## BRAND KURDISTAN REGION OF IRAQ



#### BRAND **KURDISTAN REGION OF IRAQ**

Centered on five key dimensions governance, business, human capital, tourism, and culture — this handbook is designed for policymakers, entrepreneurs, or anyone seeking to understand the Kurdistan Region of Iraq's place in the world.

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About Baizac Baizac is a strategic communication firm specialized in country branding and investment promotion.

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> 4 Bridges Al Hayat Group AmCham Kurdistan Cihan Group Divan Erbil Hotel Don Gennaro Erbil Hills Erbil Manpower Macair Flight Support Moonline Group **Rwanga Foundation** SABIS® Tenet Group University of Kurdistan Hewlêr



President Masoud Barzani's leadership has been pivotal in transforming the Kurdistan Region of Iraq into a trusted partner for peace and stability. His vision encompasses a region governed by democratic principles, ensuring equality for all its citizens, fostering prosperity, empowering women, and uniting different faiths under a common vision.

#### This book is dedicated to President Masoud Barzani, a name synonymous with resilience and visionary leadership.

CONTENTS	1		Image: Constraint of the second s
	GOVERNANCE	BUSINESS	HUMAN CAPITAL
	08—41	42—159	160—199
Masthead Acknowledgements Foreword	<ol> <li>Kurdistan Region of Iraq</li> <li>President</li> <li>Prime Minister</li> <li>Kurdistan Parliament</li> <li>Deputy Prime Minister</li> <li>Foreign Relations</li> <li>Keeping the KRI Safe</li> </ol>	<ul> <li>44 Agenda: Economic Diversification</li> <li>48 Erbil Hills</li> <li>66 Invest</li> <li>66 Invest</li> <li>68 Cihan Group</li> <li>84 Industrial Zones</li> <li>86 The Boulevard</li> <li>100 Digitalization</li> <li>104 TENET Group</li> <li>114 Energy</li> <li>116 Al Hayat Group</li> <li>126 Private Sector</li> <li>128 Macair Flight Support</li> <li>136 Agriculture</li> <li>138 Moonline</li> <li>152 Infrastructure</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>162 SABIS<sup>®</sup></li> <li>172 Rwanga Foundation</li> <li>184 University of Kurdistan Hewlêr</li> <li>192 Erbil Manpower</li> </ul>

TIME .

4

#### TOURISM



#### **CULTURE**

#### 200 - 279

202	Erbil: The Capital
204	Erbil Citadel
206	Erbil International Airport
208	Visit Erbil Province
226	Slemani: The Cultural Capital
228	Visit Slemani Province
238	Duhok: The Land of Charm
240	Visit Duhok Province
258	Hospitality
260	Divan Erbil Hotel

**270** Don Gennaro

#### 280 - 331

- **282** The People
- **284** Culture of Coexistence
- 300 Halabja Memorial
- **302** Yazidi Genocide
- 304 Newroz
- **306** Flag Day
- **308** Kurdish Clothing Day
- **310** Erbil Marathon
- **312** The Designer to Watch
- 314 Media to Watch
- **316** Women Making a Mark
- **324** Erbil Civilization Museum
- 326 Kurdish Textile Museum
- 328 Barzani National Memorial
- **330** Mullah Mustafa Barzani

## Foreword

The Kurdistan Region of Iraq's (KRI) journey to establish its brand is an inspiring tale of ambition and unwavering determination. From its humble beginnings in 1991 to its rapid developments over the past two decades, the transformation of the KRI is a testament to the vision of its leaders and the resilience of its people.

Centered on five key dimensions—governance, business, human capital, tourism, and culture—this book enables readers to explore the KRI, highlighting the unique characteristics that define its brand identity and reputation. Our goal in this work is to highlight the leadership vision, inspirational individuals and companies, cultural heritage, economic potential, and tourism opportunities.

The people and their stories within the pages of this book present compelling evidence of the KRI's commitment to building a brighter future. We are confident that the region's future will be built on the achievements it has made so far. Yet, this marks just the initial chapter of its unfolding story.



#### From its humble beginnings in 1991 to its rapid developments over the past two decades, the transformation of the KRI is a testament to the vision of its leaders and the resilience of its people.

## GOVERNANCE

The leadership of a country, region, or city is pivotal in setting the vision and tone of the place. This vision, often articulated through policies, significantly shapes the destination's reputation. In this chapter, we focus on the visionary leadership in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), highlighting its impact on the region's identity and global standing. At the heart of any vibrant debate is the parliamentary chamber, where a society's priorities are defined, its values defended, and its future direction determined. Our exploration includes the Kurdistan Parliament, a body characterized by its rich diversity of voices. It plays a crucial role in crafting the legislative framework that supports and promotes the KRI's brand. Diplomacy is another critical aspect, serving as a bridge that connects the KRI's narrative with its international image. Since its establishment in 1991, the KRI has demonstrated remarkable wisdom in diplomacy, forging relationships across the globe. The KRI's diplomatic efforts are key in articulating the region's perspectives on regional issues and asserting its position within the global community. Equally important is the aspect of security. In a region that often faces geopolitical challenges, the KRI's dedication to maintaining internal security and contributing to regional stability is of utmost importance. This steadfast commitment ensures the safety and well-being of its inhabitants, as well as that of investors and tourists visiting the region. Let's delve into the governance pillar of the KRI brand, which shapes its present and future.



08 - 41

## Kurdistan Region of Iraq



**\*** Map of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq

Article 117 of the Iraqi constitution recognizes Kurdistan as a federal region of Iraq.

The Iraqi constitution recognizes the institutions and security forces of the KRI. The Kurdistan Regional Government, as the autonomous governing body of the KRI, holds constitutionally recognized authority over the governorates of Erbil, Duhok, Slemani, and Halabja. The KRI, which borders Syria to the west, Turkey to the north, and Iran to the east, covers a total area of 40,643 km<sup>2</sup>.

The Iraqi constitution grants the KRI authority to exercise legislative and executive powers in certain areas, including security, education, health policies, natural resources management, and infrastructure development.

The KRI possesses an independent judicial system, headed by the Supreme Court of Cassation, which adjudicates cases of the utmost importance and appeals from lower courts. Additionally, this judicial system includes several lower courts that rule on commercial and criminal disputes.

Kurdistan is a federal region within Iraq. Established in 1991, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) operates under a parliamentary democracy system.



### **President** Nechirvan Barzani

The President of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, elected by the Kurdistan Parliament, holds the highest executive power. The President serves as the Commander-in-Chief of the Peshmerga and represents the people of the Kurdistan Region at both national and international levels. Additionally, the President oversees relations between the Kurdistan Region and the Iraqi Federal authorities.



"Respectful and progressive international relations are essential to demonstrate our commitment as a reliable partner for peace and stability."









#### **International Relations**

President Nechirvan Barzani has long been an influential figure in the field of international relations. His vision for the KRI centers on fostering open dialogue, nurturing global partnerships, and positioning the Region as a hub for economic and cultural exchange. President Nechirvan Barzani has worked tirelessly to enhance the KRI's reputation as a beacon for regional and international cooperation. His forward-thinking approach emphasizes the importance of mutual respect, understanding, and collaboration in a globalized world, underscoring the KRI's commitment to peaceful coexistence and international solidarity.

















#### **Climate Change**

President Nechirvan Barzani holds a compelling vision for environmental sustainability and awareness. Recognizing the pressing challenges of climate change and natural resource depletion, he has consistently emphasized the importance of environmental preservation for future generations. Under his leadership, the KRI has launched several ambitious initiatives aimed at promoting environmental awareness and advancing sustainable practices.

President Nechirvan Barzani advocates for a holistic approach where economic development and environmental protection are intertwined aspects of a sustainable future. His vision emphasizes the principle that economic development should not come at the expense of environmental sustainability, serving as a model for countries and leaders worldwide.

"Regrettably, Iraq is the fifth most affected country globally by climate change. We must actively engage in expanding coordination and cooperation with regional and global partners to mitigate the threats and challenges of climate change. It is imperative that we develop a comprehensive national plan and strategy and implement it promptly."





"Peaceful coexistence is at the core of our vision, and we are committed to enshrining robust protections for minorities in our laws and policies."

#### **Peaceful Coexistence**

President Nechirvan Barzani champions a vision of peaceful coexistence, seeing religious and ethnic diversity as a cornerstone of a harmonious society. Inspired by the rich tapestry of cultures and faiths in the KRI, President Barzani believes that mutual respect and understanding among diverse communities are crucial for societal progress and stability. He consistently supports initiatives that promote religious tolerance, both within the KRI and on the international stage.

Under his leadership, the KRI has flourished as a haven where individuals of diverse faiths and ethnicities coexist in peace. President Barzani asserts that the KRI's strength is rooted in its embrace of diversity and its fervent promotion of inclusion. Guided by this vision, the Kurdish leadership remains unwavering in its commitment to ensuring freedom and equality for all, regardless of faith, ethnicity, or any other affiliation.



"Watching our young entrepreneurs diligently create businesses fills me with profound optimism. Their success in small and medium enterprises is not only commendable but also foundational for building a resilient and prosperous future for the KRI."

#### Youth Entrepreneurship

President Nechirvan Barzani strongly believes in the potential of the KRI's youth and their capacity to shape the future of the region through entrepreneurship. He considers fostering an entrepreneurial mindset in young individuals crucial for the economic innovation of the KRI.

President Barzani envisions a KRI where the youth are not just job seekers, but also job creators. During his premiership, he initiated and supported numerous programs and reforms aimed at fostering entrepreneurial skills and innovation among the younger generation.

President Barzani's vision goes beyond just the tools and skills needed for entrepreneurship; he advocates for cultivating a mindset of resilience, adaptability, and visionary thinking in the youth. This lays the foundation for a prosperous and sustainable future for the KRI.

#### Women's Rights

President Nechirvan Barzani envisions a society where women are empowered, educated, and equal contributors across all spheres of life. Recognizing women's pivotal role in the KRI's progress, he has championed numerous initiatives and reforms to bridge gender gaps, enhance female workforce participation, and nurture women's leadership in both public and private sectors. President Barzani often emphasizes that the true measure of a nation's progress is reflected in the status, respect, and opportunities afforded to its women. His commitment to women's rights aims not only to elevate the status of Kurdish women but also to serve as a beacon of progress and change for the broader region.

"Our commitment to fostering gender equality and empowering women across every economic sector remains unwavering. We tirelessly advocate for the legal reforms that are vital to enhancing women's rights."



## **Prime Minister** *Masrour Barzani*



Alongside the responsibilities of shaping the KRG's policy agenda, this leadership role involves navigating the complex landscape of Kurdish politics, which includes managing coalition dynamics, as the KRI's parliamentary system often requires the formation of a coalition to achieve a governing majority.

Since assuming office in 2019, Prime Minister Masrour Barzani has intensified the implementation of a series of reform initiatives aimed at unlocking the KRI's vast potential across critical economic sectors, with the goals of attracting investment, stimulating job creation, and diversifying the economy. His vision encompasses the promotion of innovation and entrepreneurship, as well as the fostering of sustainable development practices that benefit all residents of the KRI.





## Kurdistan Parliament

The Kurdistan Parliament, the unicameral legislature of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, was established in 1992.





PAGE 30

Located in Erbil, the Kurdistan Parliament previously consisted of 111 members. However, in a significant ruling in 2024, the Federal Supreme Court of Iraq, the country's highest judicial body, issued several judgments regarding the election law of the Kurdistan Parliament. Among these rulings, the Parliament's total membership was reduced from 111 to 100 members. These members are elected through a proportional representation system for four-year terms. The composition of the Kurdistan Parliament reflects a broad spectrum of political parties, highlighting the diverse political landscape of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

The Kurdistan Parliament exercises legislative authority alongside the Iraqi Council of Representatives in several domains, including education, health, historical preservation, internal security, transportation, natural resource management, environmental policy, and tourism.

The parliament includes 19 functional committees, each dedicated to thoroughly examining legislative matters within their areas of expertise. These committees play a significant role in shaping the political discourse in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

In terms of promoting women's political representation, the Kurdistan Parliament is at the forefront. It has established a legal minimum quota, requiring that at least 30% of its seats are held by women. This policy sets a benchmark for legislative bodies in the Middle East.

A legal minimum quota is in place to ensure that women hold at least 30% of the seats in the Kurdistan Parliament.



## Deputy Prime Minister Qubad Talabani

Qubad Talabani has served twice as the Deputy Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). Before assuming his role as Deputy Prime Minister, Talabani was a distinguished diplomat representing the KRG in Washington, D.C.

As Deputy Prime Minister, Talabani has been instrumental in implementing strategic projects aimed at enhancing the quality of life in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). Notably, he has played a leading role in efforts towards modernizing the public sector and reducing bureaucratic inefficiencies. His initiatives have focused on streamlining government services, making them more accessible and efficient for citizens.

Additionally, Talabani has actively been working to eliminate barriers for investors and create a conducive environment for investment, thereby promoting sustainable economic growth in the KRI. In recent years, Talabani has focused on nurturing young tech innovators and entrepreneurs, harnessing local talent to spur regional development.





CHAPTER — 1 GOVERNANCE

## Foreign Relations

The Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) leverages diplomacy as a vital instrument to shape its global image and positioning. Through strategic initiatives, the KRI effectively showcases its substantial contributions to Iraq's security, stability, peaceful coexistence, and economic advancement to influential leaders on both regional and global stages. By communicating these contributions via various channels, the Region has strengthened its position on the international diplomatic stage over the last two decades.

The Department of Foreign Relations (DFR) plays an important role in advancing the interests and visibility of the KRI on both regional and international scales by fostering strong ties with other countries and organizations, thereby opening doors for increased global influence for the Region. Sweden • UK • Germany EU • • Po France • Switzerland • Austria Italy • Spain •

#### **Diplomatic Missions in the KRI**

The impressive diplomatic achievements of the KRI since 2003 are noteworthy. The establishment of 40 foreign representation offices, including consulates general of the five permanent members of the UNSC, reflects a strong vote of confidence from foreign governments in the KRI. Such a significant presence underscores the growing recognition and trust placed in the Region's diplomatic stature on the global stage.

#### **Consulate Generals:**

Armenia, China, Czechia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, India, Iran, Italy, Jordan, Kuwait, Netherlands, Palestine, Poland, Qatar, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Türkiye, United Kingdom, United States, and United Arab Emirates **Consulates:** 

• US

Egypt, Korea

#### Embassy Offices:

Canada, Sweden

Japan, Philippines, Poland, Romania BRAND KURDISTAN REGION OF IRAQ



#### KRG Representative Office

The expansion of the KRG's presence abroad over the past two decades is truly remarkable. With representative offices established in 14 countries, it demonstrates a strong commitment to engaging with the international community and fostering diplomatic relations worldwide. This growth highlights the KRG's dedication to promoting its interests beyond its borders.

#### **Consular Offices:**

#### **Commercial Offices:**

Austria, Bulgaria

#### Honorary Consuls:

Belarus, Brazil, Cyprus, Denmark, Slovakia, Spain, Sri Lanka, and Ukraine

#### Australia 🔍

#### **International Bodies:**

European Union, United Nations, Japan International Cooperation Agency, Korea International Cooperation Agency

## Keeping Kurdistan Region of Iraq Safe

The primary responsibility of any government is to ensure the safety and security of its citizens, residents, and visitors from all types of threats. Given the challenging regional security environment, the security forces of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq have consistently demonstrated their capability to effectively respond to a diverse array of complex threats.



#### 01. Legal structure

Article 117 of the Iraqi constitution states that federal regions are responsible for establishing internal security forces within their respective regions. Therefore, as the only regional government, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) bears sole responsibility for the protection of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). The KRI's security forces, which include the police, security personnel, and regional guards, have effectively ensured safety and security both within the KRI and along its borders.

#### 02. Ensuring stability

The Peshmerga, recognized by the Iraqi constitution as the KRI's military force, has been a key instrument in maintaining peace, stability, and peaceful coexistence. Peshmerga forces have been at the forefront of the fight against ISIS terrorism, which was once one of the most significant threats to security and peace, not only in the KRI but throughout the entire region. Nearly 2,000 Peshmerga soldiers lost their lives in the fight against ISIS. The heroic contributions of the Peshmerga forces in defeating ISIS and preventing the terrorist organization's resurgence have been praised by leaders worldwide.

#### oz. Public safety

Due to the tireless efforts of the KRI's security forces, who work around the clock to ensure the safety of its citizens and residents, the cities in the KRI are among the safest in Iraq. The minimal risk from crime allows people to move freely and securely. By prioritizing security measures, the KRI has created an environment where citizens, and visitors alike can live, work, and travel without fear, setting a positive example for the rest of Iraq.



## BUSINESS

region, or city. scales. Region of Iraq.



## 42 - 159

A nation's brand, much like that of a business, is a powerful signal. It encompasses the perceptions associated with a place – including its culture, resources, and people.

Just as consumers are drawn to certain brands based on the emotions and values they convey, the same principle applies to places. Consequently, the business landscape of a destination, encompassing its values, opportunities, successes, and cultural nuances, profoundly influences the perceptions of a country, region, or city.

Today, businesses not only serve as ambassadors for their home countries but also carry a fragment of their nation's essence wherever they operate. In the following pages, you will discover which companies, projects, and individuals enhance the Kurdistan Region of Iraq's reputation on both regional and global

While the businesses featured in this book vary in size and scope, each possesses unique qualities that set them apart. Throughout this chapter, we delve into their shared vision: fostering innovation, delivering exceptional services, investing in human capital, and striving for sustainable growth. Let's explore stories of ambition and vision from the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

# Agenda: Economic Diversification

The economic landscape of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) has undergone a transformative journey in recent years. At the heart of this remarkable shift are the ambitious reform packages introduced by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), which aim to lay the foundation for a diversified economy.









PAGE 44

#### Industry

The industry and manufacturing sector play a crucial role in the KRG's longterm economic development plan. These goals encompass stimulating private sector activity, facilitating a shift towards value-added production, creating employment opportunities, and fostering a production-based economy. According to official KRG data, the industry sector has received the highest capital investments in the KRI to date. To further this agenda, the KRG aims to establish new industrial zones that promote initiatives to enhance local manufacturing facilities and achieve self-sufficiency in specific areas.

#### Tourism

The tourism sector is widely recognized as a key pillar of economic growth in the KRG's longterm economic reform plan. The government's strategy is centered around supporting the development of archaeological and adventure tourism, with a focus on directing investments towards locations that have great potential to become primary destinations for tourists interested in history and culture.

