will then move on to a more general discussion of the relationship between 'neo-colonisation' and tourism in modern times.