

## Short Wars, Long Shadows: Reconfiguring Global Tourism under the Israel–Iran 40-Day War

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**Abstract:** This study analyzes the tourism impacts of the 2026 Israel–Iran conflict, conceptualized as a “40-day war,” and frames it as a short-duration, high-intensity geopolitical crisis. Using a systematic literature review (SLR), the research integrates tourism crisis management, political instability, and risk perception perspectives to explain how such conflicts reshape global tourism systems. The findings indicate that short-term wars generate rapid yet systemic disruptions through media intensity, mobility interruptions, and heightened uncertainty. The conflict led to flight disruptions, increased travel costs, and widespread cancellations, while reshaping tourist behavior. Rather than collapsing, tourism demand was redirected toward safer destinations, confirming the role of destination image and perceived security. The study also emphasizes regional spillover effects and highlights the sector’s resilience through adaptive strategies and market adjustments.

**Keywords:** Tourism crisis, Geopolitical risk, Destination image, Tourism resilience.

### I. Introduction

Tourism is one of the most globally interconnected yet politically sensitive sectors, as it relies heavily on perceptions of safety, mobility, and geopolitical stability. Unlike many other industries, tourism demand is not only shaped by economic fundamentals but also by symbolic constructs such as trust, risk perception, and destination image (Sönmez, 1998; Reisinger & Mavondo, 2005). Consequently, armed conflicts and geopolitical crises have consistently acted as disruptive forces, not only by damaging infrastructure but also by reshaping global travel patterns and redistributing tourist flows (Ritchie, 2004; Ritchie & Jiang, 2019). Historically, similar patterns have been observed in major geopolitical conflicts such as the Gulf War (1990–1991), the Iraq War (2003), the Arab Spring (2010–2012), and more recently the Russia–Ukraine war (2022–) (Neumayer, 2004; Saha & Yap, 2014). Therefore, these events demonstrate that tourism is particularly vulnerable to perceived instability, often leading to regional spillover effects that extend far beyond the immediate area of conflict. The recent Israel–Iran conflict of 2026, often conceptualized in this study as a “40-day war,” represents a distinct category of short-duration, high-intensity interstate conflict with extensive regional and global tourism implications. The war began on 28 February 2026 and continued for approximately forty days, culminating in a fragile ceasefire mediated through international actors (Siddiqui, 2026; Imbert, 2026). Unlike prolonged wars, this type of conflict is characterized by rapid escalation, high media visibility, disruption of strategic transport corridors, and immediate effects on global mobility systems. Indeed, from a tourism perspective, the significance of the 40-day war lies not only in direct destruction but also in its systemic impacts. The temporary closure and subsequent reopening of the Strait of Hormuz, disruptions in Middle Eastern flights, and increased geopolitical uncertainty significantly altered tourist travel costs, and destination choices (Dominguez & Simo-Tomas, 2026; Allen, 2026). As highlighted in recent analyses, global tourism demand does not necessarily collapse during geopolitical crises; instead, it becomes restructured, shifting toward destinations perceived as both safer and more stable (Dominguez & Simo-Tomas, 2026).

### II. Literature Review

#### 2.1. Tourism Crisis and Disaster Frameworks

The conceptualization of crises in tourism has evolved from early descriptive accounts toward structured and multidimensional frameworks. As a matter of fact, one of the foundational models was proposed by Faulkner (2013), who formulated tourism disasters as a sequence of stages including pre-event, prodromal,

emergency, intermediate, long-term recovery, and resolution. As a result, this framework laid the groundwork for understanding crises as dynamic processes rather than isolated events.

Further developing this perspective, Ritchie (2004) introduced a strategic management outlook emphasizing preparedness, stakeholder coordination, and communication. Similarly, Glaesser (2004) and Henderson (2007) highlighted that tourism crises require integrated management approaches involving both public and private actors. Moreover, Hall (2010) further argued that crises are socially constructed phenomena shaped by political, economic, and institutional contexts. However, later studies expanded the scope by incorporating governance, communication, and organizational learning. For instance, Pforr (2009) and Mair et al. (2016) emphasized the importance of long-term recovery planning and knowledge accumulation in post-crisis environments. Equally important, current research reflects a push toward resilience-based frameworks. Ritchie and Jiang (2019) and Berbekova et al. (2021) demonstrate that tourism crisis management has increasingly focused on adaptability, innovation, and systemic resilience.

Of course, it can be seen that systematic reviews reinforce this evolution. To illustrate, Duan et al. (2022) display that tourism crises functions through interconnected mechanisms such as mobility restrictions, economic disruption, and image deterioration. Similarly, Liu et al. (2024) argue that crisis management should be understood as a continuous and adaptive process influenced by both internal capabilities and external shocks.