#### Agriculture

The agriculture sector holds the potential to become the backbone of the KRI's economy, thanks to its fertile land and suitable climate. The KRG is keen on building a strong agricultural infrastructure, with the aim of transforming the sector into a significant source of employment and a key contributor to the KRI's non-oil economy. In recent years, Kurdish farmers have gradually begun to export their products to neighboring countries, which is a testament to the fact that the KRG's vision is paying off.



The essence of KRG's vision is to create an economic environment that is less reliant on the oil and gas sector. The KRG is strategically shifting its focus towards agriculture, industry, and tourism as the new pillars of the economy. These sectors hold the promise of sustainable growth and development, ensuring long-term economic stability and prosperity for the KRI.





#### Where Luxury & Leisure Converge

Erbil Hills is the most significant placemaking project ever undertaken in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. This exceptional residential and tourism project presents unparalleled value propositions to the city of Erbil, attracting visitors, investors, and residents alike. With its distinctive features, Erbil Hills is set to elevate the city's reputation on a global scale.







Nestled amidst lush greenery and designed to harmonize with nature, Erbil Hills redefines luxury living in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq like never before.

#### Prime Location

Erbil Hills not only focuses on providing a nature-centric lifestyle but also offers easy access to nearby urban centers, allowing residents to enjoy the best of both worlds.







The private gated development comprises a selection of exquisite high-end mansions, spread across an expansive 2 million square meters, offering a truly lavish living experience.

Erbil Hills project ranks as the largest green space following Sami Abdulrahman Park, with 75% of its total land area dedicated to green spaces, golf courses, and open areas

This prestigious residential development is enhanced by a world-class international golf course, meticulously designed by one of the foremost golf course designers in the world.







#### 🗯 Architectural Brilliance

The captivating designs of ancient Mesopotamian artifacts have served as a remarkable source of inspiration for Erbil Hills. The project artfully intertwines the rich cultural heritage of the past with a bold vision for the future, creating a harmonious bridge that celebrates both. Erbil Hills boasts an impressive collection of around 386 exceptional mansions designed to offer comfort, elegance, and privacy for its residents. Each one is meticulously designed and crafted to perfection; Erbil Hills' mansions redefine luxury living in every sense.

#### **Golf Mansions**



**#** Grove Mansions



Creek Mansions



Grand Palais



The project is dedicated to sustainability, seamlessly integrating eco-friendly materials and energyefficient technologies to significantly reduce its environmental footprint. Linu

100

With meticulous attention to detail, the mansions of Erbil Hills epitomize the finest in luxury living.

.....

1

#### # Architectural Style

From classical styles like the French Country Estate to more contemporary designs such as Mediterranean, each mansion in Erbil Hills exudes its own unique charm and allure.



#### Palm Springs

The seamless combination of functionality and visual appeal brought to life by a sleek contemporary design.

#### 🕷 Tuscany

Exuding a distinctly Italian-style sweep of Mediterranean grace.





#### Château d'Avignon

Embodying the sophistication of French country estate home design.



#### 🗰 Royal Crown

Experience a fresh reinterpretation of classic Middle Eastern design motifs that seamlessly blend with the comforts of contemporary living.

#### 🗰 London, Oxford

The English-inspired architecture adds a touch of elegant simplicity and practicality to its aesthetic.

#### # Paris, Bordeaux

Presenting the architecture with the grandeur and grace reminiscent of the French golden era.





Golf and luxury living have long been synonymous, offering an escape into a realm of tranquility and refined leisure. The centerpiece of Erbil Hills is undoubtedly its world-class 18-hole championship golf course, which sprawls across the estate.

A World-Class Golfing Experience





Erbil Hills stands out as an unmatched outdoor destination in the region, thanks to its world-class golf course.

Erbil Hills' premier golf course boasts a spacious driving range area that can comfortably accommodate up to 25 golfers. Designed by renowned golf course architects, it caters to players of all skill levels.

Erbil Hills is poised to become one of the most thri lling new golf venues in the region, capable of hosting international tournaments and special events.

IMG, a renowned entertainment force with a strong track record in overseeing some of the world's most iconic venues, is taking the helm in crafting the ultimate golfing paradise at Erbil Hills.

The meticulously manicured fairways, challenging bunkers, and undulating greens combine to create a remarkable playing experience for golf enthusiasts.

#### Simply. Unparalleled

Beyond golfing, Erbil Hills will offer residents a wide range of outdoor activities, including nature trails, jogging tracks, and tennis courts.

The residential development will also include top-notch amenities such as a state-of-the-art clubhouse with spa and wellness facilities, a luxury boutique hotel, gourmet restaurants, lounges, a kids club, a market, a pharmacy, a bank, a beauty salon, laundry services, and community spaces for social gatherings.

Erbil Hills embodies the perfect synthesis of luxurious living, natural beauty, and a passion for sports. With its commitment to preserving the environment, fostering a sense of community, and providing an unmatched array of amenities, this private gated development sets a new benchmark in luxury real estate in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.















INVEST

**The Kurdistan Board of Investment has approved a** total investment capital of **\$67.4 billion since 2006. Out of this amount**, **\$55.4 billion is attributed to** local companies, while \$12 billion pertains to foreign direct investment (FDI) and joint ventures.

The Investment Law of the Kurdistan **Region of Iraq (KRI) has been crafted** to be both enticing and supportive for investors, both local and foreign. One of the primary benefits is the allocation of land specifically for investment projects, complemented by the provision of essential utilities. Investors can also take advantage of a 10-year exemption from noncustom taxes and duties. On top of this, for a period of 5 years, imported raw materials are exempted from customs duties.

Furthermore, the law also ensures that imported equipment and machinery for a project are not subject to taxes and duties. **Investors are given the flexibility** to fully repatriate both their investment profits and the principal capital. Recognizing the need for development in certain areas, the law provides extra incentives for projects located in less developed regions. Additionally, joint ventures that involve both national and foreign investors receive particular encouragement, underlining the Region's commitment to collaborative growth.

### \$67.4 billion has been invested since 2006.








### A Legacy of Vision, Growth, and Diversity

Over the course of seven decades, Cihan Group has undergone extraordinary expansion, evolving from a textilefocused enterprise into a dynamic conglomerate encompassing 15 diverse sectors. This remarkable journey highlights the company's adaptability, innovative spirit, and visionary leadership.





PAGE 69

### **CIHAN GROUP**

In 1947, the late Haji Yahya Bajger, driven by an entrepreneurial vision, laid the groundwork for what would evolve into the Cihan Group, a diverse conglomerate in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). Beginning in the textile industry, the Group reached a pivotal turning point in 1971 with its strategic expansion into the wholesale textile business. This move broadened its portfolio and established solid connections with neighboring countries and the Far East. The expansion set the stage for further diversification, first into the clothing industry and later into the production of plastic and paper bags, showcasing the company's adaptability to market demands.

Over the past seven decades, the company has made significant strides in diversifying its business operations. It has branched into international trading, food distribution, automotive, heavy machinery, construction, energy, banking, insurance, education, and media. The late Haji Yahya Bajger's determination, innovative spirit, and strategic foresight have driven the Cihan Group to expand into 15 diverse sectors, and today, it provides employment for over 2,500 people. The Group's journey stands as a compelling testament to the power of entrepreneurial vision, unwavering dedication, and the courage to dream big in the KRI.

### **CELEBRATING 77 YEARS OF LEGACY**

Cihan Group is celebrating its 77<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a leading corporate group in Iraq, shaped by the vision of its founder, the late Haji Yahya Bajger. His vision extended beyond merely starting businesses; it included contributing to the country's economic and social development, instilling ethics and values, investing in education, and embracing innovation.

### The late Haji Yahya Bajger laid the foundation of Cihan Group in this small shop in 1947.









Haji Azad Yahya Bajger, Chairman of the Cihan Group, was awarded a medal by His Highness, the Emperor of Japan, on February 20, 2019.

### Cihan Group has impressively imported over 100,000 Toyota vehicles since 2004, making a significant contribution to the Iraqi automotive landscape.

### **CIHAN FMCG**

Since its founding in 1992, Cihan FMCG has established itself as a leader in Iraq's import and distribution sector, specializing in high-quality products. Initially focusing on tea, the company has diversified its offerings over the past three decades to include a wide range of essentials such as rice, dairy products, pulses, tomato paste, and edible oils.

In 2018, Cihan FMCG achieved a significant milestone by importing a record 15 million kg of tea from Sri Lanka. This strengthened its market presence with the renowned Akbar Brothers tea brand and secured a 30% market share in Iraq. Acknowledging its success, Akbar Brothers recognized Cihan FMCG as its largest buyer and exporter, celebrating 30 years of business partnership.

Cihan FMCG is renowned for its excellence in both the Food and Hygiene product divisions. As a top importer of tea and rice, the company also offers a diverse array of products, including tomato paste, sunflower oil, milk powder, pulses, vegetable ghee, flour, baby diapers, soaps, and detergents.

Looking to the future, Cihan FMCG has expanded its distribution network to international markets, exporting its brands to consumers in the USA, UK, Australia, Germany, Türkiye, the UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and several other countries.

In 2018, Cihan FMCG achieved a significant milestone by importing a record 15 million kg of tea from Sri Lanka. This strengthened its market presence with the renowned Akbar Brothers tea brand and secured a 30% market share in Iraq.





### CIHAN MOTORS: Pioneering Excellence in Automotive Imports

Established in 1997, Cihan Motors symbolizes the expansive vision and commitment of the Cihan Group to excellence in the automobile sector. Over the years, this dynamic division has thrived, setting remarkable standards in automotive imports.

A pivotal moment occurred in 2004 when Cihan Motors became the first Iraqi private enterprise to directly import Toyota vehicles from Japan, partnering with the esteemed Tomen Corporation. This groundbreaking move laid a solid foundation for the company's future endeavors. Since then, Cihan Motors has been at the forefront of revolutionizing Iraq's automotive market. The company has impressively imported over 100,000 Toyota vehicles, making a significant contribution to the Iraqi automotive landscape.

Today, Cihan Motors boasts a robust network of seven Toyota facilities across Iraq, demonstrating the company's relentless pursuit of growth and excellence. Among these, four facilities are distinguished as Toyota Authorized Dealerships. They are equipped with comprehensive 3S Facilities (Sales, Service, and Spare Parts), as conferred by Toyota Motor Corporation in Japan. This reflects the company's dedication to maintaining the highest standards in sales, customer service, and after-sales support. Cihan Motors strategically expanded by inaugurating its Machinery Division.

### CIHAN MACHINERY A Dynamic Force in Heavy Machinery and Automotive Sector

In 2005, Cihan Motors strategically expanded by inaugurating its Machinery Division, which quickly gained prominence and secured its status as the official dealer for several leading heavy machinery brands, including Hino, Hitachi, Airman, Sakai, Robin, and Fili Ferrari.

### HINO

Launched in 2010, the HINO division of the Cihan Group rapidly ascended to a leading position in the automotive market. The signing of the HASS (Hino Authorized Service Station) Agreement in 2013 further cemented the division's reputation in the industry. The division's consistent performance and dedication earned it the prestigious title of Hino Authorized Dealer in 2016.









### GEELY

In 2021, Bajger Company forged a strategic partnership with Geely Auto by signing a Distributor Agreement. This commitment bore fruit in September 2022 with the unveiling of a flagship showroom in Erbil. Building on this momentum, the company expanded its reach by opening a second branch in Slemani in September 2023. These initiatives have profoundly reinforced Cihan Group's dominant position in the Iraqi automotive landscape.









### On the Move: Hertz Rent-A-Car

In its continuous pursuit of diversification, Cihan Group achieved another milestone by establishing the Hertz Rent-A-Car business under the Cihan Automotive Division in 2017. Starting with a modest fleet of 35 vehicles, the division experienced phenomenal growth, expanding its fleet to 500 vehicles within just one year—the largest rental car fleet in Iraq. Currently operating through eight prime outlets, the division has ambitious plans to extend its presence to other cities in Iraq.











### EDUCATIONAL ENDEAVORS

Firmly dedicated to nurturing the human capital of the KRI, Cihan Group has been equipping the youth with the necessary skills to meet the ever-changing challenges and opportunities in the job market. A prime example of this commitment is the establishment of Cihan University in Erbil in 2007. Further extending its impact, Cihan Group acquired the Lebanese French University in 2012, enhancing its role in empowering the youth in the KRI.

**Cihan University** educates 2,807 students, supported by 126 Since opening its doors in 2007 in Erbil with dedicated staff members. The university's just three colleges and 450 students, Cihan diverse academic offerings span several University has undergone a remarkable departments, including the College of transformation, significantly impacting the Law & International Relations, College of academic landscape of the KRI. Over the years, Administration & Economics, College of the university has grown exponentially and Education & International Languages, and the now operates three campuses in Erbil, Slemani, Department of Information Technology. and Duhok. These comprise 30 departments and are supported by a dedicated team of 630 **Cihan International Schools** teaching staff. This expansion has enabled Cihan International Schools are renowned Cihan University to provide education to nearly for their educational excellence, holding full 10,400 students, a testament to its widespread accreditation and a commitment to providing reach and growing reputation. a student-centered educational experience Looking ahead, Cihan University plans that both challenges and supports students in to inaugurate new campuses in the cities of realizing their utmost potential. The schools Kirkuk and Baghdad. These campuses are pride themselves on delivering superior teaching quality from the foundational stages part of the university's ongoing commitment to elevating the standard of higher education right through to Grade 12.

across Iraq, demonstrating a vision that continues to shape the nation's academic future.

### Lebanese French University

Founded in 2007, the Lebanese French University (LFU) underwent a significant transformation when it was acquired by the Cihan Group in 2012. This acquisition marked the beginning of a new era for LFU, characterized by enhanced capabilities. At its core, LFU embodies a unique blend of Lebanese and French academic traditions, offering a curriculum that resonates both locally and internationally. Today, LFU

Located in Erbil, Slemani, Duhok, and Kirkuk, the schools serve approximately 2,800 students, distinguishing themselves through a rigorous curriculum that includes the MM publications and the unique Cihan Curriculum program. What truly sets Cihan International Schools apart is the deep sense of community and connection that flourishes among students, teachers, and families. This creates an exceptionally inclusive and supportive atmosphere, enhancing the learning experience and fostering educational and personal growth for every student.

### CIHAN BANK: A Beacon of Islamic Banking Excellence

Since its inception in 2008, Cihan Bank has established a distinguished presence in the Iraqi banking industry. Committed to offering a comprehensive range of Islamic banking products and services, the bank has not only grown in size but also in reputation over the years. Today, it operates a robust network of 11 branches, significantly expanding its reach across Iraq, and boasts an extensive network of over 200 ATMs throughout the country, serving more than 200,000 customers.

In 2017, Cihan Bank was listed as a fully-fledged Islamic bank on the regular market of the Iraq Stock Exchange (ISX), marking a milestone that underscores the bank's commitment to transparency and adherence to the ISX's strict regulatory standards. Further solidifying its leadership and success in Islamic banking, Cihan Bank was honored with the Gold Medal by the Tatweej-Islamic Institution, a testament to the bank's excellence in the field of Islamic banking in the Arab world.

Cihan Bank offers a variety of products in corporate, retail, and digital banking. Its vision is to offer innovative Shari'a-compliant financial solutions that promote community sustainability and financial inclusion.



Today, Cihan Bank operates a robust network of 11 branches, significantly expanding its reach across Iraq, and boasts an extensive network of over 200 ATMs throughout the country, serving more than 200,000 customers.



### In the past two decades, Cihan Construction has successfully completed 43 impressive projects.

### **CIHAN CONSTRUCTION**

Since entering the construction sector in 1982, the Cihan Group has swiftly built a reputation for delivering top-quality projects. In the past two decades, Cihan Construction has successfully completed 43 impressive projects. Notable examples include Bajger City in Erbil, which boasts 280 villa units; Cihan City, featuring 16 towers and 1,450 luxurious apartments; the Toyota 3S Facility; and the multifaceted Cihan Le Gulan, home to the Ramada Residences and commercial spaces. It is worth noting that 80% of the company's workforce consists of local professionals, further emphasizing their commitment to improving the human capital of the KRI.





### **CIHAN INSURANCE**

Licensed by the Insurance Bureau, Cihan Insurance, a private shareholding company, was established in Iraq in 2010. The company is dedicated to delivering unique services by offering professional insurance policies tailored to the diverse needs of the Iraqi market. Its offerings include Property and Casualty Insurance, Motor Insurance, and Health Insurance. To ensure compliance with Iraqi law and protect the interests of Iraqi insurance policyholders both domestically and internationally, Cihan Insurance maintains a reinsurance treaty with the Iraqi Public Reinsurance Company under the Ministry of Finance. The company extends its insurance services through its branches and offices located in Erbil, Baghdad, Basra, Mosul, Duhok, and Slemani, demonstrating its commitment to accessibility and customer service across Iraq.

### **CIHAN PETROLEUM**

Since its inception in 2017, Cihan Petroleum has been steadfastly committed to providing the highest quality fuel products throughout the KRI. Starting with a single retail center in Erbil, the company has successfully expanded its operations. It now boasts a network of stations across the Erbil, Slemani, and Duhok Governorates. In addition, the Cihan Group is investing in solar technology, aligning with its goal to become a pioneering company in sustainable energy solutions within the KRI.







### HAJI YAHYA CHARITY ESTABLISHMENT

### Unwavering Commitment to Community and Social Development

Cihan Group's prowess in business is paralleled by its strong commitment to social responsibility, as demonstrated by the range of initiatives it supports. The Haji Yahya Charity Establishment, founded in 1993 and managed by the Bajger Family, epitomizes this commitment as the Group's philanthropic arm. The charity addresses various societal needs by focusing on youth development, education, environmental protection, and providing assistance to IDPs, refugees, and low-income families.

Furthering its investment in the community, the charity supports internship programs in collaboration with various international and local organizations. Additionally, it provides scholarships to over 1,000 students each year, ensuring that financial constraints do not impede access to education.

In response to environmental challenges, the Charity actively engages in tree planting and various environmental conservation initiatives.



### **Promising Future**



For over seven decades, the Cihan Group has built a legacy as a beacon of entrepreneurial expertise and resilience in the KRI. As one of the most prominent business entities in the region, it boasts a diversified portfolio encompassing 15 distinct business divisions. Integrated into a comprehensive national network, this portfolio ensures the Group's influential presence across Iraq.

