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.
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.
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.”

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 Ummayad times and warm hospitality.”

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.