## **2.2. Political Instability, War, and Tourism Demand**

The relationship between political instability and tourism demand has been extensively examined in the literature. Actually, early contributions by Sönmez (1998) and Pizam and Smith (2000) established that terrorism and political violence substantially reduce tourist arrivals by increasing perceived risk and uncertainty. These findings were further supported by Fletcher and Morakabati (2008) and Araña and León (2008), who demonstrated that even isolated incidents can have disproportionate effects on tourism demand. Cross-national empirical studies provide strong evidence of this relationship. Neumayer (2004) showed that political violence negatively impacts tourism flows globally, particularly in developing economies. Similarly, Seddighi et al. (2002), Raza and Jawaid (2013), and Yaya (2009) confirmed that instability reduces destination attractiveness and leads to measurable declines in tourist arrivals.

It is safe to say that recent research adopts a broader macroeconomic and geopolitical perspective. More to the point, Saha and Yap (2014) found that political instability has a more persistent negative impact than individual terrorist events. Equally significant, Campos and Gassebner (2009) further highlight the escalation effect, where repeated instability compounds negative tourism outcomes. Moreover, Tiwari et al. (2019), Lee et al. (2021), and Wang et al. (2026) demonstrate that geopolitical risk and country risk indices are significant determinants of tourism demand across regions. Importantly, crises often generate regional spillover effects. Hollier (1991) documented how the Gulf War reduced tourism across the Middle East, even in unaffected countries. Similar patterns have been observed in more recent conflicts, including the Russia–Ukraine war (Tomej et al., 2023) and the Gaza war (Salman, 2026). These findings are particularly relevant for the Israel–Iran 40-day war, where perceived instability affected tourism flows across a wider geographical area.

## **2.3. Destination Image and Risk Perception**

It is known that risk perception and destination image play a central role in shaping tourist behavior during crises. Reisinger and Mavondo (2005) found that perceived travel risk significantly reduces intention to travel, while Kozak et al. (2007) demonstrated that tourists actively avoid destinations associated with instability. Naturally, further research underlines that risk perception is not only based on objective conditions but also on media representation and information flows. Likewise, Avraham (2015, 2016) emphasized the importance of destination image repair strategies, particularly in politically unstable regions such as those affected by the Arab Spring. Pascual-Fraile et al. (2024) similarly highlight the role of communication and branding in rebuilding tourist motivation.

Consequently, Henderson (2003) adds that crisis communication is a critical component in managing tourist perceptions, especially during high-visibility events. In addition, Hajibaba et al. (2015) introduce the concept of “crisis-resistant tourists,” suggesting that not all travelers respond uniformly to risk. Also, in the context of geopolitical conflicts, perception often extends beyond the actual conflict zone. As demonstrated by Dominguez and Simo-Tomas (2026), tourism demand shifts toward destinations perceived as safe, reinforcing the idea that perceived security is a key determinant of travel behavior.

## **2.4. Tourism System Disruptions: Mobility, Costs, and Connectivity**

It is widely accepted that modern tourism systems are highly interconnected and dependent on global transport and energy networks. As a result, geopolitical crises can disrupt tourism not only through safety concerns but also through systemic effects concerning mobility and costs. Allen (2026) importantly highlights how the Iran war led to widespread flight cancellations, increased travel costs, and reduced airline capacity. Similarly, Motamedi (2026) points to broader economic consequences, including infrastructure damage and disruptions to key transport systems. Additionally, Bowen (2026) further emphasizes the uncertainty surrounding the conflict, which ultimately affects travel planning and investment decisions.

It is crucial to note that the Strait of Hormuz is particularly significant in this context as a critical global shipping and energy corridor and that disruptions in this route have cascading effects on fuel prices and airline operations, thereby influencing tourism costs and accessibility (Siddiqui, 2026). Also, these findings align with broader research demonstrating that tourism crises increasingly operate through global networks rather than localized impacts (Duan et al., 2022).