The Group's evolution from an initial focus on textiles to encompassing a broad array of sectors stands as a testament to its adaptability and visionary leadership. This transition has positioned the Cihan Group as a driving force in the economic and social fabric of the KRI. Continuously pushing boundaries, the company is forging a path toward a promising future. CHAPTER — 2 BUSINESS



**INDUSTRIAL ZONES** 

**The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) is** expanding its industrial zones to attract more investment in the manufacturing sector. **Presently, there are 4** operational industrial zones, and the KRG is planning to establish an additional **13 special economic zones** across the region.



Industrial zones offer lucrative opportunities for investors looking to develop and operate businesses in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. The KRG is seeking interested parties who can contribute to the growth of these zones and capitalize on the potential they hold for success. CHAPTER — 2 BUSINESS

### Sustainable Excellence. Global Standards.

Haval Salih, CEO of 4 Bridges, discusses how the Boulevard leads the way in transforming residential developments in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq by seamlessly combining worldclass quality with sustainability.

# THE BOULEVARD





### What uniqueness does the Boulevard present to the Kurdish real estate market?

In the traditional approach, projects are typically assessed using key performance indicators such as timeline, budget, and cost. However, we've chosen not to rely solely on these conventional KPIs for our project evaluation. Instead, we've adopted a more progressive method, drawing inspiration from practices used in developed markets.

While meeting deadlines, staying within budget, and adhering to regulations are vital benchmarks, they merely establish the foundation. What holds paramount significance for us is the unwavering commitment to international quality standards, sustainability principles, and stringent safety protocols. These elements form the core criteria for evaluating the Boulevard project.

The cornerstone of our vision, across all projects we engage in as 4 Bridges, is to prioritize sustainability, quality, and safety over the pursuit of maximum profit. While the primary goal of any business is profitability, we believe, it is essential to align financial success with ethical considerations. Neglecting business ethics can lead to detrimental outcomes. Therefore, our vision ensures that success is not only measured by monetary gains but involves adhering to the highest international quality, sustainability and safety standards, even if the regulations do not enforce such practices in the country.

When it comes to adhering to international quality, sustainability, and safety standards, Boulevard stands out as a unique residential development, not only within the Kurdistan Region but also across Iraq.



### A substantial 70% of our built-up area to the transformation into open spaces and lush green areas.

### Which specific sustainability aspects have been incorporated into the Boulevard project?

As 4 Bridges, we firmly believe that sustainability isintertwined with both the security of our nation and the prosperity of its people. So, every action we take to diminish our impact on the environment for the well-being of future generations contributes to this aspect. For that reason, throughout every phase of Boulevard, we've meticulously integrated international sustainability standards — a rarity within this marketplace.

In our commitment to integrating green spaces throughout the development, we have made a significant contribution to reducing the environmental footprint of our project. This achievement is evident in our dedication of a substantial 70% of our built-up area to the transformation into open spaces and lush green areas.

Another notable sustainability aspect we have incorporated into our project is the establishment of a water treatment plant. This initiative holds significant importance due to one of the foremost challenges confronted by Iraq - water scarcity. The water storage serving the entire community will undergo recycling and subsequent storage. The reclaimed water will be repurposed for the extensive green areas within the project.





CHAPTER — 2 BUSINESS

Throughout every phase of Boulevard, we've meticulously integrated international sustainability standards.



In line with our commitment to sustainability, we've forged partnership with companies dedicated to following LEED principles, underscoring their dedication to a widely recognized sustainability certification. This commitment is reflected in their production processes, which prioritize the reduction of carbon footprint and the reuse of recycled materials, contributing to a more environmentally responsible approach. For instance, consider our cutting-edge HVAC system, which has led us to form a partnership with Samsung, a company aligned with LEED sustainability principles. Furthermore, we've established a partnership with Schindler, renowned for their Swissengineered elevators. Their dedication to sustainability is apparent in their product line, certified LEED and mirroring our commitment to eco-friendly practices.

### We exert our influence on decision-makers here to adopt Boulevard's model as a blueprint for other residential projects in the KRI.

Furthermore, we have constructed an additional park adjacent to our project, spanning 12,000 square meters. This park integrates with our project's landscape and design. All aspects within this park, including irrigation, will be sustained through recycling mechanisms connected to our project.

Yet another noteworthy stride we have taken towards sustainability is our utilization of the aluminum formwork construction technique. The environmentally friendly nature of aluminum formwork is two-fold. Its 100% recyclability not only aids in lowering carbon footprints but also presents an opportunity to curtail expenses and environmental impact by incorporating recycled aluminum into the formwork process. I am proud to affirm that the introduction of the Aluminum Formwork System marks a pioneering step in Iraq, as it makes its debut implementation within our project.

Last but certainly not least, Boulevard stands out as the sole development in Iraq to adopt centralized heating and cooling systems. This distinction reflects our strategic approach of harnessing cutting-edge technology to curtail energy consumption. Through this integration, we have achieved a substantial reduction in the energy load, from 100 to an impressive 70 percent. Additionally, our discreet outdoor units, engineered for silent operation, ensure that noise emissions remain below the 70-decibel threshold.





When considering quality control, which specific key aspects would you like to emphasize?

To uphold the highest standards of quality throughout the project's duration, we have allocated two percent of our budget for the implementation of quality assurance and quality control measures. Since its inception, our objective has extended beyond merely meeting the existing quality standards in the marketplace; instead, we are determined to surpass them. This commitment has driven us to prioritize international quality standards at every stage of Boulevard's development.

To uphold the highest standards of quality throughout the project's duration, we have allocated two percent of our budget for the implementation of quality assurance and quality control measures. Furthermore, we have established a dedicated department comprising a quality control consultant, a quality control officer, and a quality control engineer. This department plays a critical role in decisions regarding material selection and implementation methods.

As per our company's stringent quality control and assurance policy, let's take the example of our project's façade structure, which includes galvanized components. Our standard procedure for quality assurance mandates strict adherence to internationally recognized galvanization standards. Before incorporating galvanized materials, prospective bidders must furnish test results from accredited laboratories. These tests are essential to validate the zinc galvanization rate, confirming full compliance with the established standards.

Additionally, let's consider our procurement of tiles from a reputable Italian company. While the reputation of the company held significance, it wasn't the sole determinant. Our approach included careful sampling: random samples were selected as per our standards and underwent thorough testing at an independent third-party lab for certification. Our authorization for the contractor to proceed was only given upon receiving the certified results. This rigorous process underscores our commitment to maintaining quality standards in all aspects of our projects. Our dedication to safety is reflected in the fact that we have surpassed an impressive milestone of 7 million working hours without a single fatality.

### How would you assess the safety measures you have implemented in the Boulevard project?

Safety isn't merely a priority; it's an integral part of our reputation, which forms the very foundation of our identity. If you were to ask anyone about the caliber of our safety protocols, you'd find a unanimous agreement that Boulevard is widely recognized as the epitome of excellence across Iraq.

In the course of this project, we diligently adhere to the comprehensive guidelines set forth by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), a respected authority in safety standards. Central to our policy is a steadfast principle: any task that poses a risk to the well-being of our workforce will not be pursued. Our dedication is reflected in the fact that we have surpassed an impressive milestone of 7 million working hours without a single fatality. This remarkable accomplishment stands as evidence of our unwavering commitment to safety and is a source of immense pride.

Currently, our project boasts a team of 21 dedicated safety engineers overseeing the well-being of our workforce consisting of 1200 individuals. This ratio translates to approximately one safety engineer for every 120 workers, exceeding the international standard. This dedication underscores our steadfast focus on providing a safe environment for our team members to carry out their work effectively and with peace of mind.

### How has the integration of young Kurdish professionals influenced the progress of the Boulevard project?

We believe, the future of our nation is closely connected to our investments in capacity building. To this end, we've embarked on a journey to integrate recent graduates from local universities in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. By providing training and mentorship, we offer them a chance to participate in a project that follows international standards from inception to completion. This immersive experience offers them a unique platform for growth and professional development.

Our dedication to talent development extends beyond borders as well. We've paved the way for Kurdish professionals residing abroad to join our ranks and collaborate with us. Upon their return, their presence has had a transformative impact on our workforce. Notably, our head of design, a young Kurdish graduate from London, and our project coordinator, a talented young woman with a master's degree in construction management from Scotland, have set examples that inspire our local employees. Their accomplishments serve as inspiring role models for our employees, and their contributions carry significant weight within our project.



### About the CEO

Haval Salih is undoubtedly a prominent figure in modern management philosophy and a strong advocate for sustainability in the Iraqi real estate marketplace. With his expertise and multifaceted management strategy, he aims to transform the KRI's construction industry by promoting innovative methods that prioritize long-term success and environmental responsibility.

Haval Salih obtained his bachelor's degree in Civil Engineering from Saladdin University. He also earned a master's degree in Construction Management from the University Technology of Malaysia, graduating with high honors.

Beginning his professional journey at a Kurdish holding company as a project manager, Haval Salih spearheaded a project worth over \$80 million at the age of 28. His career trajectory continued to rise when he joined 4 Bridges. Initially serving as a project manager, his forwardthinking management approach swiftly led to his promotion to Deputy CEO. By 2021, he had risen to the role of CEO. Beyond his demanding role at 4 Bridges, he dedicates time to lecturing on Construction Management at Tishk University in Erbil, Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

One of his foremost ambitions is to execute projects that aren't solely distinctive within the Kurdistan Region of Iraq but also gain prominence on a global scale. He firmly believes that the path to international recognition hinges on the implementation of sustainable building practices and strict adherence to international quality standards. Given the best-in-class quality and sustainability accomplishments of the Boulevard project under his leadership, it's highly likely that Haval Salih's global vision will materialize in the near future.



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### **BUILDING FEATURES**

The towers are designed using the latest and most contemporary architectural advances that reflect the region's environment and climate.

- Walls and conductors constructed using heat and moisture insulating materials.
- Windows with double-pane glass to maximize insulation from the heat, protecting the building from fluctuations in temperature that occur between seasons.
- High-speed
   elevators for
   residents, in
   addition to special
   service elevators.
- Finest wood-lined interior doors.
- Luxury-brand sanitary ware.
- Kitchens equipped with stained-wood cupboards and high-tech exhaust fans.



### SPECIAL AMENITIES

In addition to basic services such as water, electricity, drainage systems, telecom services, and Internet, residents will enjoy exclusive benefits and services:

- Security surveillance system across the entire complex.
- Automatic fire alarm system.
- Emergency exit stairs.
- Underground parking spaces with direct interior access.
- Spacious visitors' parking.

- 24-hour maintenance and cleaning services
- Advanced energysaving heating and cooling system.
- Specific repository areas for garbage disposal.
- Service Facilities (Medical Clinic, Fire Station, Kindergarten, Mosque)

CHAPTER -2BUSINESS



**DIGITALIZATION** 

The vision of the Kurdistan **Regional Government** (KRG) is to embrace the digital age by seamlessly merging governance, business, and society into a symphony of digital excellence.

The KRG has strategically positioned digital transformation at the heart of its long-term development plans. The primary objective of this ambitious initiative is to streamline business processes, significantly bolstering efficiency, transparency, and accountability within governmental operations. However, the KRG's vision extends far beyond merely adopting technological advancements. It ambitiously aims to cultivate a robust digital ecosystem in which government services are seamlessly integrated. This approach empowers local entrepreneurs and businesses to fully leverage the myriad opportunities presented by the digital age. Additionally, a key component of this strategy is ensuring that the youth are equipped with digital literacy, thereby preparing them to thrive and innovate in this rapidly evolving digital world.



### The Department of Information Technology

Established in March 2007 under the premiership of His Excellency Nechirvan Barzani, the Department of Information Technology (DIT) serves as the cornerstone of the KRG's digital transformation. Tasked with spearheading this initiative, the DIT has successfully executed various pivotal projects since its establishment. A recent landmark achievement in its portfolio is the inauguration of the KRG's Data Center by Prime Minister Masrour Barzani. This vital facility centralizes data from various sectors, thereby enhancing transparency, reducing bureaucratic obstacles, and improving operational efficiency for both public institutions and private businesses. Notably, the development team at DIT, composed entirely of graduates from local universities, underscores the DIT's commitment to harnessing homegrown talent. This strategic move not only promotes a culture of innovation and technological advancement within the region but also signifies a significant leap toward realizing a more technologically sophisticated future for the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.







CHAPTER — 2 BUSINESS

### Elevating Elegance, Importing Luxury

Driven by the philosophy that 'true value lies not just in the price, but in the quality received'—a sentiment echoed by the legendary Warren Buffett— TENET embarked on its journey in Erbil to bring unparalleled quality and elegance to the market. With their vast selection and unwavering commitment to quality, coupled with a strategic approach to accessibility and reliability, TENET stands as a gateway to a refined taste and luxury in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

### **TENET GROUP**





TENET GROUP

TENET's journey began with a clear vision: to enrich the local market, which was saturated with subpar products, by offering items that embody excellence in craftsmanship and durability. With this vision in mind, TENET has meticulously curated its catalog to include only brands that meet the company's high standards of quality. This careful curation process is a testament to their dedication to providing true value to their customers.

While luxury retail is still in its early stages in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), TENET's leadership acknowledges the growing demand for high-end products in the market. In response to this emerging trend, the company aims to expand its business model with a vision to shape the future of luxury retail in both the KRI and the broader Iraqi market.





### TENETSTORE.COM: A gateway that connects the entire Iraqi market to a world of luxury.

### RIEDEL

TENET holds the exclusive distribution rights for RIEDEL, a prestigious brand renowned for its specially crafted crystal glassware for wine connoisseurs. With an extensive and unparalleled selection of RIEDEL products, TENET has firmly established itself as a leader in the luxury glassware market in Iraq.

### NACHTMANN

TENET has also secured exclusive distribution rights for Nachtmann in Iraq. Nachtmann, the esteemed lifestyle division of RIEDEL, is globally recognized for its exquisite crystal whiskey glasses, along with plates, bowls, and vases, all reflecting exceptional craftsmanship.

### PREMIUM CIGARS

TENET has taken the premium cigar market to new heights by securing exclusive reseller rights for Aganorsa Leaf and distributor rights for Rocky Patel in the Iraqi market.

### Aganorsa Leaf — Major force in the world of Nicaraguan tobacco

Aganorsa cultivates about 1,200 acres in Nicaragua annually, making it one of the world's largest tobacco grower. Notably, all their tobacco is cultivated using Cuban seeds.

### **Rocky Patel — Impressive collection of over 100 unique cigar blends**

Rocky Patel is one of the world's leading players in the cigar industry. With renowned factories in Nicaragua, Honduras, and the Dominican Republic, the company ensures meticulous production of their exquisite cigars across Central America.

### **ACCESSIBILITY & CUSTOMER TRUST**

At the heart of TENET's philosophy lies an unwavering commitment to building and maintaining customer trust, a principle that forms a foundational pillar of their business. From online to direct sales, from delivery to after-sales service, every aspect of their operation is designed with the customer's satisfaction in mind. By prioritizing the customer at every turn, Tenet is setting a new standard for customer relationship in the market.

In an era where customer experience reigns supreme, TENET has woven accessibility into the very fabric of its operations. The company's after-sales operations are robust and responsive, ensuring customers can contact the company 24/7 and receive immediate responses. Supported by a sophisticated system on their website, TENET actively monitors customer feedback and promptly resolves any issues, thereby ensuring a seamless customer experience. "Our approach extends beyond resolving complaints; it's about transforming a dissatisfied customer into a loyal one," emphasizes Dori Abouzeid, highlighting the company's dedication to long-term customer relationships.

### **STORAGE UNDER OPTIMAL CONDITIONS**

TENET's attention to detail is exemplified in its meticulous handling of luxury items. Each crystal piece is stored under optimal conditions in the company's standalone 15,000-square-foot storage facility, and every cigar box is also stored under optimal conditions in the company warehouse.

### DELIVERY

Recognizing the critical importance of logistics, TENET ensures safe and prompt product delivery, thereby enhancing customer satisfaction and trust. The company prioritizes door-to-door and on-time delivery, guaranteeing that every product, from fragile crystal glassware to premium cigars, reaches the customer in impeccable condition.

### SAFE SHOPPING EXPERIENCE

With a keen eye on the evolving digital landscape, TENET is poised to usher in a new era of safe and reliable online shopping in Iraq. TENET's online stores employ EV and SSL encryption, the most advanced and secure encryption technology currently available. Additionally, the company's websites have achieved PCI certification, which requires passing approximately 2,000 security tests, demonstrating TENET's commitment to protecting their customers' data. The company's focus on cybersecurity is further reinforced by regular audits. These ensure that TENET not only remains at the forefront of data privacy and cybersecurity but also maintains a flawless record in these critical areas.







"We are more than just a retailer; we're a symbol of luxury, quality, and enduring value in the market." Dori F. Abouzeid, CEO, TENET

### BRAND KURDISTAN REGION OF IRAQ



### **CUTTING-EDGE TECHNOLOGY**

In a bold move to merge consumers' shopping experiences with cutting-edge technology, TENET is set to implement augmented reality (AR) in its online stores. This integration of AR technology represents a significant leap forward in online shopping, offering an interactive experience that allows customers to visualize products in a realistic and engaging manner. By providing customers with a more informative and reliable way to make purchasing decisions, TENET continues to uphold its vision of becoming a company synonymous with trust, value, and innovative customer experiences.

### EBABYLONIA.COM: TENET's Bold Foray into E-Commerce

In a strategic move to diversify and expand its digital footprint, TENET has unveiled its e-commerce platform, e-Babylonia. The platform is set to revolutionize the online shopping experience in Iraq and beyond.

E-Babylonia is being meticulously developed to ensure that every aspect, from product availability to delivery, aligns with TENET's high standards. The online store will offer a wide array of products, including electronics, cosmetics, fashion, and home products. This expansion strategy demonstrates the company's aim to position e-Babylonia as a one-stop-shop for quality and convenience, responding to evolving market trends.

What sets e-Babylonia apart is its vision to serve the entire Iraqi market. This ambitious goal underscores TENET's confidence in their logistical capabilities. By extending their reach across all of Iraq, e-Babylonia is poised to become a major player in the Iraqi e-commerce landscape, further solidifying TENET's position as a leader in the digital marketplace.

