

Abraham Path Initiative Semiannual Report



Mission & Methods

The Abraham Path is a route of cultural tourism that retraces the journey made by Abraham through the Middle East some four thousand years ago. Three and a half billion people – over half the human family – trace their history or faith to Abraham. The Abraham Path honors this shared cultural heritage by connecting the ancient sites associated with Abraham and his family, creating an outstanding travel itinerary through 10 countries in the Middle East.

The Abraham Path will serve as a:

- cross-cultural meeting place, fostering mutual understanding and respect,
- economic catalyst for sustainable development, youth employment, and site preservation
- positive media focus for articles and films highlighting the region's unique heritage and hospitality.

The Abraham Path leverages three existing assets that are unique to the region. These assets are:

1. *Common Story:* The **Abraham Path reawakens Abraham's inspirational journey throughout the world**, inspiring both new and existing travelers to re-trace Abraham's footsteps – crossing borders, making friends, and discovering the shared values of justice, faith, respect, friendship and hospitality.
2. *Common Experience:* The **Abraham Path utilizes the region's surge in tourism to facilitate the travel of people along the path**. Beautiful rural landscapes and villages inspire tourists to “get off the bus” and directly meet the people of the region in an experience of hospitality and friendship. With 38 million tourists already coming to the region each year, the initiative is well positioned to channel this existing interest towards a more connected cultural experience.
3. *Common Meeting Place:* The **Abraham Path is an outstanding cultural itinerary** that connects some of the most revered world heritage sites and ancient holy places, and will join over 5,000 kilometers of scenic walking trails through the heart of the Middle East.

The Abraham Path employs three corresponding strategic actions to leverage these assets. These actions establish the powerful story, place and experience of the Abraham Path across the world.

1. **Inspire and promote global awareness** of the Abraham Path through launch events, such as international walks and cultural exchanges that are captured by the global media in film, print, television and web-based technology.
2. **Facilitate international, national and community based partnerships** to establish the Abraham Path as a worldwide cultural tourist destination and partner with tour agencies, tour operators, and universities to facilitate the flow of travellers down the path.
3. **Empower local institutions and communities** to open the path through nationally based staff teams. The initiative's national staff teams work with other national and community partners to open pilot segments, engage communities in collaborative planning, historic site and cultural restoration projects, mapping activities, and partner with other local and international NGOs to establish development initiatives and youth entrepreneurial programs.

Objectives

- Inspire positive media coverage of the Middle East through newspapers, television, documentaries, and web-based networks, **reaching over 250 million people**.
- Encourage cross-cultural exchange and understanding by **facilitating the travel of 50,000 tourists** to the path.
- **Provide 1,000 young people with entrepreneurship and leadership opportunities** on the Abraham Path that allow them to express their energy, idealism and creativity.
- **Open 1,000 km of tourism routes** that celebrate and promote the cultural wealth of the Middle East.

Results

2009 has been pivotal for the Abraham Path Initiative. In the first half of this year, over 40 groups and 850 people have walked the path. The initiative has reached its first milestone of 1,000 people walking the path since opening the first pilot sections last year. Two new short documentaries were completed on the path, one on a youth walk in Palestine, and the other on the inaugural walk on the path in Turkey. The films can be viewed on our web site at <http://www.abrahampath.org/turkey.php> and <http://www.abrahampath.org/palestine.php>.

The Abraham Path Initiative has also expanded globally, with the launch of the The Friends of the Abraham Path United Kingdom Chapter. The inaugural meeting was attended by API donor and board member Lord Leslie Griffiths of the Sir Halley Stewart Trust, former cabinet minister Paul Boateng, James Kidner of the Coexist Foundation, Steven Shashoua of the Three Faiths Forum, and Samuel Klein of the Coexistence Trust, among others. Their collective enthusiasm for the project was striking. The group will be forming a legally registered chapter with an influential board of trustees, who will work to raise funds, promote the path, build youth networks, and organize trips.