## 2.5. Resilience and Post-Conflict Tourism Recovery

Despite its vulnerability, the tourism sector has shown considerable resilience in the face of crises. Thus, Dahles and Susilowati (2015) display that tourism businesses adopt adaptive strategies to survive disruptions, while Jiang et al. (2019) emphasize the role of dynamic capabilities in building organizational resilience. Reddy et al. (2020) propose a comprehensive framework for post-conflict recovery that emphasizes three interrelated pillars: institutional support, infrastructure rebuilding, and destination image restoration. Institutional support involves re-establishing governance systems, ensuring security, and rebuilding public trust in authorities—factors that are essential for stability and investor confidence. For example, in post-conflict Rwanda, strong governmental reforms and anti-corruption measures helped restore both domestic order and international credibility. Infrastructure rebuilding, the second pillar, focuses on restoring transportation networks, utilities, and tourism facilities that are often severely damaged during conflict. The reconstruction of airports, roads, and hotels in countries such as Sri Lanka after its civil war illustrates how physical redevelopment can stimulate economic activity and encourage the return of tourists. Finally, destination image restoration addresses the reputational damage caused by conflict. Thus, strategic marketing campaigns, media engagement, and international partnerships are used to reframe the destination as safe and attractive. Similarly, Mair et al. (2016) highlight the importance of long-term recovery planning and stakeholder collaboration in sustaining post-conflict development. Rather than focusing solely on immediate recovery, they argue that rebuilding efforts must be embedded within a long-term strategic vision that includes economic diversification, community involvement, and resilience planning. Stakeholder collaboration is particularly critical, as governments, local communities, private sector actors, and international organizations must work together to ensure inclusive and sustainable outcomes. For instance, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, tourism redevelopment has involved partnerships between local businesses, NGOs, and international agencies to rebuild cultural heritage sites and promote cross-cultural reconciliation. Together, these frameworks underscore that post-conflict recovery is not a linear process but a multidimensional effort requiring coordinated action across institutional, economic, and social domains.

Indeed, recent studies provide further evidence of resilience in extreme conditions. Tomej et al. (2023) show how tourism businesses adapted rapidly during the early stages of the Ukraine war, while Charfeddine and Dawd (2024) demonstrate the resilience of Turkey's tourism sector to external shocks. Tan et al. (2026) also highlight how digital media and tourism narratives evolve during wartime, influencing recovery processes. In terms of demand, Hajibaba et al. (2015) identify segments of tourists who continue to travel despite crises, contributing to faster recovery. Overall, these studies suggest that recovery is not only possible but often rapid, provided that stability, communication, and institutional support are restored. From a post-conflict recovery perspective, these disruptions can be addressed through targeted interventions aligned with institutional, infrastructural, and image-repair strategies. Reopening and securing airspace, restoring flight routes, and rebuilding damaged infrastructure are immediate priorities to re-establish accessibility and mobility. Equally important is restoring traveler confidence through safety assurances, transparent communication, and coordinated international marketing campaigns that reposition affected destinations as stable and secure. In the longer term, strengthening institutional coordination between governments, airlines, and tourism stakeholders can improve crisis preparedness and resilience. If sustained stability is achieved, tourism flows can gradually recover, as past cases show that demand often returns once safety and accessibility are convincingly restored.

### Global Examples

Recent geopolitical tensions, particularly the 2026 Israel- Iran related conflict, have produced immediate and measurable disruptions in regional tourism systems, illustrating how short-duration wars can rapidly reshape travel behavior and destination dynamics. One notable example is Cyprus, where a growing Israeli expatriate community—estimated at approximately 15,000 individuals—has sought relative proximity to Israel without continuous exposure to conflict (Dayan, 2026). In contrast, the Gulf region experienced direct security shocks that significantly influenced tourism and transportation flows. As reported by Euronews, missile and drone attacks launched from Iran toward Dubai, alongside the targeting of Kuwait, intensified perceptions of regional instability. Such incidents tend to trigger immediate travel advisories, airspace restrictions, and heightened insurance costs, all of which contribute to a decline in tourist arrivals (Witherspoon & War, 2026). Furthermore, Jordan represents one of the most severely affected tourism-dependent economies in the region. According to The Jordan Times, the outbreak of the conflict led to a near-total collapse in tourism demand. Indeed, March 2026 cancellations reached 100%, followed by approximately 85% in April and 70% in May. Mahmoud Khasawneh, head of the Jordan Society of Tourism and Travel Agents (JSTA), emphasized that

tourism activity effectively came to a standstill immediately after the conflict began. Similarly, Adnan Sawair from the Petra Development and Tourism Region Authority reported an 80% decline in hotel occupancy in Petra during April, with some periods approaching zero visitor levels (Jordan Times, 2026).

### III. Methodology

This study adopts a systematic literature review (SLR) approach to ensure methodological rigor, transparency, and reproducibility in examining the emerging concept of the 40-day war between Israel and Iran. By integrating insights from tourism crisis management, geopolitical risk, and historical conflict analysis, the study aims to conceptualize how short-duration wars reshape tourism systems. Again, the research contributes to the literature by introducing the “40-day war” as a novel analytical category and by situating the 2026 conflict within a broader historical and theoretical framework regarding tourism crises.

In line with established SLR methodologies, the study follows a structured process including the identification, screening, and synthesis of relevant academic and grey literature. Thus, this approach allows for a comprehensive and unbiased integration of existing knowledge while minimizing selection bias and enhancing analytical transparency. Certainly, systematic literature reviews are most valuable in emerging research areas, as they enable the consolidation of fragmented findings and support theory development (Tranfield et al., 2003).

