



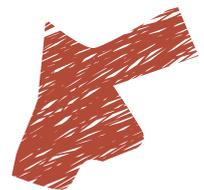
Managing natural resources through ecotourism

Executive summary

Wild Jordan is the business arm of the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature (RSCN), a non-profit organisation with the mandate to protect Jordan’s natural resources, including wildlife and wild areas, through the establishment of reserves.

Wild Jordan manages ecotourism activities in all protected areas. The enterprise currently employs 120 people, providing local residents with employment opportunities that offer an alternative to hunting, which has been restricted for conservation purposes. Wild Jordan also oversees a range of entrepreneurial opportunities and encourages members of the local community to set up their own businesses.

This case study demonstrates that conservation efforts can be combined with ecotourism and entrepreneurial opportunities for local communities.



COUNTRY
Jordan

NAME
Wild Jordan, the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature

TYPE
Conservation area

FIELDS OF INCLUSION
Natural conservation, maintenance and services, crafts, construction



How the business model works

The RSCN is a non-profit organisation tasked with protecting Jordan's natural resources. It works to conserve wildlife and wild areas, in large part through the creation and maintenance of nature reserves. Its Wild Jordan business division was established in 2003 by Chris Johnson, a former head of RSCN's Socio-Economic Unit, with the aim of encouraging tourism that would raise awareness about nature conservation while having a positive impact on local communities. Wild Jordan sets up nature-based businesses such as eco-lodges, crafts workshops and restaurants with the aim of developing and providing financial resources for protected areas. The overarching goal is to conserve Jordan's natural reserves and create employment within local communities.

Creating alternative sources of income through tourism

Prior to the founding of reserves, local community members primarily worked as goat shepherds or hunters. Neither activity ensured a steady financial income. Hunting is today limited by laws intended to protect endangered species. These laws have presented considerable problems for local residents since 1975, when the first reserve was created by RSCN. This is why alternative sources of income had to be made available to the local community. Wild Jordan addresses this problem through the creation of job opportunities in the tourism and crafts sector.

Wild Jordan is divided into three main divisions, each of which supports one another: the Wild Jordan Centre, handicrafts production workshops and tourism eco-lodges. The proceeds from each division are funnelled back to Wild Jordan to cover the operational costs of all reserves.

Wild Jordan Centre

The Wild Jordan Centre is the operation's main promotional and marketing tool. Located in downtown Amman, the facility allows potential guests to book a

stay at any of Wild Jordan's eco-lodges. The centre also has a restaurant that uses sustainably sourced ingredients, as well as furniture and crafts shops that feature products made by the reserves' workshops. In addition, the centre offers a weekly farmers' market where local growers can sell their organic produce.

Crafts workshops

In each of the five reserves, Wild Jordan also operates handicrafts production workshops. All of these crafts centres provide instruction in handicrafts inspired by local traditions. Locals, predominantly women, come to these facilities to work and sell their products. This serves as an income-generation opportunity for these individuals, since the crafts are sold to visitors through shops in the reserves at the Wild Jordan Centre in Amman and at other locations such as the airport. Thanks to the crafts workshops, the mostly female employees receive steady salaries, social security and health insurance for themselves and their families, as well as the opportunity to invest in saving funds.

Tourism eco-lodges

Wild Jordan operates five tourism eco-lodges in the country's nature reserves. During the facilities' construction phase, Wild Jordan either trained and hired people from the local community for the work, or obligated a significant share of external companies' workforces to be drawn from amongst local residents, thus helping to create jobs. All lodge staff members are trained and hired locally, thus ensuring operational sustainability. This includes managers, guides, rangers and drivers. In one of the lodges, the food and beverage division has been outsourced in the form of a concession contract to a member of the local community who started as a chef in the lodge's restaurant prior to establishing his own company.