### **The Path Forward**

In a world where the market is often dictated by price over quality, TENET stands apart. Its model is straightforward: to introduce products that not only meet a high standard of luxury but also enrich the lives of their users. TENET's journey and its leadership's vision position the company as an ideal partner for global luxury brands seeking expansion in the Iraqi marketplace. As TENET continues to grow and evolve, it remains a beacon of excellence in a market hungry for true quality.



CHAPTER — 2 BUSINESS



The Kurdistan Region of Iraq possesses around <u>25 trillion cubic</u> <u>feet of proven gas reserves</u>, making it one of the largest in the Middle East. Developing these reserves is crucial for the KRI to become a driving force in its future economic growth.

THE ENERGY

The Kurdistan Region of Iraq holds an estimated <u>45 billion barrels of</u> <u>oil reserves</u>, making it the region with the 7<sup>th</sup> largest oil reserves in the Middle East.

PAGE 114

### The Frontrunner in the Beverage Industry

Al Hayat aspires to establish itself as one of the premier Pepsi bottlers globally.

## AL HAVAT GROUP



AL HAYAT GROUP

The Kurdish conglomerate Al Hayat has experienced a remarkable period of growth over the last three years. During this time, the company has successfully doubled its production capacity and has been honored with prestigious recognition from PepsiCo as the leading bottler in the Middle East region for its exceptional growth strides. What truly distinguishes this accomplishment is that Al Hayat managed to achieve this impressive expansion while adhering to the same production and distribution lines it has maintained for years. Furthermore, this was accomplished using the same factory facilities and workforce, underscoring the company's ability to leverage its existing strengths and offerings for significant success.



### Al Hayat has successfully increased its production levels by approximately 35% in recent years while maintaining its established product lines.

### **Conquering the Market**

By leveraging existing resources and effectively implementing management practices, Al Hayat has successfully increased its production levels by approximately 35% in recent years while maintaining its established product lines. This notable achievement showcases the company's prowess in enhancing productivity and upholding product consistency.

Additionally, the company experienced a significant surge in sales, enabling it to capture an impressive 10% market share from its primary competitor over the last two years. This achievement underscores Al Hayat's growing prominence in the market.

### **Customer-Centricity**

One of the driving forces behind Al Hayat's growing market share is its customer-centric approach. While maintaining the core identity of the Pepsi brand, the company has utilized consumer insights to craft new recipes that better align with its customers' tastes. Based on their market research, Al Hayat introduced Rock Star and Pepsi Zero in 2023. The company's management anticipates that these new offerings will make a substantial contribution to their market growth trajectory.

### Keeping a finger on the pulse of the market

At the heart of Al Hayat's notable achievements in recent years lies its formidable distribution network, serving as a vital bridge to its varied clientele. The company's distribution infrastructure is more than just a network of routes and storage facilities; it embodies a deep well of market intelligence. The brand's extensive reach enables it to draw insights from both the urban hubs and the rural regions of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI).

### Market Execution to the Highest **Standards**

Marketing has also played a crucial role in Al Hayat's growth trajectory in recent years. Al Hayat's marketing department has redefined the essence of in-store marketing, ingeniously showcasing its diverse range of products in supermarkets and bolstering engagement with consumers. Additionally, through initiatives ranging from interactive social media campaigns to collaborations with influencers, the company has fortified brand awareness with its robust digital presence in the marketplace.



### **Quality Control: Setting an Example for Others to Follow**

By adhering to PepsiCo's stringent quality control measures, Al Hayat employs a rigorous quality control process that incorporates third-party assessments. This external validation ensures the credibility and precision of Al Hayat's quality evaluations.

To date, Al Hayat's products have consistently attained an impressive score of no less than 95% in these third-party quality assessments, positioning the company among the top 2% in the AMESA region where Pepsi operates.

Looking ahead, the company has set an even more ambitious target for 2024: to attain an outstanding score of 97% in third-party quality assessments, which would position them within the top 1% globally.

### **Food Safety System Certification** 22000 & ISO 9001

Al Hayat proudly holds certifications that underscore its commitment to product excellence and safety. With the Food Safety System Certification 22000 and ISO 9001 accolades, the company showcases its dedication to maintaining the highest standards in the production of soft drinks and mineral water. These certifications not only validate Al Hayat's adherence to stringent quality protocols but also demonstrate its focus on delivering products that meet the highest levels of safety and customer satisfaction.

### **ISO 17025**

To enhance its capabilities in conducting precise testing, sampling, and providing accurate results, Al Hayat's lab is working towards obtaining ISO 17025 accreditation. Once it achieves ISO 17025 certification, the company's lab will be able to issue official quality certificates for companies seeking to test their products.

At present, there is only one lab in the Middle East, located in Dubai, that can provide certificates to companies seeking certification for their products' quality. Al Hayat's management is determined to become the second lab in the region to offer this service.



### Al Hayat aspires to be a leader in sustainable business practices in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

Al Hayat aims to be among the very best water scarcity in Iraq. To address this challenge, Pepsi bottler globally. the company has invested in cutting-edge technologies that enable it to recycle water Al Hayat is ready and awaiting official approval across its operations. In the past, it took 2.7 from PepsiCo to conduct a comprehensive liters of water to produce a single liter of training program for bottlers in the Middle carbonated soft drink. However, driven by their East. With a focus on enhancing capabilities, commitment to sustainability and operational this training initiative aims to empower bottlers efficiency, the company has impressively with the knowledge, skills, and tools necessary reduced this ratio to 1.8 liters. Through the to excel in the industry. implementation of efficient water management, the company has notably lessened its reliance on fresh water sources, thereby easing the strain Sustainability: on local ecosystems.

### **Inspiring Positive Change for the Planet and People**

A pivotal aspect of Al Hayat's vision is its steadfast commitment to sustainability, a vision that aligns seamlessly with that of PepsiCo. To transform Al Hayat into a green company. the management promotes sustainable initiatives aimed at minimizing the company's overall ecological footprint. These endeavors range from packaging innovations that curtail waste and reduce energy consumption in its facilities, to the launch of recycling initiatives across all departments, as well as investments in solar energy sources. Collectively, these efforts position Al Hayat as a responsible corporate citizen.

automation for dissolving sugar. Previously, dissolving sugar required temperatures as high as 85 degrees. However, with Al Hayat's new automation technology, the company has successfully reduced this temperature to just 40 degrees. This significant reduction in temperature translates into reduced costs, a more sustainable approach to manufacturing, and a greener footprint for their business. By focusing on sustainable practices, Al Hayat has been able to enhance operational efficiency and reduce expenses. The significant reductions in both raw material costs and water wastage over the past year stand as a testament A significant facet of Al Hayat's dedication to the brand's commitment to sustainability and to sustainability lies in its emphasis on water innovation. reuse, a matter of utmost importance due to

Another project worth mentioning that Al Hayat embarked on is the introduction of CIB CHAPTER — 2 BUSINESS

Al Hayat's HR vision revolves around elevating accountability, fairness, and employee satisfaction.

### **Human Resources: Transferring PepsiCo's Best Practices to Erbil**

By placing employee engagement at the forefront, Al Hayat's HR vision is to cultivate a motivated and highly productive workforce, ultimately propelling the beverage company's success in the marketplace.

The company facilitates the participation of its employees in a range of training courses both in the country and abroad. These courses not only bolster employees' professional competencies but also provide valuable exposure to industry-leading practices and insights. Additionally, the company has implemented a comprehensive HR protocol to ensure that all employees have a clear understanding of their roles and potential career progression paths. Through this policy, Al Hayat aims to nurture a positive work environment while recognizing the unwavering dedication exhibited by its employees.



Al Hayat's success in the KRI exemplifies the company's strategic insight and adaptability. Through tailoring products to local preferences, maintaining high-quality control, formulating innovative marketing strategies, harnessing distribution technology, and investing in sustainability and human resources, the company has carved a significant niche in the consumer goods sector of the KRI. With its visionary leadership and strategic ability to adapt to evershifting market dynamics, Al Hayat is wellpositioned for forthcoming expansion and continued growth.



### **The Prospect**

CHAPTER — 2 BUSINESS



PRIVATE SECTOR

**The Kurdistan Regional Government** (KRG) is making significant strides in supporting the private sector to foster economic growth through structural reforms and strategic initiatives. By focusing on the development of the private sector, the KRG aims to create a robust economy, leveraging SMEs, which constitute about 50 percent of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq's workforce.

**Prime Minister Masrour Barzani** launched Project Bloom in 2023, embodying his government's vision to bolster the private sector. **Designed specifically for SMEs,** this initiative offers up to 150 million dinars in loans to help these businesses expand. By providing financial support, the KRG sends a strong message of confidence in the private sector's potential to significantly contribute to the economy.

The emphasis on SMEs and startups, coupled with strategic financial support through initiatives like Project Bloom, is expected to pave the way for a more diversified economy. It promises to harness the talent and entrepreneurial spirit, aiming for a prosperous future for the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

### **150m dinars** in loans to help SMEs expand.



### Committed to a Higher Standard of Excellence

Macair's expansion into the Kurdistan Region of Iraq in 2011 marked the beginning of a new chapter in corporate aviation services in the Region.

## FLIGHT SUPPORT



PAGE 129

### MACAIR FLIGHT SUPPORT

Macair Flight Support is a diversified corporate aviation services company. It specializes in FBO services, worldwide aircraft charters, sales, management, and acquisitions. The company began its operations in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), serving as the exclusive provider of private flight support at Erbil International Airport (EIA) since 2011.

The CEO of Macair, Dori Abouzeid, is a highly experienced air transport pilot with over 15,000 flight hours in various types of aircraft, ranging from small to intercontinental jets, including large Boeing jets. Having founded two successful aviation companies in the U.S., Dori has leveraged his extensive global aviation business experience to innovate the private aircraft industry in the KRI.









Since its inception in 2011, Macair Flight Support has demonstrated remarkable resilience and consistent growth in the KRI. This success can be attributed to the company's high standards, which enable it to offer EIA the best possible aircraft handling services. These services include everything from red carpet treatment to passenger and crew support, aircraft fueling, concierge services, and assistance with customs and immigration procedures for both crews and passengers. By prioritizing the customer experience, Macair ensures luxurious service for its clients, whether they are arriving or departing.

Safety and security are cornerstones of Macair's operational ethos. The company ensures its team is proficient in safety protocols, guaranteeing that every aspect of aircraft handling is executed with the utmost precision and care. Macair's firm commitment to safety and security sets it apart in an industry where these factors are of paramount importance.

Another pivotal factor in Macair's success is its team. By employing the best in the industry, the company places significant emphasis on continuous training and fostering synergy among its members. This approach ensures cohesive team operations, further enhancing the quality of service and efficiency. Macair's leadership believes that a highly capable team dynamic is key to the company's continued growth and success in the years ahead.







### **SERVICES**

### 01. **FBO and Flight Support**

As the exclusive VIP aircraft flight support provider in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, Macair offers unparalleled aviation assistance to its clients. The company's expertise in FBO services guarantees a seamless experience for every client.

### 02. **Aircraft Management**

Owning a corporate aircraft represents a substantial capital investment that demands expert and meticulously orchestrated management. Macair provides superior on-demand air charter services worldwide, ensuring the efficient and reliable management of its clients' aviation assets.

### 03. **Sales and Acquisitions**

Macair provides comprehensive services in aircraft brokerage, acquisition, and disposition, catering to both aircraft owners and entities interested in acquiring new or selling existing aircraft. With years of experience, the company has established long-standing relationships with aviation professionals, including aircraft owners, brokers, buyers, and sellers, ensuring a smooth and efficient transaction process.







### 04. **Aircraft Charters** and Medivac

Offering worldwide aircraft charters and brokerages, Macair adheres to the highest standards of excellence. Whether it's a light, mid-size, large-cabin jet, or turboprop, the company provides the perfect aircraft, matched with impeccable service, to meet its clients' specific needs.

### 05. **Concierge Services**

Macair's concierge services extend from in-flight amenities to on-ground accommodations. The company's attentive and multilingual staff is adept at fulfilling even the most specific and niche requests, ensuring a personalized and luxurious experience for its clients.

### **06. Aircraft Detailing**

Macair provides meticulous aircraft cleaning and detailing services at Erbil International Airport. The company's commitment to detail ensures that each aircraft is always in pristine condition, reflecting the high standards of its operations.

### **The Road Ahead**

Macair's journey in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq is a testament to its resilience and dedication to excellence. With experienced leadership, a welltrained staff, and an unwavering commitment to safety, the company is well-positioned to continue its trajectory of growth and service excellence in the corporate aviation sector of the KRI. Looking forward, Macair's core values of high ethics and standards will undoubtedly continue to drive its success.



### **"Our passion for excellence drives us** to constantly push the boundaries and exceed the expectations of our clients."



Dori F. Abouzeid, CEO, Macair Flight Support

CHAPTER -2**BUSINESS** 



AGRICULTURE

Agriculture, as the untapped pulse of prosperity, has the potential to become the future cornerstone of the **Kurdistan Region of Iraq's** economy.



### Pomegranate

Pomegranates are considered one of the most commercially significant fruit crops in the KRI. The city of Halabja, in particular, is renowned for its high-quality pomegranates. Over the past two decades, pomegranate production in the KRI has steadily increased. Since 2022, the KRI has also started exporting its pomegranates to the GCC markets.

The Kurdistan Region of Iraq is blessed with fertile land and a diverse climate, creating conditions conducive to cultivating a wide variety of crops. Many of these crops are highly sought after in regional markets. Recognizing the considerable potential of its agriculture industry, the Kurdistan Regional Government is committed to enhancing the technical skills of its farmers. The goal is to improve the quality of their produce, allowing them to access export markets.

As of 2022, Kurdish agriculture firms have begun exporting their products to neighboring countries. Among these products, honey, pomegranates, and apples are the most in demand.





### Apple

The apples cultivated in the mountainous regions of Barwari, located in the Duhok Province, have earned a well-deserved reputation as one of the most renowned agricultural products from the KRI. Boasting exceptional quality, Barwari apples have captivated both local and international consumers. The year 2023 marked a significant milestone for these apple producers, as they initiated their first exports to the markets of the GCC.

### Honev

As of 2022, the KRI's honey producers have begun to earn a well-deserved reputation for their exceptional honey quality. They have taken a significant step forward by venturing into the export market, with a particular focus on the GCC markets.



### From the Kurdistan Region of Iraq to a Global Stage

Transitioning from modest beginnings in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq to establishing a global presence, the trajectory of Moonline is truly remarkable.

MULINE



PAGE 139
MOONLINE

Moonline has experienced outstanding growth since its founding in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) in 2010. In just over a decade, the company has expanded its operations to five countries and achieved the prestigious No.1 ranking in GDS segmentation for multiple consecutive years. From its humble beginnings with a small team, Moonline today proudly employs over 300 dedicated staff members. The company's impressive collaboration with over 10,000 international travel agencies across 170 countries has resulted in a staggering 1.5 million passengers and over 300 corporate clients entrusting their travel needs to the Moonline brand.



#### High-Touch Customer Service

Moonline has earned a trusted reputation in both the travel-tourism and travel technology sectors due to several factors, chief among them being its unwavering commitment to efficiency, exceptional service delivery, investment in innovative technologies, and adherence to sustainable practices. Whether catering to business or leisure travelers, Moonline expertly addresses the needs of its clients with utmost dedication. This commitment is manifested in their rigorous attention to product and service development, as well as in the strategic recruitment of talent aligned with their vision.

When asked about the secret behind Moonline's rapid growth, CEO Brwa Qadir emphasizes the company's customercentric approach, anchored in serving people. He notes that whether traveling for business or leisure, the primary needs of travelers revolve around two critical aspects: efficiency and convenience. "With these needs in mind, we excel in meticulous planning, laying the foundation for our highly efficient operations. Our vision has evolved over time, but our core mission remains unchanged—to be pioneers in both local and international travel and tourism. Our driving force is the passion to surpass expectations and deliver exceptional experiences to all our valued

Another important reason for Moonline's success is directly attributed to their unwavering dedication to nurturing a highly committed team. Moonline executives believe that investing in their team members is tantamount to investing in the company's growth. "By providing comprehensive training programs and fostering an environment that encourages ongoing skill development, we unlock the boundless potential within each member of our staff," adds Brwa Qadir.

To maintain its top-tier services, Moonline has earned the designation of an IATA-Accredited Agent, demonstrating its commitment to the highest standards in airline services. Moreover, the company's dedication to quality and excellence is underscored by its ISO 9001:2015 certification for Quality Management which Moonline has held since 2016. Additionally, Moonline has received the ISO 14001:2015 certification for its Environmental Management System, highlighting its commitment to sustainable practices. Both certifications, granted by the esteemed PECB, underscore Moonline's pledge to reduce its environmental impact and to uphold the highest-quality services in every facet of its operations.



customers," Qadir explains.







Our collaboration with over 10,000 international travel agencies across 170 countries-all expertly managed by a dedicated team of over 300 employees—has led to a staggering 1.5 million passengers entrusting their travel to us.

#### **Harnessing Digital Innovations**

Embracing technological innovations has been a crucial factor in elevating Moonline's position within both the international travel-tourism and travel technology industries. In response to the digital age, Moonline's leadership has consistently invested in digital platforms to enhance their services, ensuring a hassle-free travel planning experience for their clients. These enhancements include user-friendly websites, mobile applications, and advanced booking systems. Moreover, Moonline's booking platforms are designed to offer unique and sustainable travel options, featuring eco-friendly accommodations and experiences. These options not only cater to environmentally conscious travelers but also provide greater convenience through Moonline's sophisticated B2B and B2C network platforms.

Moonline's B2B and B2C network stands as an epicenter of global travel solutions, marked by its expansive scale and reach. "Our collaboration with over 10,000 international travel agencies across 170 countries-all expertly managed by a dedicated team of over 300 employees—has led to a staggering 1.5 million passengers entrusting their travel to us. Our robust infrastructure not only highlights our position as a rising player in the travel and tourism industry but also emphasizes our commitment to delivering comprehensive, top-tier travel solutions to our partners worldwide," Brwa Qadir emphasizes.

CHAPTER — 2 BUSINESS

Through Babylon Booking, Moonline's clients have access to tickets from over 800 airlines globally, including approximately 200 budget carriers. This ensures that they receive the most favorable fares available.