Most recently, the Abraham Path Brazil Chapter organized a race in Sao Paolo in July of 2009. Almost 2,000 runners ran 6.5 km through the middle of the city wearing t-shirts promoting the Abraham Path Friendship Day. Every kilometer of the race was marked with billboards showing photos from the Abraham Path: Urfa, Aleppo, Beirut, Damascus, Jerusalem, and Hebron. The mayor of the city walked the race with other dignitaries and reports from the race say the atmosphere of excitement and friendship in the atmosphere was contagious.

Sustainability

As the project enters the second half of 2009, with global recognition, effective demonstration, and sustained national and worldwide partnerships, the initiative has begun to diversify its funding model beyond social venture philanthropy to include institutional sources of income, such as governments, development agencies and other international donor organizations. These institutions have the resources, expertise, and capacity to build out the complete infrastructure of the path and implement community development activities that will carry the project forward.

An example is the German Development Service (DED), which has agreed to fund an expert in Palestine for two years to oversee the organizational development and systemization of the project. The expert will focus on capacity building, sustainability and business models. The DED will also support the increase of administrative personnel and assist with funding a part-time women's engagement coordinator. Another example is Engineers Without Borders International and its global chapters, which are organizing a traveling workshop on the Abraham Path in the Spring of 2010. This walk will raise resources for the project, engage engineers across the world focused on sustainable community-based development, and explore future engineering projects along the path including tourism infrastructure, sustainable energy and clean water projects.

The initiative is also working to broaden its funding base to project-specific donors and "walk the path" campaigns run through virtual social networks, which will form a worldwide base of support. In the summer of 2009, we have launched pilot fundraising efforts on Facebook, Firstgiving, and through Google. In August, the initiative is beginning a new campaign using the online fundraising site Global Giving.

Use of Funds

The Abraham Path is now established in Turkey, Jordan, Palestine and Israel. Our teams of staff and partners working in each country are now working to expand the path by opening additional segments, expanding public, private and non-profit partnerships, building community host-networks, establishing basic tourism infrastructure, organizing promotional events in each country, and creating a global marketing strategy to tourists, tour agencies and operators. The initiative is also continuing to build engagement in Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

Over the next three years, funds will primarily be used for the following activities: country team operations, field equipment, community engagement projects, worldwide tour operator partnerships, guide training programs, walks and events, national partnerships and diplomacy, international program management, development and marketing, media and publicity, communications and web-based networking technology.

The Abraham Path Initiative continues to partner with public, private and non-profit organizations, which provide significant in-kind resources and contributions.

Spring & Summer 2009



Abraham Path Turkey hosts youth walks

This spring, the Abraham Path Turkey hosted over 50 travelers, including a group from Emory University. In the fall of 2009, the Abraham Path Turkey and our partners Sabanci University (Turkey) and Leeds Metropolitan University (UK), will host a youth cultural exchange, service learning and student walk on the path in Sanliurfa and Harran.

Abraham Path Jordan reaches out to local women

API team member Suhair Ayyash, is working with 20 young women from the Al Ayoun municipality, conducting needs assessments and organizing workshops to support them with planning and marketing small businesses to tourists, including a bakery and a handmade clothing shop. Other projects the Jordan team is pioneering include volunteer trips with university students. During the trips, the youth walk the path and participate in projects, such as picking up trash, painting a local school and spending time with special needs students.

The Jordan team is also working to develop the path, adding a new route and working with adventure tourism experts Tony Howard and Di Taylor to map trekking and climbing routes in the area. Queen Rania of Jordan visited the trail in Ajloun and through an online Twitter posting, noted Rasoun village as a unique tourist destination with “walking trails, Byzantine church, olive groves, traces of Ummayyad times and warm hospitality.”



Abraham Path Palestine highlights diversity

So far in 2009, a total of 10 walks have taken place, with more than 100 people walking on the path through the heart of the West Bank from Nablus to Betin. During a remarkable 7-day walk, French trekkers walked the entire path, which now extends 70 km. On this walk, travelers tested a new segment that stretches through a desert valley and into Jericho. Travelers were hosted by the Bedouin in the desert and slept in a tent beneath the stars.

Team member Areej Jafari writes, “The variety of the people walking (religious sisters, youth, Palestinian students, foreigners, trekkers, journalists, etc.), as well as the vast geographical and cultural variety and richness along the path revealed to us another important aspect of the Abrahamic experience of walking: Discovering Diversity.”