SPOTLIGHT

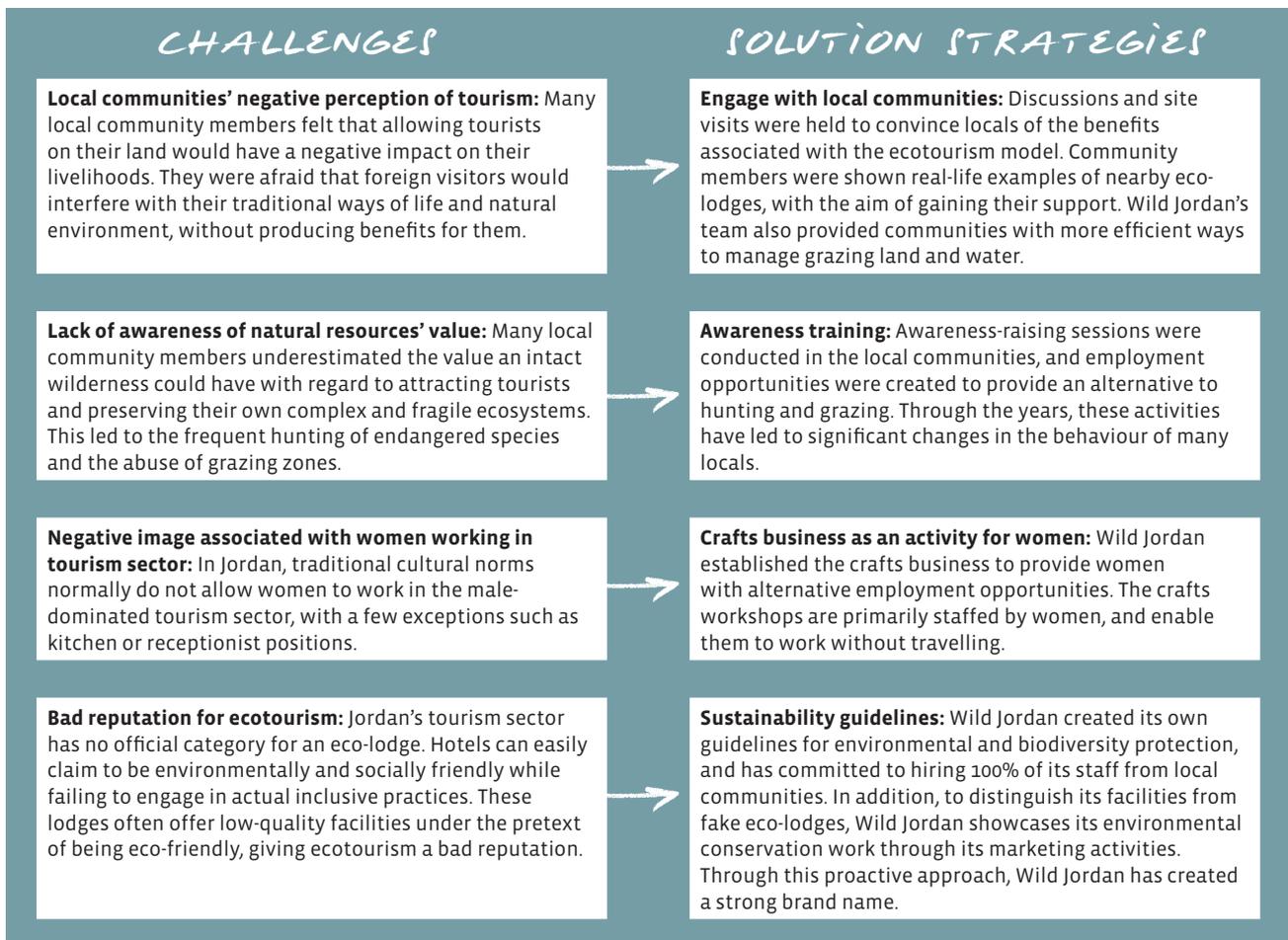
Laith El Samady – from chef to lodge director



Laith El Samady started as a chef in Dana Nature Reserve. He went on to start his own company, and ultimately took over operation of the Ajloun lodge in the Dana reserve. "As soon as I was hired, Wild Jordan provided me with cooking training sessions for five-star hotels in the Dana reserve," El Samady said. "I was able to improve my personal skills through the

different activities offered. Wild Jordan really helped not only by providing me with a salary but by introducing me to companies in the tourism industry. This facilitated things for me when I decided to set up my own business."