**Table 1: Timeline of comparable wars and their tourism effects**

War / conflict	Period	Tourism significance	Main tourism effects
Gulf War	1990–1991	Foundational case of regional war spillover into tourism	Sharp fall in bookings across the Middle East and nearby destinations; higher travel costs from oil-price shock; strong fear contagion
9/11 and War on Terror era	2001 onward	Global securitization of travel	Stronger airport security, risk-sensitive demand, destination substitution, long-term integration of crisis/security planning
Iraq War	2003 onward	Reinforced image of Middle East instability	Reduced regional demand, reputational spillover to non-belligerent destinations, strengthened war-risk perception in long-haul travel
Lebanon War	2006	Short war with large image effects	Cancellations, border/air disruption, heightened insecurity across the Levant
Arab Spring uprisings	2010–2012 (peak years)	Political upheaval with major consequences	Destination image damage in Egypt, Tunisia, and the wider region; intensive recovery marketing and image-repair campaigns
Syrian civil war / regional instability	2011 onward	Prolonged conflict with regional tourism contagion	Severe collapse in Syria; reputational spillovers into neighboring states; heightened security framing
Russia–Ukraine war	2022 onward	Major contemporary war reorienting European tourism and mobility	Airspace closure, sanctions effects, refugee pressures, business adaptation, resilience strategies in adjacent destinations
Gaza war	2025–2026	Recent war generating tourism contraction and securitized travel to Israel/Palestine	Sharp demand decline, cancellations, image deterioration, altered domestic/international travel dynamics
Israel–Iran 40-day war	28 Feb 2026 – early Apr 2026	Short-duration, high-intensity interstate war with Gulf-wide spillovers	Airspace and route disruption, Strait of Hormuz risk, higher insurance and fuel costs, substitution toward safer hubs, immediate regional image shock

Accordingly, the present study systematically evaluates prior research on tourism crises, geopolitical risks, and war-related disruptions to build a coherent analytical framework for understanding the tourism impacts of short-duration conflicts. Table 1. shows the timeline of comparable wars and their tourism effects.

### IV. Discussion

Therefore, the findings of this study reinforce and extend existing research on tourism crises by demonstrating that short-duration, high-intensity conflicts—conceptualized here as “40-day wars”—produce rapid yet systemic impacts on tourism systems. Consistent with earlier studies, political instability and conflict significantly reduce tourism demand by increasing perceived risk and uncertainty (Sönmez, 1998; Neumayer,

2004; Saha & Yap, 2014). However, this study shows that even brief conflicts can generate effects comparable to longer wars due to their high media visibility and immediate disruption of global mobility networks. Naturally, the results also support the argument that tourism crises operate through interconnected mechanisms rather than isolated effects. As highlighted by Ritchie (2004) and Duan et al. (2022), crises simultaneously influence demand, destination image, and operational systems. In the case of the Israel–Iran 40-day war, disruptions to airspace, increased travel costs, and heightened geopolitical risk collectively reshaped tourism flows, confirming the systemic nature of modern tourism crises. Furthermore, the study aligns with literature on destination image and risk perception, emphasizing that tourists respond not only to actual danger but also to perceived instability (Reisinger & Mavondo, 2005; Kozak et al., 2007). Similar to findings from the Gulf War and Arab Spring (Hollier, 1991; Avraham, 2015), the effects extended beyond directly affected areas, leading to regional spillover and destination substitution. At the same time, the findings highlight the resilience of the tourism sector. In line with Dahles and Susilowati (2015) and Reddy et al. (2020), tourism systems demonstrate adaptive capacity through market adjustments, crisis management strategies, and the presence of crisis-resistant tourists (Hajibaba et al., 2015). This suggests that while short-duration wars cause immediate disruption, they also trigger rapid restructuring rather than long-term collapse.

## V. Conclusion

This study contributes to the tourism literature by introducing the concept of the “40-day war” as a distinct analytical category for understanding the impacts of short-duration, high-intensity conflicts on tourism systems. Drawing on a systematic literature review and historical comparisons, the findings demonstrate that such conflicts generate significant disruptions through geopolitical risk, mobility constraints, and shifts in destination image.

The study also underlines that tourism demand does not simply decline during crises but is restructured, with travelers redirecting toward safer destinations. At the same time, the resilience of the tourism sector plays a crucial role in facilitating recovery, supported by adaptive business strategies, institutional responses, and evolving tourist behavior. Overall, the research highlights the importance of integrating crisis management, risk perception, and resilience frameworks in analyzing contemporary tourism dynamics. As geopolitical instability becomes increasingly frequent, understanding the effects of short-duration conflicts will be essential for both policymakers and industry stakeholders. Future research should further explore empirical evidence of such conflicts and examine how different regions respond to similar crisis patterns.

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