#### **Powered by Moonline**

#### **Babylon Booking**

In 2015, Moonline solidified its position in the industry with the launch of its own B2B portal, BabylonBooking.com, specializing in flight reservations. This portal grants both IATA and non-IATA travel agents access to a vast selection of airline content, exclusive local market deals, and highly competitive fares. Additionally, it has played a significant role in helping the company achieve a leading position in GDS segmentation for several consecutive years. Babylon Booking is expanding its global reach while maintaining a distinctive presence in Iraq.

#### **Babylon Holiday**

Another key investment by Moonline in the travel technology sector is the creation of BabylonHoliday.com, a platform designed to provide premium travel and tourism services to its agency partners, both in Iraq and worldwide. Its primary objective is to consolidate a wide range of travel services into one comprehensive platform.

Babylon Holiday offers more than just access to an extensive network of over 1.25 million hotels in 170 countries; it also facilitates customized searches for hotels, tours, activities, transfers, and packages, all tailored to individual preferences. The platform boasts instant availability and provides secure online booking and payment options. As of 2023, Babylon Holiday has attracted over 2,400 travel agencies from 75 countries.

#### Visa Advisers

Another key service introduced by Moonline is Visa Advisers, which offers an array of visa services, including tourism, business, and student visas. The company also assists clients in securing residence permits and obtaining citizenship through investment.

#### **Booking Advisors**

In addition to its B2B portals, Moonline has made a significant impact in the B2C sector with the launch of BookingAdvisors. com. This consumer-focused portal offers a comprehensive suite of services, including flight and hotel bookings, package deals, tours, activities, and transfers, along with visa requirement information.

#### Medi Advisors

Medi Advisors, a key offering from Moonline, provides access to safe, effective, and patientcentered medical treatments at affordable prices. The company coordinates the entire treatment journey, encompassing assessments by expert doctors and handling logistics like flight ticketing, hotel accommodations, and visa issuance.



#### The Corporate Travel Vanguard

One key milestone in Moonline's journey is its strengthened position as the preferred partner in the corporate travel sector. Since partnering with "Lufthansa City Center" as the Iraqi franchise in 2016, and subsequently joining the FCM, the premier corporate travel division of the Flight Centre Travel Group in mid-2021, Moonline has offered unparalleled travel and tourism solutions to its corporate clients. As a leading travel management company, Moonline expertly serves over 300 corporate clients across various industries, adeptly meeting their travel management needs.

Moonline currently serves over 300 corporate clients across diverse industries, expertly catering to their travel management needs.



#### The Global Network: Connecting Travelers and Businesses

Since its inception in 2010, Moonline has meticulously crafted an expansive global network, interlinking an impressive array of customers and suppliers across diverse business models. Focusing on B2B, B2C, and the corporate market segments, the company serves as a bridge, connecting millions to travel experiences through its operational and sales offices in five countries: Iraq, France, Germany, the United Arab Emirates, and Türkiye.

#### At a Glance:

#### Associations

Trusted by over 10,000 international travel agencies, more than 3,000 sub-agents, and upwards of 6,000 Iraqi travel agencies, Moonline showcases its reliability and esteemed reputation within the industry.

#### **Global Reach**

Provides access to 1.25 million hotels across more than 170 international markets.

#### Carriers

Offers access to over 800 global airlines, which includes more than 200 budget-friendly, low-cost carriers.

**Annual Footprint** Proudly supports 1.5 million travelers annually.

#### **Corporate Trust**

Serves a diverse portfolio of over 300 corporate clients.

#### **Offices in Iraq**

Located in Erbil, Slemani, Duhok, Baghdad, Basra, and Mosul.

#### **International Offices**

Established in Dubai, Paris, Darmstadt, and Istanbul.

# Over the past decade, Moonline has carved out a respected name for itself in both the travel-tourism and travel technology industries.

#### **Building Strategic Partnerships**

One of the crucial factors contributing to Moonline's success since 2010 has been its ability to establish strong and diverse strategic partnerships with leading companies in the hospitality and aviation sectors. This extensive network spans different geographical locations and encompasses various tiers of service, enabling the company to offer its clients a comprehensive range of options and unparalleled value. Here are some of the most important strategic partnerships that Moonline has established over the years:

#### Hospitality:

Juniper, Hotelbeds, Expedia, Roibos, TBO, Travelgate X Airlines: Air Arabia, Turkish Airlines, EgyptAir Franchises & GDS: FCM, Lufthansa City Center, Galileo by Travelport Exclusive Representation: UEFA EURO 2024, FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, AFC Asian Cup 2023, Stars On Board 2023





#### **The Road Ahead**

From its humble beginnings to setting its sights on the global stage, Moonline's journey is a vivid testament to its ability to build a unique company culture and to optimize its business strategy to stay aligned with the latest trends. As the leadership at Moonline looks to the future, their vision remains clear: to continue expanding their regional and global footprint, forging new strategic partnerships, enhancing their diverse services, and remaining the travel platform of choice for those seeking unmatched experiences. "Let us embrace the wisdom of Albert Einstein, who reminds us that imagination is more important than knowledge. With this insight, we can ignite our creativity, explore new horizons, and unlock endless possibilities," Brwa Qadir concludes.



CHAPTER — 2 BUSINESS



INFRASTRUCTURE

The Kurdistan Regional Government has allocated significant funding towards improving its road network infrastructure over the last two decades.



In the long term, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq's economic development will be shaped by how infrastructure investments are implemented. Transportation networks, silos, electricity lines, and water pipelines have been identified as priorities for infrastructure investment, and the Kurdistan Regional Government has been directing significant levels of funding towards these projects. AmCham Kurdistan Advocacy. Networking. Strategic Advisory.

AmCham Kurdistan has established itself as a leader in business-to-government advocacy and networking platform within the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.





PAGE 154

CHAPTER — 2 BUSINESS

AmCham Kurdistan serves as an essential partner for American companies in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) and Kurdish companies in the US. Its foundation is strengthened by cooperation with the US Chamber of Commerce, significantly boosting commercial relations between the US and Iraq, especially within the KRI.

#### **Expanding Activities**

Over recent years, AmCham Kurdistan has significantly increased the number of its networking events, connecting members with new business opportunities and high-level government contacts. Additionally, the business organization has outlined an ambitious program for its members, prioritizing investment opportunities, sustainable development, human capital development, women's leadership, and fostering greater engagement between U.S. businesses operating in the KRI and Kurdish businesses in the U.S.

#### **Rapid Growth**

The remarkable surge in AmCham's activities and the increasing demand for its services are further underscored by the addition of 30 new members in the last two years. This significant expansion speaks to AmCham Kurdistan's growing influence and relevance within the KRI business landscape.



"Our primary mission is to advance American business interests overseas and cement the American-Kurdish relationship through business and trade ties."

Dori F. Abouzeid, AmCham Kurdistan President









The leadership at AmCham Kurdistan believes that the U.S. and the KRI are great partners, yet they acknowledge that much untapped potential remains.



#### **The Potential**

The leadership at AmCham Kurdistan believes that the U.S. and the KRI are great partners, yet they acknowledge that much untapped potential remains. The KRI is still a largely undeveloped market, in need of a full range of products and services, especially in IT, industry, agriculture, and tourism. These sectors offer numerous opportunities to American businesses in the medium to long term.

#### Join the Network

Business and trade cooperation has the potential to enrich the US-KRI relationship with energy, vitality, and innovation. Aimed at cementing American-Kurdish ties, AmCham Kurdistan leverages dynamic synergy to build a robust connection within the business communities of the US and the KRI. The active engagement of its members highlights the shared values and interests among business owners in both the US and the KRI. By joining, members have the opportunity to showcase their companies to policymakers and share their business insights and experiences, contributing to the development of economic policies that support growth. Consequently, AmCham Kurdistan's leadership encourages all businesses and professionals to join their efforts in strengthening American-Kurdish relationships.

# HUMAN CAPITAL



# 160 - 199

By investing in their human capital, countries, regions, and cities can unlock the full potential of their people, driving sustainable and inclusive growth.

A nation's most valuable asset is its people. The quality of a nation's workforce, directly influenced by its education system, speaks volumes about its capabilities and future trajectory. A well-educated, skilled workforce is synonymous with high productivity, innovation, and competitiveness. Such a workforce does not just fuel the economy; it propels the nation into attracting multinational corporations and high-value investments. This is the essence of a strong national brand – a brand built not on promises, but on the tangible achievements of its people. Additionally, education and skill development are not mere economic tools; they are instruments of social inclusion, equality, and overall well-being. A nation that invests in these areas nurtures a healthier, more knowledgeable, and engaged citizenry. Such investment reflects a governance vision that values every individual, fostering a sense of belonging and unity. This sense of collective well-being and social harmony is a compelling aspect of a nation's brand.

In the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), specific educational institutions, NGOs, and companies have emerged as leaders in nurturing local talent and contributing to the Region's brand. Their role in shaping skilled and knowledgeable individuals who contribute to the KRI's image is undeniable. This chapter profiles these entities, not just as centers of learning, but as ambassadors of the KRI's brand and breeding grounds for the next generation of leaders and innovators in the KRI.

### The SABIS® Network in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq

SABIS<sup>®</sup> has achieved remarkable success in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, expanding its network of schools and solidifying its position as a leading educational institution since its establishment in 2006.

# SABIS





PAGE 163

CHAPTER — 3 HUMAN CAPITAL

#### **SABIS**<sup>®</sup>

The story of SABIS<sup>®</sup> dates back to 1886 when the first International School of Choueifat was founded in the village of Choueifat, a suburb of Beirut, Lebanon. Guided by a clear set of core values and an unwavering commitment to creating a better world through education, in 1975, SABIS<sup>®</sup> began their expansion program outside Lebanon and opened their first school in the UAE. Soon after, SABIS<sup>®</sup> schools were opened all around the world, including the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). Today, SABIS<sup>®</sup> has an active presence in the public and private sectors in twenty-one countries on five continents.

In 2015, SABIS<sup>®</sup> launched a new concept of schools into the network, CADMUS<sup>®</sup> International Schools. CADMUS<sup>®</sup> International Schools, follow the same high-quality education that is offered in all SABIS<sup>®</sup> schools on optimized campuses located in cities around the world. Students benefit from all SABIS<sup>®</sup> proprietary digital classroom solutions which include Interactive Whiteboards, E-books, and E-learning tools that perfectly blend the latest in educational technology with SABIS<sup>®'</sup> proprietary teaching methods.

The first CADMUS<sup>®</sup> International School was launched in Duhok, the KRI. CADMUS<sup>®</sup> International School — Duhok opened its doors in September 2018 and was followed by additional schools in Baghdad, Iraq; Cairo, Egypt; Erbil, KRI; and soon in Zenata, Morocco, and a second school in Baghdad, Iraq.



#### A HIGH-QUALITY EDUCATION

All schools in the SABIS<sup>®</sup> Network educate students through a proprietary approach to education known as the SABIS<sup>®</sup> Educational System. The features of this system include a well-structured curriculum, proven teaching methods, constructive assessments, advanced educational technology, and continuous follow-up and support to ensure that students are receiving a complete, 360° education. From Kindergarten to High School, SABIS<sup>®</sup> students follow a curriculum that is designed to establish a solid academic foundation and develop students' logical reasoning and critical thinking skills, while generating excitement for lifelong learning.

As a result of their strong academic foundation, students in SABIS<sup>®</sup> schools perform at high levels academically. They have excelled on internationally recognized, standardized exams like AP<sup>®</sup>, SAT, IELTS, IGCSEs, and A-levels, and have had a long record of acceptance and success at the most competitive universities locally and around the globe, mainly in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom and the rest of Europe, the Middle and Far East, and Australia.





SABIS<sup>®</sup> A leader in education since 1886

#### A CLOSER LOOK AT SABIS® SCHOOLS IN THE KRI

Since the opening of its first school in the KRI in 2006, SABIS<sup>®</sup> has established a strong presence in the Region and consolidated its international reputation that is rooted in a well-developed philosophy that seeks to provide students with a top-quality education that prepares them to meet the challenges of a changing world.

#### The International School of Choueifat - Erbil

Founded in 2006, The International School of Choueifat - Erbil (ISC-Erbil) first opened its doors to 200 students. Over the years, ISC-Erbil steadily grew and today, the school educates close to 2,000 students, all of whom enjoy the school's state-of-the-art campus where they develop the foundation of knowledge and skills they will need to achieve success.

Over the last fifteen years, through periods of regional prosperity and challenge, ISC-Erbil has built a successful track record and a reputation for excellence. ISC-Erbil students have become known for having a solid academic foundation and the essential life skills needed to achieve success.

#### The International School of Choueifat - Sulaimani

As a result of ISC-Erbil's success and the growing demand for quality education across the KRI, the International School of Choueifat - Sulaimani (ISC-Sulaimani) opened its doors in 2009, bringing the renowned SABIS<sup>®</sup> education to the local and international community in Sulaimani.

Originally housed in a temporary facility in Sulaimani, the school will be moving to its permanent campus in September 2024. The new campus at Raparin Qularaisy will feature world-class facilities including an indoor swimming pool, gym, football fields, basketball courts, event hall, kindergarten building, and modern classrooms.



#### CADMUS<sup>®</sup> International School – Duhok

CADMUS® International School - Duhok (CADMUS® Duhok) is the first CADMUS® school to open in the KRI in 2018. The school offers students in and around Duhok a high-quality, international education. The school currently welcomes students from Kindergarten through Grade 9 and will be adding a level each year to reach Grade 12.

Students enrolled in CADMUS® Duhok benefit from a world-class curriculum, cutting-edge education technology, proven teaching methods, an engaging student life, and more, as the school, like all schools in the network, offers the SABIS® Educational System. They also benefit from the school's new, purpose-built campus designed with the students in mind.

#### CADMUS<sup>®</sup> International School – Erbil CADMUS® International School – Erbil is the third CADMUS<sup>®</sup> school to open in Iraq and the second within the KRI. The school officially opened its doors in September 2023, offering students in and around Erbil a high-quality international education that balances academics, life preparation, and self-development.

Students enrolled at CADMUS<sup>®</sup> Erbil benefit from the same world-class curriculum, proven teaching methods, engaging student life, and advanced technology offered across all SABIS<sup>®</sup> schools, as they also implement the proven SABIS<sup>®</sup> Educational System. For the 2023-2024 academic year, CADMUS<sup>®</sup> Erbil is welcoming students from KG 1 to Grade 6 and plans to add a grade level each year until reaching Grade 12.

#### **Meltho International School**

Founded by the Syriac Orthodox Archdiocese of Mosul in the KRI, this school was given a name that honors its Syriac heritage and history: "Meltho," a Syriac word that means "the word" in English.

Meltho International School is managed by SABIS<sup>®</sup>, which means students enrolled at the school will learn through and benefit from the renowned SABIS® Educational System, using proprietary material and educational technology designed to offer them a solid foundation of knowledge and 21st-century skills to succeed in an everchanging world.

Meltho International School first opened its doors in September 2022 to local and international students from KG 1 to Grade 5 and will be adding a new grade level each year until reaching a full Kindergarten to Grade 12 offering.

#### SABIS® PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP SCHOOLS IN THE KRI

Following the success of SABIS<sup>®</sup> private schools in the KRI, His Excellency then Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani set out on an ambitious mission to develop a high standard of education in the public schooling system. He also sought to provide all students, not just those who could afford private schooling, with the high-quality education that SABIS<sup>®</sup> offers. This ambitious mission led to the birth of the SABIS<sup>®</sup> Public-Private Partnership (PPP) with the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG). Today, there are seven SABIS<sup>®</sup> PPP schools - Fakhir Mergasori International School, Sardam International School, Soran International School, Suleimaniah International School, and Zakho International School - in the KRI.

SABIS<sup>®</sup> schools in the KRI are currently enrolling for the upcoming academic year. If you are interested in learning more about a specific school, you can schedule a meeting with the school's admissions team to tour the school, gain insights into the academic programs, and experience a day in the life of students at school. A full list of schools is available at kurdistan.sabis.net.

Today, SABIS<sup>®</sup> has an active presence in the public and private sectors in twenty-one countries on five continents.







#### AN EDUCATION BEYOND ACADEMICS

As part of the well-rounded education offered at SABIS<sup>®</sup> schools, in 2023, the SABIS<sup>®</sup> Academy for sports and arts came to life in the KRI. The academy is designed to enhance students' skills and performance, encourage new interests, and offer them a space to learn new things.

The SABIS<sup>®</sup> Academy is open for children from age 6 and above, in SABIS<sup>®</sup> schools or other schools, and currently offers basketball, football, swimming, gymnastics, music, dance, drama, vocals, and painting. Students enrolled in the academy receive professional coaching from experts in their respective activities and gain far more than just the technical skills needed to perform. Participating in the academy, and in sports and arts, is an important way for children to nurture valuable life skills like problem-solving, creative thinking, communication, teamwork, leadership, confidence, and so much more.





#### Decide. Commit. Succeed.

Rwanga Foundation's powerful story of building resilience and ingraining hope highlights the profound influence of collective efforts in overcoming challenges and fostering positive change in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) and beyond.





CHAPTER — 3 HUMAN CAPITAL

**RWANGA FOUNDATION** 

Rwanga Foundation, a prominent non-governmental organization operating throughout Iraq, commenced its activities in 2013. It places a strong emphasis on key sectors such as youth, education, environment, and vulnerable groups. Since its establishment, Rwanga has successfully implemented 310 projects, positively impacting over 3.6 million individuals. The Foundation's extensive reach and unwavering commitment to various sectors highlight its dedication to driving positive change and addressing crucial needs across Iraq.



PAGE 174

<b>1</b>	Name	Time	Score		Name
01	Mohammad Nazm Anwar	1:30:00 PM	0	08	Ameer Ham
82	Ali Amin Heider	1:30:00 PM	0	09	Ahmed Fai
03	Muhammad Sabah Ibrahim	1:30:00 PM	•	2.0	Mustafa K
84	Majeed Omer Majeed	1:30:00 PM	•	11	Mohammed
85	Sina Srud Saeed	1:30:00 PM	•	12	Zied Asse
06	Dana Sherzad taheer	1:30:00 PM	•	13	Ibrahim Y
87	Safeen Azad	1:30:00 PM	6	2.4	Sand Req1

CHAPTER — 3 HUMAN CAPITAL

#### A nation that neglects its youth is a nation on the path to self-destruction.

#### Since its establishment in 2013, Rwanga has successfully implemented a total of 310 projects, benefiting an impressive 3.6 million individuals overall.



