

Why is the Dead Sea important?

The Dead Sea is an international natural and cultural heritage site. The basin is the origin of some of the world's oldest continuous human settlements and is an area with sites sacred to Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. It is a unique environment for wildlife, containing habitats that support hundreds of plant species, in addition to over ninety species of birds, including some that are in danger of extinction.

The composition of the Dead Sea itself and the climate of the region provide a unique setting for the treatment of skin, respiratory, and rheumatic diseases, which have created a region appealing to tourists.



The Dead Sea is the only place in the world where one can float on water

International Efforts

This project is an important partnership between all nations sharing the Dead Sea basin. Together, the partners hope to evaluate physical and socio-economic data and to propose options for a better future.

In addition, efforts are underway to propose the Dead Sea basin as a World Heritage site through the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

What can you do to help?

- * Contact your local political representative and ask them to promote projects to save the Dead Sea.
- * Encourage your friends and family to take a hike or pay a visit to the unique desert surroundings of the Dead Sea.
- * Write an article on the dire state of the Dead Sea in your local or national newspaper.

For more information about this project, please go to our website at: www.deadseaproject.org

Partners



ARC Seibersdorf Research GmbH Wien, Austria



The Arava Institute for Environmental Studies Israel



Applied Research Institute - Jerusalem (ARIJ) Bethlehem, Palestine



ECO Consult Office Amman, Jordan



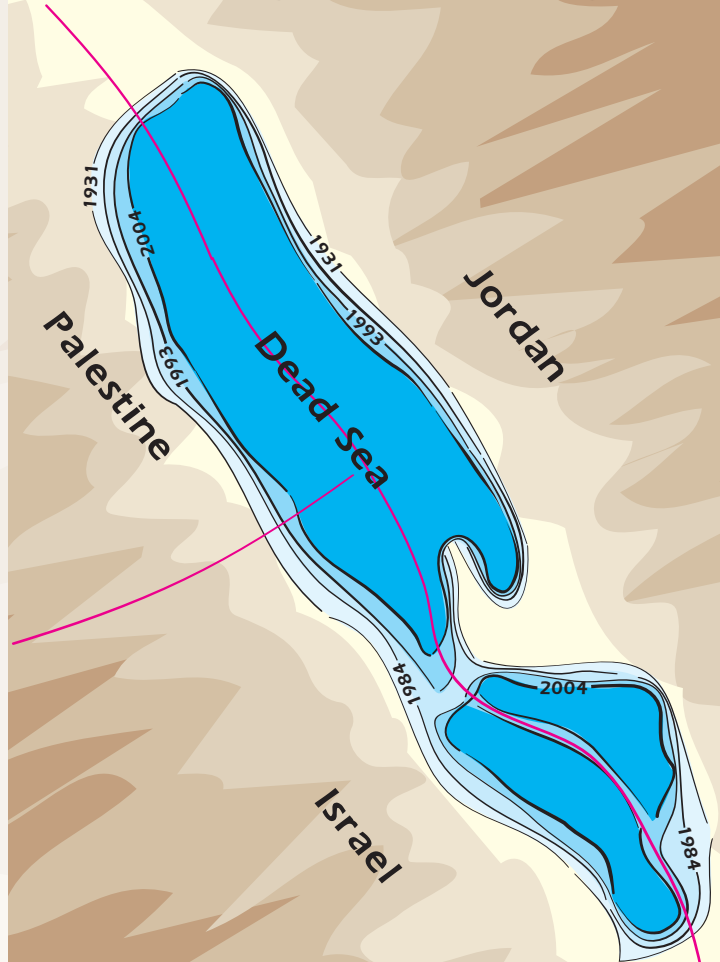
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Funded by:



European Union

Does the Dead Sea Have a Future?



Jordanians, Palestinians, Israelis, and Europeans working together for a long-term solution

www.deadseaproject.org



The sign marks the waterline in 1984 and the shoreline today can barely be seen

Who does this affect?

The tourism industry has been greatly affected by the deterioration of the shoreline. Today, there are 5,500 hotel rooms in the Dead Sea Basin and 11,000 tourism-related jobs. There are plans to build nearly 50,000 more, but these plans have been delayed or postponed. The expected increase in employment opportunities has also been deferred. This expansion could have been of significant benefit to the stressed economy of the Palestinian Authority for example. Groundwater resources are also being contaminated by the potash industries along the shoreline.

Effects on Nature

The dire effects on nature and endangered species caused by the drop in the level of the Dead Sea cannot be overestimated. Streams and springs that once flowed seasonally, providing crucial habitat to wildlife, no longer flow as they once did. The Dead Sea is also part of the important Syrio-African Rift bird migration route. Desert oases that have existed for millennia providing refuge for wildlife and people alike are today threatened with disappearance as the water feeding these oases are diverted for agricultural, municipal, and industrial use.



Research for a better future

February 2003 marked the official launch of a three-year research initiative funded by the European Commission to design sustainable strategies for water management in the Dead Sea basin. The project offers a rare opportunity to consider the future of the Dead Sea from a full-watershed perspective. The main focus of the project is to address the options for a future, more sustainable development of the Dead Sea basin. Specific goals include determining realistic development scenarios for the future and exploring options for sustainable tourism.



Israeli and Jordanian industries produce a variety of salt products from the rich mineral resources of the Dead Sea

Working together to find solutions

The project team includes Palestinian researchers from ARJI (the Applied Research Institute - Jerusalem) located in Bethlehem, an Israeli research team from AIES (the Arava Institute for Environmental Studies), and "ECO Consult", a leading Jordanian environmental consulting firm, as well as partners from Austria and England. The teams work together on various aspects of the project, including data collection and harmonization and systems analyses.

What is happening?

The surface area of the Dead Sea has shrunk by around 30% in the past 20 years, a drop in the water level that translates to the rate of approximately one meter per year. On the western shore, sinkholes are appearing. These sinkholes range widely in size and occur without notice under roads, buildings, agricultural lands, and wildlife reserves. The eastern shore is experiencing degradation as well. This deterioration of both shorelines is a result of the misuse and overuse of freshwater sources in the region.



Sinkholes have appeared along the shoreline

Why is this happening?

The reasons for the Sea's decline are well-known: a constant decrease of input from the Jordan River and increased use of other sources, such as natural springs, that supply water to the Dead Sea. The rapidly growing populations in the three countries bordering this area will increase the demand for fresh water. The degradation is a direct result of the water management practices of the countries bordering the Dead Sea.