Challenges and solution strategies



Mutual benefits

Business benefits

Prior to the establishment of Wild Jordan, RSCN relied entirely on donors, sponsors and government grants for its funding. However, Wild Jordan today serves as a revenue-generating division that contributes to RSCN's financial sustainability. Since the commencement of business operations, Wild Jordan's revenue has grown between 15% and 20% annually, except during the years of the Arab Spring, which saw a slight decrease. In 2010, Wild Jordan's net revenue totalled USD 800,000, a sum that covered around 50% of RSCN's operational costs.

Wild Jordan's inclusion of local communities in its activities has helped it create an authentic experience for its guests. Tourists learn about the area's heritage and history through direct interactions with the staff. Fur-

“Ecotourism is not well known in the Arab countries. When you tell the locals that you will build eco-lodges they immediately think of the traditional tourism model, with buses loaded with people invading their community. Getting them to change their mind was our biggest challenge,” stated *Nasr Al-Tamimi, Wild Jordan's acting director.*

thermore, some guests prolong their stays in Jordan after visiting the reserves. Receiving as few as 100 visitors per year in 1994, the Dana reserve, for example, today attracts 20,000 visitors annually.

The crafts produced by reserve-based workshops are also unique to the area. Each reserve has a line of exclusive products such as jewellery, leather goods or candles, which are more attractive and hold higher value than generic souvenirs. The fact that the crafts are created on-site facilitates guests' purchases.

In 2010, Wild Jordan received the Guardian-Observer Ethical Travel Award, which bolstered its reputation as a responsible business. This has also been reflected in recommendations by travel guides such as Lonely Planet and Trip Advisor.

Development benefits

In all protected areas, hunting and grazing are governed by very strict laws that limit local community members' ability to make a living in traditional ways. In response, Wild Jordan has created alternative employment opportunities for reserve residents. For example,

in Dana reserve, 115 jobs were created in positions ranging from lodge managers to guides, chefs and drivers. This proved to local residents that reserves hold vast potential to improve their lives, and helped make them active advocates of environmental protection.

In addition to the jobs, Wild Jordan provides local community members with capacity-building programs tailored to their identified skills. This equips them to fill positions as guides, chefs, housekeepers, managers and rangers, or to carry out other jobs needed for the eco-tourism facilities' operations.

Finally, the creation of crafts centres within the reserves helped with women's economic integration and empowerment. The workshops enable them to support themselves financially, and to improve their living conditions without challenging cultural norms.

Outlook

In the future, Wild Jordan wants to explore the option of outsourcing management and operations for some of its activities and functions to private companies. It plans to establish a business unit that oversees the concession contracts in order to ensure that sustainable practices are maintained.

Wild Jordan would also like to create additional activities able to contribute to financing biodiversity conservation programs. Though it currently covers 50% of RSCN's operational costs, Wild Jordan's goal is to raise this figure to 100% through its own revenues. For example, it is considering lowering prices for some activities within protected areas, making them affordable to a broader segment of society.



Local residents produce and sell handicrafts inspired by local tradition in Wild Jordan's craft centres.



REFERENCES

Wild Jordan (2014). Wild Jordan: Driving Conservation through Business. Accessed 15 May 2014. www.cbd.int/doc/meetings/fin/wsfmb-eoc-01/other/wsfmb-eoc-01-scen-en.pdf

INTERVIEWS

Nasr Al-Tamimi, Acting Director of Wild Jordan

Leith El Samady, owner and founder of the Special Team for Food and Beverage Services

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PHOTOS

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