Iraq's heart beats with a dual rhythm of struggle and hope. Its turbulent history tells a compelling story of resilience amidst adversity. Despite facing significant internal and external challenges, the country navigates through conflicts. In the midst of this, the Rwanga Foundation emerges as a beacon of hope, particularly for the youth. It symbolizes a narrative of revival, where the passion of young people fuels rebuilding efforts and instills hope through impactful initiatives. The Rwanga Foundation is deeply committed to empowering youth and works tirelessly to lay the foundation for a brighter future. By launching innovative programs and advocating for policies that expand and improve education in the KRI and beyond, the Foundation positions itself at the forefront of creating opportunities for young people.

Rwanga's commitment to sustainability is evident in its efforts to cultivate a culture of learning and passion among the youth. The foundation aims to create lasting impacts by nurturing an environment where the new generation can fully realize their potential. Rwanga Foundation envisions a world where young individuals play a pivotal role in driving enduring and positive global change.







#### **PROJECTS**

Rwanga Foundation has outlined its vision for 2024 and beyond, which involves actively engaging in policy-making endeavors in addition to its existing initiatives in youth, education, environment, and support for vulnerable groups. By strategically involving itself in shaping policies, the Foundation aims to address challenges and make valuable contributions to social development in various sectors.

#### Youth

Over the past decade, the Rwanga Foundation has dedicated 27% of its projects to the youth sector. This considerable investment has positively impacted 1,234,013 beneficiaries, demonstrating the Foundation's commitment to nurturing the potential of young people. Key components of these projects include delivering training courses, providing seed funding for startups and small businesses, and offering capacity-building programs. These programs cover essential skills, such as advanced training in coding and vocational skills, job placement, CV writing, work ethics, organizational behavior, and computer skills. Additionally, the Foundation has played a crucial role in encouraging youth involvement in volunteering activities, thereby fostering a sense of community and public service among the younger generation.

#### Education

Since 2013, 30% of Rwanga Foundation's projects have been focused on the education sector. These projects encompass school renovations, the provision of educational supplies to support schools, and the publication of educational materials in multiple languages for students. In the span of ten years, an impressive 1,155,907 individuals have benefited from Rwanga's education-related initiatives.

#### Notably, the planting of 333,500 trees across Iraq stands out as a remarkable achievement, strengthening climate resilience in the region.

#### Environment

Rwanga Foundation has been a leading force in environmental conservation efforts in Iraq. Over the past decade, the Foundation has dedicated 10% of its projects to the environment sector, making a significant impact. These initiatives have benefited an impressive total of 470,599 individuals, demonstrating the Foundation's commitment to this vital cause. Notably, the planting of 333,500 trees across Iraq stands out as a remarkable achievement, strengthening climate resilience in the region.

#### **Rwanga Forest Project**

The Rwanga Forest Project is a standout initiative that aims to bring verdant greenery to Iraqi lands, leading the way in rejuvenating the country's natural landscape. Moreover, the Foundation has played a pivotal role in the One Million Oak Project in Erbil, a significant campaign designed to combat climate change and reduce pollution through large-scale tree planting. These initiatives highlight Rwanga's unwavering dedication to environmental conservation and its role in fostering a greener future.

Beyond its national contributions, Rwanga's commitment to environmental sustainability on a global scale was underscored by its exclusive invitations to participate in COP27 and COP28, where it was distinguished as the sole representative from Iraq. This recognition positions the Foundation as a key player in international efforts to promote ecological change and awareness.









#### Since 2013, Rwanga's projects have provided much-needed assistance and support to 764,978 vulnerable beneficiaries.

#### **Vulnerable Groups**

Since 2013, Rwanga Foundation has been instrumental in laying the groundwork for long-term resilience and development among the most vulnerable segments of society. Dedicated to addressing their needs, the Foundation has allocated 33% of its projects to the Vulnerable Groups sector over the past decade. As a result, 764,978 beneficiaries have received much-needed assistance and support. A key focus of the Foundation's work has been supporting IDPs and refugees, aiming to help these individuals become economically independent and selfreliant. To achieve this, the Foundation has actively developed skills among vulnerable groups and supported the establishment of small businesses, including the encouragement of home-based business projects.

#### Youth Volunteers Initiative

The Youth Volunteers Initiative project, implemented The "1,000 Hopes" project is a transformative initiative throughout Iraq, aims to support young volunteers by designed to shape the futures of 1,000 young individuals helping them develop project proposals and participate by providing them with opportunities for job placement in a competition to implement their projects for the and apprenticeships. Funded by GIZ and implemented by greater public benefit. Initiated in 2018, the initiative has the Rwanga Foundation, the project focuses its efforts on continuously provided funding to volunteer groups each sectors that promise sustainable employment—such as year. On average, more than 13 groups receive funding manufacturing, education, and agriculture-with the aim annually to carry out projects within their communities. of equipping participants with the skills and experience Since its establishment, the initiative has funded 80 projects, necessary for long-term career success. At its core, with a total of 308 million Iraqi Dinars. "1,000 Hopes" embodies a proactive movement against unemployment, striving to empower communities through targeted support and development opportunities and sowing the seeds of sustainable, large-scale employment in the heart of the KRI.

#### 1,000 Hopes

#### **Rwanga Annual Awards**

The Rwanga Annual Awards offer a unique opportunity for Iraqi youth to showcase their abilities and foster their growth. This event celebrates the diverse talents of young individuals across Iraq in categories including short stories, painting, film, graphic design, scientific research, entrepreneurship, music, photography, poetry, and software development. Welcoming participants aged 15 to 25 from all walks of life, including refugees and IDPs, the awards provide a platform for youth to demonstrate their exceptional skills. More than just a competition, the Rwanga Awards act as a catalyst for creativity, confidence-building, and the reinforcement of the Iraqi spirit, nurturing the next generation of innovators and artists in Iraq.





#### Hope for the Future

Since its inception in 2013, Rwanga Foundation has made a profound impact, touching the lives of millions by undertaking a variety of diverse and impactful initiatives, particularly in the KRI and extending its influence beyond. By focusing on the potential of the youth, the Rwanga Foundation is actively paving the way towards a society that is more resilient, educated, and empowered. The significance of their work, both in scale and impact, continues to inspire and catalyze positive change, fostering an environment where opportunities for growth, learning, and development are readily accessible to everyone. The Rwanga Foundation's commitment to nurturing and supporting the community's progress underscores its crucial role in shaping a brighter, more inclusive future in the KRI and beyond.





#### **Educating Future Leaders**

Welcome to the University of Kurdistan Hewlêr (UKH), one of the most advanced academic institutions in the region and a hub for educating future leaders, fostering scientific innovations, and promoting academic excellence. Founded in 2006, the University is well-known for its magnificent contributions to the academic, social, economic, and entrepreneurial development of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI).





PAGE 185

#### UNIVERSITY OF KURDISTAN HEWLÊR

UKH has gained an enviable reputation in the KRI for its focus on academic excellence, innovation, and its outstanding record in graduate employability. The university has now embarked on an ambitious strategic plan aimed at expanding its influence and enhancing its reputation both regionally and globally.

Founded by His Excellency Nechirvan Barzani, UKH's key purpose has always been "educating future leaders"—a phrase the University proudly uses to define its role. However, as UKH President Professor Keith Sharp explains, the University defines leadership as more than just preparing graduates for traditional leadership positions:

"While this is certainly a part of it, leadership for us is an attribute that anyone can display at any point in their career. It's about taking responsibility, challenging established beliefs and ways of working, solving problems creatively, working ethically, and influencing others in positive and constructive ways."







There are several aspects to how UKH seeks to foster these attributes of leadership, both in its curriculum, and its teaching and assessment methods. Over the last few years, the University has introduced a number of new programs aimed at preparing graduates for employment in new and emerging sectors of the economy. For example, the BSc in Computer Science and Cybersecurity, introduced in 2022, began with an initial cohort of 20 students. In its second year, the program expanded to recruit 60 students, reflecting the growing importance of this field for the future economic development in the KRI and globally. Additionally, this year marked the introduction of the KRI's first-degree program in Games Development and Media Design-a future-oriented degree designed to equip students with essential skills for the digital age.





Founded in 2006, the University of Kurdistan Hewlêr is well-known for its magnificent contributions to the academic, social, economic, and entrepreneurial development of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

> But it is not just the subjects UKH offers that contribute to its mission of educating future leaders; it's also how the University teaches and assesses its students. The first point to note is that studying at UKH is challenging, and students are expected to achieve high standards. However, studying at the University is also about developing skills as critical thinkers and problem-solvers. As the President Sharp comments, "We want our students to leave us as independent critical thinkers, capable of analyzing complex problems and proposing novel, creative solutions. We take for granted that our graduates will leave with the latest technical expertise in their fields, but we expect them to go beyond this and become truly effective and critical problem-solvers in whatever field they work in. Therefore, we actively try to develop these attributes in our teaching and assessment methods."

#### UKH is a university that is making an impact and helping to put the KRI on the map regionally and globally.

A key part of the University's strategy is to benchmark itself internationally in terms of academic standards and the quality of the learning experience it provides. It achieves this by engaging external examiners from leading universities around the world. These examiners oversee the performance of UKH students and the quality of teaching and assessment at the University. As the President explained, "By having senior academics from leading universities in the UK, Europe, and the US as our "critical friends," we can assure ourselves that the academic knowledge and skills achieved by our students are comparable to those at the best universities worldwide. Each year, our external examiners provide us with critical feedback on how we can further improve, fostering a culture of continuous improvement—something vital for a university."

UKH has also been very active in encouraging the research undertaken by its staff members. In addition to the four academic schools, UKH has established three dedicated research centers: The Centre for Peacebuilding and Dialogue, The Centre for Artificial Intelligence and Innovation, and The Centre for Environmental Studies. By investing in these centers, UKH aims to produce research that is not only relevant to the economic and social needs of the KRI but also contributes to global

knowledge in these crucial areas. Speaking about research at UKH, Professor Sharp commented: "Over the last year, we recorded a 29% increase in staff research output, which reflects the extraordinary efforts of our staff. We plan further significant increases in research investment, which will lead to additional improvements in the quantity, quality, and impact of our research."

Another important strand of the University's strategy is internationalization. The University is developing new partnerships with universities in the UK, the US, Europe, and Asia, which have already resulted in several staff and student exchanges, as well as study abroad opportunities for UKH students. This year, for example, UKH Petroleum Engineering students will spend one semester at Montanuniversität in Leoben, Austria, one of the leading specialist universities in Europe. This experience will give UKH students access to advanced laboratories and expertise in key areas of petroleum science.

UKH is a university that is making an impact and helping to put the KRI on the map regionally and globally. The University leadership looks forward to the continued success of UKH and to seeing the role of UKH graduates in the future development and success of the KRI.





CHAPTER — 3 HUMAN CAPITAL

#### Commitment to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq's Talent Development

Recognized for its excellence and prestige in the human capital field, Erbil Manpower has established itself as a leading brand within the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI).

# ERBIL MANPOWER





#### **ERBIL MANPOWER**

In response to the lack of professional job-hunting and training platforms in the KRI, Talan Aouny envisioned establishing a company in 2006 to support and develop local talent and businesses. Drawing on her experiences, she launched Erbil Manpower (emp) in 2007, the KRI's first specialized firm offering recruitment, outsourcing, payroll, HR consulting, and training services.

Thanks to the KRI's thriving business environment from 2008 onwards, emp diversified its services and portfolio, thereby reinforcing its market position. Leveraging her extensive network and responding to market demand, Talan expanded emp's services to include organizing tailor-made capacitybuilding training programs and events for government, nongovernmental organizations, and private companies in the KRI.

Since its inception, emp has significantly influenced both the perception and methods of recruitment and training in the KRI job market. As a successful businesswoman in the human capital field, Talan Aouny, CEO and Founder of emp, shares her insights into the transformation of the KRI's human capital environment and its driving forces.



#### **Talan Aouny**

Talan Aouny stands as a prominent figure in the KRI's HRM and recruitment landscape, and she is a passionate advocate for local talent development.

A graduate of Salahaddin University-Erbil with a Bachelor of Arts in Electrical Engineering, she furthered her education at prestigious institutions. These include participating in Harvard University's Women's Leadership Program and Stanford University's Democracy, Development, and Rule of Law Program.

Although her academic background is in electrical engineering, Talan's professional journey veered towards business and management. Her dynamic career included a significant role as a Senior Director at USAID. In 2007, Talan took a bold step by founding emp. Her professional management style, combined with extensive expertise and a broad network, rapidly established emp as a leading recruitment and HR consulting firm, maintaining strict adherence to international standards in the KRI. Beyond her executive role, Talan also serves as an advisory board member at the University of Kurdistan Hewlêr (UKH).

From a young age, Talan harbored the ambition to be a role model, driven by her resilient and determined character. She is committed to mentoring the next generation and sharing her journey as a woman entrepreneur, thereby inspiring others to believe in their own potential and break barriers.

Talan defines her leadership style as a blend of compassion and firmness, fostering a company culture where employees feel valued like family members. She views emp as a company committed not only to professional excellence but also to being a supportive and inclusive workplace.

## What have been the key driving forces for the advancement of human capital in the KRI?

The human capital landscape in the KRI has undergone a remarkable transformation over the last two decades. This change has profoundly influenced employment prospects and enhanced various skills, thereby creating new and exciting opportunities for the youth to grow and prosper.

**Reforms in Education System** The main driver of this progress has been substantial reforms in the education system, aimed at modernizing university curricula by shifting from outdated theoretical models to contemporary, practical approaches. Additionally, universities have increasingly incorporated entrepreneurship and innovation into their programs, actively conducting workshops and training programs to foster entrepreneurial skills among students. These reforms have not only enhanced career prospects but have also positively contributed to the skillset of the workforce.

#### **Education Investments**

Furthermore, the impressive expansion of the KRI's education infrastructure has played a crucial role in enhancing its human capital. Over the past 15 years, the establishment of 19 new universities, along with numerous colleges and departments, has been instrumental in equipping the workforce with the necessary skills. This significant investment in higher education has positioned the KRI's human capital on the right track for growth and development.









#### **Practical Experience**

Since 2008, the emergence of both local and international companies in the KRI has opened up numerous internship opportunities. This marks a notable shift from a decade ago, when internships were scarce, often leaving graduates without essential practical work experience. Today, most universities not only encourage but often require internships before graduation, representing remarkable progress in human capital development in the KRI.

In collaboration with the KRG, we organized a conference in 2014 for private sector companies in the KRI. The purpose of this conference was to introduce and discuss the KRG Internship Program, an initiative of the Council of Ministries. This program is designed to support youth and fresh graduates by connecting them with companies and enrolling them in internships to gain work experience.

#### The KRG's Efforts in Empowering Human Capital

Last but not least, the growing preference of the younger generation for private-sector employment over the public sector is a notable trend in the KRI. In line with this trend, the KRG has been demonstrating unwavering commitment to empowering its citizens through investments in capacity development initiatives. These programs aim to nurture the skills of the labor force and equip them with the tools necessary to excel in their respective fields. I firmly believe that the current capacity development and localization initiatives of the KRG will greatly enhance the competitiveness and overall quality of human capital in various sectors, ultimately leading to the establishment of a self-sustaining economy in the long term.

#### What are the emerging sectors in the job market?

The aggressive economic diversification policy of the KRG is focused on cultivating a thriving job market, not solely reliant on the oil and gas sectors. This approach is in alignment with its goal of achieving sustainable economic growth and addressing the pressing issue of unemployment. In line with this policy, several industries have emerged as new engines of growth and job creation in the KRI in recent years.

#### **Information Technology**

One of the most popular emerging sectors is software development and digital services. The youth are highly engaged in finding jobs in IT-related service companies, representing a trend for the future. This interest is driven by two main factors: the rising entrepreneurial spirit among young people and the KRG's vision to position itself as a leading government in the field of digitalization.

#### **Banking and Financial Services**

The banking and financial services sector is rapidly emerging as another popular area in the job market. Currently undergoing significant evolution, this sector is witnessing the introduction of new financial services by various banks. As these financial institutions modernize their fintech offerings, they are expected to continue generating more opportunities and attracting a diverse pool of talent, thereby enhancing the region's human capital.

#### **Manufacturing Industry**

The manufacturing sector has also been experiencing a significant surge in momentum. As this sector continues to expand, it is expected to create a wide range of job opportunities catering to different skill levels and professional interests. The growth of the manufacturing sector will also positively impact related industries, including logistics, transportation, and warehousing, thereby further expanding the employment landscape in the KRI.



#### How do you see the trend in terms of women's participation in the workplace?

The role of women in the workplace has undergone a significant transformation in the KRI over the last 15 years. When I embarked on my journey in 2007, social norms did not support women in business, making it challenging for them to pursue their ambitions in both the public and private sectors. However, I am delighted and proud to see that this scenario has been changing in the KRI. Today, more women are actively participating in significant roles in both the public and private sectors.

#### A Steady Rise in the Education Level

There has been a noticeable increase in the number of female job applicants compared to a decade ago. This increase can largely be attributed to the steady rise in the education level of women in the KRI. The reforms, initiated in 2008 to ensure equal access to education for girls, have paved the way for their gradual involvement in almost every aspect of work life.

#### **Breaking the Glass Ceiling**

A clear indication of this positive change is evident in the job market. A striking example is the transformation of job domains, once predominantly male, are now more inclusive, with gender barriers gradually dissolving. In the past, such a scenario would have been unimaginable. However, today, women are showcasing their capabilities in fields such as politics, medicine, engineering, manufacturing, and construction.

However, while urban areas have shown notable progress in women's participation in the workforce, rural areas in the KRI still lag behind. There is a need to elevate the education level of women and girls in rural areas, and these regions require increased awareness and active involvement to achieve a similar level of advancement in women's empowerment.

# TOURISM



# 200 - 279

Tourism plays a crucial role in place branding, offering destinations a unique opportunity to showcase their cultural, historical, and natural assets. This, in turn, boosts their reputation on the global stage. In this chapter, we aim to demonstrate how tourism can serve as a

powerful tool for rebranding and reshaping the global perception of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI)—a region eager to harness the full potential of tourism in its place branding strategy.

A significant focus of this chapter is to illuminate the tourism potential of the KRI, showcasing its assets to a worldwide audience, particularly among young people and in distant countries where knowledge of the KRI is limited or outdated.

We also emphasize the KRI's rich archaeological heritage. Positioned on the ancient land of Mesopotamia, the cradle of civilization, the KRI is home to over 1,000 known archaeological sites. This positions the region as an untapped destination for archaeological tourism, offering insights into some of the world's oldest civilizations, cultures, and religions. Additionally, the chapter highlights the KRI's breathtaking natural landscapes. Surrounded by majestic mountain ranges, the region offers a plethora of outdoor activities, including hiking, skiing, and birdwatching. This unspoiled nature positions the KRI as an emerging destination for adventure and outdoor tourism, capable of attracting regional and international visitors. CHAPTER — 4 TOURISM

# **Erbil** *The Capital*

Erbil, the progressive capital of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), possesses a unique identity, a serene charm, and a rich history. It is actively striving to establish itself as a powerful city brand in the region.

Nestled in the cradle of civilization, Erbil stands as a testament to the past and a beacon for the future. With its roots stretching back to at least the 6<sup>th</sup> millennium BCE, Erbil is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities on earth. The city's ancient heart is the Erbil Citadel, a towering mound of history, recognized by UNESCO for its historical and cultural significance.

Erbil is not just an attractive place due to its illustrious past; it is a city brimming with modern life and a forward-looking vision. In the last decade, Erbil has undergone a remarkable transformation, marked by the rise of skyscrapers, luxury hotels, international restaurants, and shopping malls.

Erbil's cityscape tells a story of this dynamic evolution. Contemporary architectural complexes complement historical landmarks, while lush parks and bustling bazaars reflect the city's blend of tradition and modernity. The city's growth is encapsulated in its expanding ring roads, leading from the ancient Citadel to new neighborhoods that symbolize progress.

The city's charm extends to its people, renowned for their hospitality and warmth. The social fabric of the city is vibrant, characterized by a tapestry of cultures and ethnicities that come together, offering a unique Kurdish welcome.

As Erbil continues to shape its narrative, it warmly invites travelers, investors, and innovators to discover its potential.







VISIT

# Erbil Citadel

Erbil Citadel was officially added to UNESCO's World Heritage List in 2014.

The historic Erbil Citadel, continuously inhabited since at least 6000 BCE, is perched atop a plateau. The citadel has been a key inspiration for the city's development, with Erbil expanding in increasingly larger concentric rings outward from this central structure.

Erbil Citadel was officially added to UNESCO's World Heritage List in 2014. The decision, made by UNESCO's World Heritage Committee, recognized the citadel's nearly 6000-year history and its importance as one of the world's oldest continuously inhabited settlements.







# Erbil International Airport

Erbil International Airport (EIA) opened as a civilian airport as recently as 2006 and underwent renovation in 2010. EIA has the capacity to handle 3 million passengers annually and features one of the longest runways in the world, enabling the successful landing of large cargo aircraft. The airport provides free internet and is expanding its duty-free offerings, enhancing the quality and comfort of passengers' experiences. With its distinctly Kurdish welcome, EIA has become a stronghold of efficiency, promoting a national brand and connecting the Kurdistan Region of Iraq to the world. CHAPTER — 4 TOURISM

| VISIT

# **Erbil** *Province*

PAGE 209

CHAPTER — 4 TOURISM

#### visit RAWANDUZ

Surrounded by majestic mountains, Rawanduz is home to the deepest gorge in the Middle East. Boasting several Christian villages, its history dates back to the seventh century BC. Additionally, Rawanduz is a treasure for archaeology enthusiasts, offering a variety of archaeological sites that provide a glimpse into the ancient civilizations that once thrived in this region.


# VISIT SHAQLAWA





Shaqlawa, with its stunning green landscape and serene mountains, is not only one of the most popular holiday destinations in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq but is also poised to become the Middle East's next big adventure tourism hotspot. This picturesque town, celebrated for its untouched nature, offers an array of outdoor activities, making it an ideal retreat for adventure enthusiasts.

The shrine of Raban Boya, located in Shaqlawa, is a historical site dating back to the fourth century. The site includes a church, a graveyard, and a facility that leads visitors to the Raban Boya Cave. Originally home to a monastery, the cave stands as a testament to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq's rich religious and cultural history.

#### VISIT

# THE SHRINE OF RABAN BOYA

# VISIT SHANIDAR CAVE

# **VISIT KHANZAD CITADEL**





Shanidar Cave, located on Bradost Mountain in Erbil Province, is one of the most significant archaeological sites known for its remarkable contributions to the understanding of Neanderthal life. In the 1960s, archaeologist Ralph Solecki led a groundbreaking excavation, unearthing the fossilized bones of ten Neanderthal skeletons. These fossils, dated between 65,000 and 35,000 years ago, revolutionized the perception of early hominids, showcasing their ability to walk upright and suggesting a more sophisticated culture than previously assumed. After a hiatus of six decades, a British team has resumed excavations at Shanidar Cave, promising new insights into the ancient past and further enriching our understanding of human evolution. or the Netflix documentary Secrets of the Neanderthals, archaeologists at the University of Cambridge re-created the face of a 75,000-year-old female Neanderthal in 2024. Khanzad Citadel, a significant landmark in Shaqlawa, is a historical site dating back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Constructed during the Soran Emirate, it is attributed to Princess Khanzad, from whom it gets its name. Remarkably, much of its original structure, primarily made of stone and gypsum, has remained intact over the centuries.



# VISIT BARZAN

When visiting Barzan, there's absolutely no reason to stay indoors. This enchanting area, located in Erbil Province, is celebrated for its scenic landscapes, best experienced on foot. Hikers and nature enthusiasts alike are drawn to Barzan's stunning natural beauty, characterized by rolling hills, lush greenery, and panoramic views. The area's breathtaking scenery makes it a must-see for any visitor.

# **BEDIAL**

Bedial is a small Christian village in the Barzan area of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). The village, along with its ancient church, was destroyed by the regime of Saddam Hussein. After the KRI was established in 1991, the villagers returned to rebuild their traditional stone houses and their church.

President Nechirvan Barzani, then Prime Minister, funded the construction of a dozen homes, a school, and a new church in Bedial. The ancient church was also reconstructed. The iconic church of Bedial is a favorite among visitors and is one of the KRI's most-visited churches.





# VISIT KOREK MOUNTAIN





Located in Erbil Province, Korek Mountain is one of the most prominent peaks in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Rising to 2,120 meters above sea level, its slopes are acclaimed as some of the best skiing destinations in the region, offering beautiful, panoramic views. Consequently, Korek Mountain has become a popular local winter tourism spot, and it also attracts foreign tourists to its annual snow festival. Koya boasts an ancient history that dates back to at least 2,500 BC. This captivating city has witnessed the rule of influential civilizations such as the Assyrians and Medians, making it a pivotal location in the region's historical narrative. Koya has served as a vibrant cultural hub, attracting numerous scholars, poets, and artists who have left an indelible mark on its rich heritage. Archaeologists and historians consider Koya a true treasure, as it is home to over a hundred archaeological sites scattered across the area.

# visit KOYA

VISIT

# MONASTERY OF MAR BENA QADISHO





Located in the Christian village of Armota, on the outskirts of Koya, the Monastery of Mar Bena Qadisho was first established in the fourth century by the followers of Saint Banham. Unfortunately, this small monastery was destroyed in 1988. However, in a tribute to its historical significance, the chapel was rebuilt in 1996 using the original stones. The first Friday after Easter marks the grand feast of Mar Bena, a time when the entire area comes alive with people engaging in picnicking and celebratory activities. Choman is one of the leading adventure tourism hotspots in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. The varied scenery, from popular tourist attractions to wild landscapes, has earned Choman a well-deserved reputation as a major hiking destination in the Region. Choman's annual winter festival attracts skiers from across the world.

# **VISIT CHOMAN**

# VISIT HALGURD MOUNTAIN





Halgurd mountain is the highest mountain in Iraq, at 3,607 meters above sea level. The peak of the mountain is covered with snow throughout the year. Surrounding the mountain, there are many springs and lakes, enhancing the already lush scenery. The area is also home to a diverse range of bird species and unique endemic plants. Halgurd Mountain has become a renowned destination for birdwatching, botany enthusiasts, and the cultivation of medicinal herbs. Halgurd-Sakaran National Park attracts tourists from all over Iraq and various foreign countries, seeking thrilling adventures and hiking opportunities.

Balakayati, nestled within the Choman district of Erbil Province, is a charming destination that has been steadily gaining popularity among local tourists. The area's natural beauty, characterized by lush greenery and scenic views, makes it an ideal spot for nature lovers.

# VISIT BALAKAYATI

# **Slemani** *The Cultural Capital*

Known as the cultural capital of Iraq's Kurdistan Region, Slemani buzzes with energy, characterized by its parks, museums, cultural centers, and a vibrant art scene.

The modern city of Slemani, founded in 1784, is now the second-largest city in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), with a population of over 800,000. Landmarks such as museums, local art galleries, universities, scenic parks, shopping malls, modern cafes, and restaurants are transforming the city's landscape.

Slemani places great emphasis on preserving its cultural heritage, creating a unique blend where modern expressions fuse with Kurdish traditions and practices. Throughout the year, the city hosts various cultural events that focus on literature, art, design, music, and other Kurdish traditions. Thanks to these events, Slemani has solidified its reputation as a center of culture in the KRI.

Designated as a Creative City of Literature by UNESCO in 2019, Slemani has been home to some of the greatest writers in the KRI. The city hosts an annual international book fair, attracting publishing houses and famous writers.

In Slemani, experiencing great art doesn't necessarily require a visit to a museum or gallery. The city serves as the KRI's most charming open-air canvas, making it an ideal location for a self-guided street art safari. Thanks to talented street artists, collections of spray-painted masterpieces are prominently displayed in public spaces.



PAGE 227

| VISIT

# Slemani Province

144

# VISIT **BAZYAN CITADEL**







Bazyan archaeological site, first identified in the 19th century, was initially misclassified as a caravanserai. However, ongoing excavations that began in 2011, led by Vincent Déroche and Narmen Ali Muhamad Amen from Salahaddin University, have revealed its true nature. The structure was actually established as a monastery during the Sassanian Empire. Moreover, further discoveries have shown that the church on the Bazyan site, built by Syriac-speaking Christians, dates back to the 6<sup>th</sup> century.

Darbandikhan Lake, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq's second-largest lake, is a man-made reservoir designed for irrigation, hydropower generation, and recreational activities. Spanning approximately 72 square kilometers, it is a popular spot for picnics, swimming, and fishing. Additionally, Darbandikhan is recognized as an important bird and biodiversity area by BirdLife International.

# VISIT DARBANDIKHAN LAKE

# HAZAR MERD CAVE

Hazar Merd Cave, situated 13 kilometers from the city of Slemani, holds immense historical and archaeological significance. It was first excavated in 1928 by the renowned British archaeologist Dorothy Garrod, offering valuable insights into ancient human history. As a Paleolithic cave, Hazar Merd stands out as the second-oldest cave in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, dating back to 50,000 BC.

# VISIT SARTKA CITADEL





Sartka Citadel, nestled in the scenic Dukan Lake area of Slemani Province, was constructed by Prince Muhammad, the ruler of the Soran Emirate from 1813 to 1837. The area around Sartka Citadel is renowned for its natural beauty, making it a popular spot for both history buffs and outdoor adventurers.

The Tombs of Qizqapan, located near Zarzi Village in the Chemi Rezan Valley of Slemani Province, are an archaeological site of great historical significance. Scholars believe that these rock-cut tombs date back to the Median-Achaemenid period, approximately between 600 and 550 BC. The site provides valuable insights into the burial practices and architectural styles of this ancient era.

#### VISIT

# TOMBS OF QIZQAPAN

# visit DUKAN LAKE

Dukan Lake, the largest in Iraq's Kurdistan Region, is situated near the city of Ranya in Slemani Province. This expansive lake covers an area of about 251 square kilometers. The lake's surrounding region is predominantly agricultural, with over seventy villages dotting the basin. One of the most remarkable aspects of Dukan Lake is its rich biodiversity, particularly its status as a habitat for more than 180 species of birds, making it a significant site for birdwatching enthusiasts.



# Duhok The Land of Charm

Duhok's ancient history and rich cultural heritage undeniably enhance the province's appeal, creating a vibrant space where people of diverse cultures and faiths coexist in peace and harmony.

Duhok Province, serving as a gateway to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, holds a strategic position at the intersection of Iraq, Türkiye, and Syria. The provincial capital, Duhok city, is nestled in a picturesque valley between Bekhair Mountain to the north and Zawa Mountain in the southeast, alongside the Tigris River. Duhok city, along with six other districts (Akre, Amedi, Simele, Zakho, Sheikhan, and Bardarash), comprises the administrative area of Duhok Province. With a population of around 1.2 million, the province has experienced consistent growth in recent years.

Duhok, a land that has been home to numerous civilizations over the centuries, is celebrated for its multicultural identity and the peaceful coexistence of its communities. In the various districts, towns, and villages of Duhok province, diverse communities including Assyrians, Chaldeans, Armenians, and Arabs live together harmoniously, with Kurds forming the majority.

Within Duhok Province, there are various archaeological sites, including ancient ruins, caves, carved stones, as well as churches, mosques, and synagogues that date back a thousand years. The province is a popular holiday destination for local tourists; however, this ancient land has yet to attract the number of international visitors it deserves.



| VISIT

# Duhok Province

# | VISIT AKRE

Akre, an ancient city located in the Duhok province, is a place of historical and architectural significance. Perched on the slope of a mountain, Akre is particularly renowned for its old houses, which are distinctively constructed using yellow-brown stones. This choice of material not only imparts a unique aesthetic to the city but also preserves a traditional architectural style that speaks volumes about its rich past.

Despite its historical significance, archaeologists have only recently begun to explore the depth of Akre's historical treasures. The city is home to hundreds of archaeological sites, each holding the promise of uncovering more about the region's ancient civilizations and cultures.

The city is known for hosting the largest Newroz (Kurdish New Year) celebration in Iraqi Kurdistan, an event that attracts visitors from across the region and beyond, showcasing the vibrant culture and traditions of the Kurdish people.

Akre's picturesque landscape, historical structures, and cultural significance offer a unique experience for tourists interested in exploring the roots and heritage of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

# VISIT **KHINNIS RELIEF**







The Khinnis Reliefs, located in the town of Shekhan in Duhok province, are remarkable for their depiction of Sennacherib, the Assyrian king who reigned from 705 BC to 681 BC, shown in a pose of worship towards the deities Ashur and Ninlil. Recognizing its historical and cultural significance, Khinnis was included in the 2014 World Monuments Watch. This inclusion aimed to increase awareness and foster preservation efforts for heritage assets in the area.

Sufism, a mystical movement within Islam, has been a part of Iraqi Kurdistan for several centuries. Sheikh Abdulaziz Gaylani, the founder of the Qadri Sufi dervish order and a revered Sufi leader, passed away in 1205. Named after him, the Sheikh Abdulaziz takiye (dervish lodge) serves as a vital ritual center, drawing dervishes from across the region. This lodge, attracting tens of thousands of pilgrims annually, stands as the most significant pilgrimage and ritual center for Sufis in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

# VISIT **SHRINE OF SHEIKH ABDULAZIZ GAYLANI**

# I VISIT

With a history tracing back to the Assyrian Empire era around 2,500 B.C.E., Amedi is a small city that has remarkably preserved its unique characteristics over the millennia.

Renowned for its rich history and diverse cultural heritage, Amedi is considered a significant landmark in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). Recognizing its value, UNESCO included the city in Iraq's Tentative List of World Heritage Sites in 2011, and it was nominated for the World Monuments Watch List in 2016.

Historically, Amedi has been a melting pot where Muslims, Jews, and Christians have lived together for centuries. The Christian quarter, located on the west side of town, is still home to a small Christian community. The city was also an important center for Jewish life, with two synagogues dating back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century. In addition to its religious significance, Amedi was a hub of Islamic learning. The city's Qubahan School, historically associated with the prestigious al-Azhar University in Cairo, was an eminent center for Islamic studies, attracting students from across the Muslim world.

# VISIT CHARSTEEN CAVE



Charsteen Cave is a valuable piece of cultural and religious heritage, believed to have once served as a Zoroastrian fire-temple—a testament to the diverse religious history of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. The temple's structure is particularly notable for its unique architectural features, comprising five sanctuaries. Three of these sanctuaries are directly carved into the rock, while the remaining two were constructed using stone blocks.



Carved into the rocky facade of Zawa Mountain, 200 meters high in the village of Geverke in Duhok province, the Maltai Reliefs are a remarkable example of ancient Assyrian art. They were created in the 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C. during the reign of King Sennacherib, one of the most powerful rulers of the Assyrian Empire. The reliefs consist of three distinct panels, each depicting a visually striking scene that holds significant historical and cultural value. In these panels, King Sennacherib is shown facing a procession. This procession is particularly notable for its depiction of Assyrian gods, which are represented in human form. Adding to the grandeur and mystique of these representations, the gods are shown mounted on various animals, a common theme in Assyrian art symbolizing power and divine authority.

# **WISIT MALTAI RELIEFS**

# VISIT ZAKHO

Located in the northwest of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, Zakho is both a significant commerce hub and a symbol of the cultural wealth of the region.

The city's geographical positioning has historically made it a vital trading center, a role it has maintained since at least the 1800s. Today, Zakho continues to serve as an important commercial hub for much of north and central Iraq.

Zakho is celebrated for its long-standing history of religious and ethnic diversity. Assyrians have been part of the city's community since at least the 5<sup>th</sup> century, and there has also been a significant Armenian presence. In the 1960s, Christians made up over 40 percent of the population, reflecting the city's diverse religious landscape.

Historically, Zakho was known as "The Jerusalem of Mesopotamia," a title it earned due to its numerous synagogues and a sizeable Jewish community. The Jewish residents of Zakho were known for their unique and rich oral tradition, which included legends, epics, and ballads featuring heroes from both Jewish and Muslim traditions. However, the city's landscape shifted in the 1950s when most of the Jewish population relocated to Israel.

Today, the population of Zakho is primarily composed of Kurds, Chaldeans, and Assyrians. Despite changes over the decades, the city continues to be a testament to the diverse cultures and religions that have coexisted in this region for centuries.



# VISIT **PIRA DELAL** BRIDGE



Pira Delal Bridge, a historical landmark in Zakho, dates back to the early years of the Abbasid dynasty, which spanned from 750 to 1517 AD. The bridge extends 115 meters in length and reaches a height of 16 meters. Its enduring presence over the centuries has made it an iconic feature of the city.



Established in the 7th century, Rabban Hormizd Monastery stands as one of the oldest Christian monasteries in Iraq and a significant ancient sanctuary for the Chaldean Church. The monastery is located near the administrative border of the Kurdistan Regional Government, just two kilometers from the center of Alqosh city. Remarkably carved into the mountainside, the monastery, with its 1,400-year history, offers a breathtaking view of the valley below. Inside, visitors can find the vault of its saintly founder, as well as the tombs of a long lineage of Nestorian and Chaldean monks, abbots, and patriarchs who have served and led the Christian community in the region over many centuries. Today, Rabban Hormizd Monastery attracts visitors and pilgrims seeking to connect with the ancient traditions and spiritual heritage of the Chaldean Church in Iraq.

# VISIT **RABBAN HORMIZD MONASTERY**

VISIT

# TOMB OF THE BIBLICAL PROPHET NAHUM





The 2,700-year-old tomb of Prophet Nahum is located within the walls of the 800-year-old synagogue in the Christian town of Alqosh. For many centuries, this tomb was a major site of Jewish pilgrimage, especially during the festival of Shavuot.

Lalish is the spiritual center of the Yazidi faith, encompassing elements from pre-Islamic Mesopotamia, Judaism, Nestorian Christianity, and Islam. The temple includes the tomb of Sheikh Adi ibn Musafir, the founder of Yazidism, who resided in Lalish in the 12th century. Lalish is also the focal point of an annual pilgrimage for Yazidis, who form an important ethnic component of the diverse ethnic mosaic of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

# VISIT LALISH

# VISIT MAR MATTAI





Located in Duhok Province, Gali Sherana is a preferred tourist destination due to its untouched natural beauty.

Founded in the fourth century, Mar Mattai Monastery is nestled on Mount Alfaf, 20 kilometers from Mosul. This Syriac-Orthodox monastery is considered one of the oldest Christian monasteries in existence and boasts an extensive collection of Syriac Christian manuscripts.

# **GALI SHERANA**



| HOSPITALITY

In a world where every destination competes for attention, focusing on the hospitality sector has become an essential strategy for the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) as it seeks to bolster its appeal on the regional stage. From luxurious five-star accommodations to high-end restaurants offering international cuisines, the KRI is enhancing its hospitality offerings with a focus on nurturing a culture of hospitality that prides itself on exceeding expectations.

The hospitality sector serves as a pivotal touchpoint between a destination and its visitors. For many travelers, their first real interaction with a destination occurs through its hospitality sector.

These initial encounters are crucial in shaping how a place is experienced and remembered. A positive experience can set the tone for the entire visit, influencing the visitor's perception and, by extension, the place's brand.



### State of the Art Luxury

As the leading luxury business hotel in Iraq, Divan Erbil seamlessly combines state-of-the-art amenities with elegance.





PAGE 261

**DIVAN ERBIL** 

Since its inauguration in 2012, Divan Erbil has revolutionized the hospitality landscape in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), establishing itself as the most strategic hospitality investment in the region. The hotel has set new benchmarks in luxury and service, emerging as a nurturing ground for talent and significantly enriching the KRI's hospitality culture. With its high-end amenities, unparalleled services, and commitment to excellence, Divan Erbil plays a pivotal role in transforming the perceptions of those who visit Erbil, thereby elevating the KRI's brand profile.







Its variety of guest suites, ranging from a generous 45 to a spacious 300 square meters, are meticulously equipped to cater to the distinguished guests of Divan Erbil.

Divan Erbil is not only the most visually striking modern structure in the city's skyline but also a beacon of comfort. With its strategic location, unrivaled layout, and stringent security protocols, the hotel offers peace of mind alongside luxury. Its variety of guest suites, ranging from a generous 45 to a spacious 300 square meters, are meticulously equipped to cater to the distinguished guests of Divan Erbil.









Within Divan Erbil, gastronomic delights abound, offering a diverse array of dining experiences. Guests can savor the rich flavors of Middle Eastern cuisine or explore a global palette with international selections inspired by the diverse cuisines of the Far East.

#### Upscale Sushi Restaurant

When people think of Erbil, sushi may not be the first thing that comes to mind. However, this perception is changing, thanks to the delicious offerings at Divan Erbil's Qi21 sushi restaurant.

At Qi21, the utmost importance is placed on freshness and strict adherence to preparation standards, ensuring that every dish authentically represents the exquisite art of sushi. Ingredients are meticulously handled with care at every stage, from storage and preparation to presentation, to maintain the highest quality for an unparalleled dining experience.









#### The Best Fitness & Wellness Club in Erbil

Divan Wellness Club is the city's premier fitness and wellness destination, boasting an impressive semi-Olympic-sized indoor pool, complemented by a sauna, steam room, Turkish bath, and private massage suites. Additionally, the wellness club offers therapeutic treatments provided by certified spa therapists.





#### **Can Unluer,** *General Manager, Divan Erbil Hotel*



#### **DIVAN ERBIL** AT A GLANCE

- 228 rooms and suites
- Club Lounge
- International restaurants
- Fitness & Wellness Club
- Swimming pool
- 10 meeting rooms
- Business center
- Car-rental service
- 24-hour security



PAGE 268



## Elevating Erbil's Dining Experience to New Heights

At Don Gennaro, each dish, along with the meticulously crafted service, serves as a genuine tribute to Italy's rich culinary and hospitality heritage.

# **BENNARO**





State of

DON GENNARO

Born in Naples, Alessandro Casillo embarked on his educational journey abroad at a young age, majoring in finance. He began his career in the finance sector in London, following a path that seemed clearly defined. However, fate had other plans. Erbil, a city not initially on his radar, unexpectedly called to him.

In 2018, a brief visit to Erbil became a pivotal moment in Alessandro's career. He recalls, "I discovered a hidden gem—a city brimming with untapped potential, yet warmly welcoming to newcomers." What began as a temporary exploration gradually deepened, with Erbil's potential resonating with him and transforming his short-term stay into a lasting commitment.

Recognizing the absence of authentic Italian cuisine in Erbil, Alessandro aimed to elevate the city's dining landscape. Driven by his Italian heritage, he embarked on a mission to launch Don Gennaro by the end of 2020, aiming to introduce the authentic flavors of Italy and premium Italian hospitality to Erbil.



PAGE 272

"Guests from Naples often express surprise at the authenticity of our food, noting its similarity to what they would find back home."



#### **The Neapolitan Impact**

Given that Alessandro and his core teamincluding the manager, chef, and bartenderhail from Naples, Don Gennaro's menu is significantly influenced by Neapolitan cuisine. Alessandro shares, "Naples is renowned for its rich culinary tradition and strong regional values, which we are immensely proud of. This deeply ingrained pride is vividly reflected in our dishes." As a result, much of Don Gennaro's menu draws inspiration from Naples, featuring traditional Neapolitan pastas and pizzas. Unique dishes, such as pasta with potatoes and pasta with beans-specialties rare outside of Naples-also showcase this influence.

#### The Chef

Chef Angelo Giannino's vast experience and culinary skills have been key to Don Gennaro's success. With over 30 years of expertise in the hospitality industry, his ability to adapt and excel in diverse culinary roles, coupled with his mastery of flavors and techniques, has profoundly impacted the restaurant's dining experience and earned admiration from guests. Under his guidance, Don Gennaro has consistently maintained high quality in its offerings over the past three years-a true testament to his culinary expertise.



#### **Most Popular Dishes**

The most popular dishes at Don Gennaro, Since its inception, Don Gennaro has tailored including Eggplant Parmigiana, Ravioli with its menu to cater to local tastes. Alessandro Truffle, and Pasta with Lobster, collectively remarks, "Over the years, Italian food has represent the essence of Don Gennaro's culinary become heavily Americanized, straying far experience by blending traditional Italian from its original authenticity. This has resulted flavors with unique, high-quality ingredients. in a local palate more accustomed to a version Eggplant Parmigiana, a traditional quite distinct from traditional Italian flavors, Neapolitan dish, has become a favorite among a trend that is evident in Erbil as well. Take guests for its authentic Italian taste. Chicken Alfredo: in Italy, it's simply pasta Ravioli with Truffle stands out for its with Parmesan and butter. However, here in luxuriousness. This quintessentially Italian dish, Erbil, there's a popular demand for variations featuring fresh truffles imported from Italy and with chicken or mushrooms, reflecting the shaved on top, is a distinctive offering that sets Americanized style. Despite our initial Don Gennaro apart in Erbil. hesitance, we integrated these variations into Lastly, Pasta with Lobster is sought after our menu, and they have since become some of for its exclusivity. The lobster, sourced directly our most sought-after dishes."

#### **High-Quality Ingredients Pivotal**

Alessandro's approach to ensuring the authenticity of Don Gennaro's dining experience extends beyond assembling a team from Italy; he also strategically imports key ingredients directly from Italy. This dedication to authenticity means that approximately 85% to 90% of the ingredients used at Don Gennaro are sourced from Italy. While fresh produce, like vegetables, is locally sourced, essential items such as meat, fish, flour, and cheese are imported to ensure the highest quality.

Alessandro emphasizes the importance of this strategy, stating, "In Italian cuisine, where simplicity is paramount, the quality of ingredients is crucial. Our commitment to using high-quality ingredients is fundamental. Despite the higher costs, we choose to import from Italy to uphold the high standards we have set."

from Cuba, presents a rare delicacy not commonly found in the market, making it a more upscale option on the restaurant's menu.

#### **Catering to Local Tastes**

The collection features around 120 different labels, showcasing wines from Italy's premier wine-producing regions, such as Tuscany and Campania.



#### **Extensive Selection of Beverages**

Don Gennaro takes great pride in its extensive selection of Italian wines, offering a diverse range to perfectly complement the restaurant's dishes. The collection features around 120 different labels, showcasing wines from Italy's premier wine-producing regions, such as Tuscany and Campania. Catering to a variety of preferences and budgets, the wine prices at the restaurant range from \$50 to \$6000, ensuring there's an option for every guest. Recognizing the importance of pairing the right wine with each dish, Don Gennaro's Manager, Corrado De Cenzo, who is also a skilled sommelier, assists guests in making the optimal selection.



#### **Excellent Service Quality**

Don Gennaro distinguishes itself not only with its authentic Italian cuisine but also by offering high-quality, European-standard service, ensuring an exceptional dining experience for its guests.

To maintain this high level of service, Don Gennaro undertakes numerous behind-thescenes efforts, led by Manager Corrado De Cenzo. He consistently conducts comprehensive staff training that covers every aspect of service, down to the smallest details. These integral, often unseen aspects of their operation focus on meticulous attention to detail and play a significant role in ensuring the consistency and quality of service at Don Gennaro.

#### **Immersion into Italian Culture**

At Don Gennaro, deep immersion into Italian But Don Gennaro's cultural offerings extend culture is not just promised but lived. The beyond the kitchen. Under the expert guidance restaurant doesn't merely serve Italian cuisine; of Corrado De Cenzo, the restaurant is set it acts as a cultural gateway, offering Italians to unveil a new class that delves into the a piece of home and introducing others to finer aspects of Italian hospitality. Designed the rich tapestry of Italian food, hospitality, to explore the elegant art of table setting and traditions. The events organized by the and nuances of service etiquette, this course restaurant transcend simple gatherings; they are endeavors to showcase the comprehensive an essential part of Don Gennaro's commitment nature of Italian hospitality, which extends to delivering authentic Italian cultural well beyond the culinary realm. Aiming to encompass the entire dining experience, from experiences. Every Friday, the restaurant transforms into the meticulous art of drink selection to the a vibrant classroom, where up to 15 guests subtleties of impeccable service, the class have the chance to learn the art of making pasta ensures that every aspect of Italian dining from scratch. This culinary class is more than culture is shared and celebrated.

just a cooking lesson; it's an initiation into a quintessential skill that lies at the heart of Italian cuisine.



Don Gennaro has been honored with the prestigious Italian Excellency Award as an Ambassador of Italian Cuisine by the Italian Consulate in Erbil.

#### **Bridging Cultures Through Design**

Through its design, Don Gennaro creates a bridge between Italian and Kurdish cultures, offering guests a genuine and immersive experience. While the restaurant's ambiance is deeply rooted in Italian tradition, it equally resonates with the warmth and familiarity of Kurdish culture, creating an inviting space for everyone.

The journey to create such a harmonious blend began during the design phase when Alessandro, eager to craft a culturally cohesive environment, enlisted Primo Atelier, a design studio based in Naples, to explore Iraqi Kurdish architecture. In their research, Primo Atelier discovered striking architectural parallels between Naples and Kurdistan, especially the prominence of courtyards at the heart of homes, surrounded by graceful arches. This insight became the cornerstone of Don Gennaro's design, leading to the creation of various dining areas within the restaurant. Each area mirrors the concept of these traditional courtyards, framed by elegant arches.

Further cementing this cultural synthesis, Don Gennaro's carefully selected color palette features wood tones, brass accents, and earthy hues, all complemented by luxurious marble touches. These elements not only pay homage to the classic Italian aesthetic but also resonate with the natural, grounded aspects prevalent in Kurdish design. The use of marble, extending from the floors to the walls, adds a layer of sophistication and authenticity, enhancing the overall Italian ambiance.







## **The Expansion**

Erbil's culinary scene has prompted the expansion of the Don Gennaro brand into the bakery sector. Alessandro aims to elevate the standard and quality in the local bakery sector by incorporating the same high-quality ingredients for which Don Gennaro is renowned. The bakery branch of Don Gennaro, set to feature approximately 15 different types of bread, Italian sandwiches, and a selection of patisserie items, is poised to deliver an authentic Italian bakery experience. The initial feedback from guests on their bakery products has been exceptionally positive, indicating a promising future for this new endeavor. "Our foray into the bakery business is more than an expansion; it's a step towards establishing a new benchmark in the market, leveraging Don Gennaro's reputation for quality and excellence," Alessandro concludes.



Alessandro Casillo's commitment to enhancing

# CULTURE



# 280 - 331

The cultural branding of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) hinges on its unique blend of tolerance, diversity, hospitality, and dynamic spirit. As the KRI continues to navigate its path, its cultural identity will undoubtedly play a central role in shaping its image on both the regional and global stages, offering a model of progressive values.

One of the most striking aspects of the KRI's cultural landscape is its religious and ethnic diversity. Home to Muslims, Christians, Yezidis, Jews, Sabean Mandeans, Zoroastrians, Baha'is, and Kaka'is, the KRI stands as a beacon of religious freedom. This remarkable peaceful coexistence among various religious groups is a powerful element of its brand identity. Kurdish culture is deeply rooted in hospitality, a welcoming nature exemplified by the KRI's response to regional crises. The Region's willingness to open its doors to refugees and IDPs has garnered international respect, further strengthening its image as a bastion of hospitality and humanitarianism. Such acts of solidarity and compassion are powerful components of the KRI's brand, portraying a region that values human dignity and offers a safe haven amidst turmoil.

Another significant cultural aspect is the evolving role of women in the KRI. Over the last two decades, there has been a notable improvement in the status of women. This progressive change is pivotal in redefining the region's brand, showcasing a commitment to women's empowerment, which strongly resonates with global audiences.

Last but not least, the engagement of Kurdish youth in various fields has played a pivotal role in shaping and promoting the KRI brand in recent years. This cultural flourishing, driven by young entrepreneurs and creatives, is crucial in repositioning the region's image. It reflects a forwardlooking, innovative, and energetic culture, which is essential for attracting international attention.

# The People



## Tolerant

Being Kurdish signifies openness and inclusivity, which are important aspects of Kurdish identity. Kurds respect the rights of all religious and ethnic groups living in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

The residents of each country, region, or city possess their own distinct characteristics. We've profiled the unique attributes of the people from the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.



## Generous

Kurdish generosity knows no bounds. Refusing food or an additional cup of tea is considered rude.

## Respectful

Family ties hold a vital role in Kurdish culture, where respect for the elderly is paramount. Even if a sibling is only one year older, listening to them respectfully is expected.



## Resilient

Kurds have come a long way, fighting hard for what they have today. Decades of conflict have made them extraordinarily adaptable, shaping their identity under tough circumstances. They are wellknown for their patience, even in the most difficult conditions.

## Love of Nature

Kurds have a deep attachment to the beautiful nature of their land and never miss an opportunity to picnic in the soaring mountains.

## **Patriotic**

In the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, national symbols are everywhere, with t-shirts, cars, and phones often emblazoned with the Kurdish flag or national colors.



Kurds often engage in political discussions, from the young to the old. Be prepared to discuss both domestic and international politics.

## Love of Soccer

Life in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq comes to a halt when El Clásico is on. The Spanish league, being the most followed in the region, particularly among the youth, divides Kurds into fans of Barcelona and Real Madrid.

## Love of Music and Dance

Kurds are passionate about their traditional music and dancing, and any event is an excuse for a celebration.

## Love of Social Media

Kurds are upwardly mobile, dynamic, and digitally connected. Don't be surprised if you receive business proposals through WhatsApp or Messenger.
## Culture of Coexistence

Uniting communities of different faiths with a common vision and conquering challenges with steadfast shared values, the culture of coexistence is at the heart of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

Since its foundation, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) has established an integrated model for peaceful coexistence among followers of different religions. Despite the problems unfolding around it, the KRI's model has become an example for the region of how coexistence, dialogue, and mutual respect can flourish, even in the most challenging circumstances.

The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has introduced various laws promoting and protecting the rights and freedoms of religious minorities and encouraging peaceful coexistence among them. Among these, the Minority Rights Law, passed in 2015 by the Kurdistan Parliament, unequivocally grants rights and religious freedoms to all its citizens regardless of their religion or ethnicity. The Minority Rights Law guarantees freedom of religion, language, and education, and it also focuses on preserving cultural heritage and safeguarding the holy places of all religions within the KRI. Furthermore, it mandates the KRG to ensure equality for all component groups and requires that any form of religious discrimination against its citizens

be punished.

PAGE 284

#### Muslims, Christians, Yezidis, Jews, Baha'is, Zoroastrians, Sabeans, and Kaka'is live together peacefully and enjoy robust religious freedoms across the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

The overwhelming majority of Muslims in the KRI adhere to the Sunni sect of Islam. Sunni Muslims have significant representation in the executive, legislative, and judiciary bodies of the KRI. The Region also has a small number of Shia Muslims. Notably, unlike other parts of Iraq, the KRI has never experienced sectarian conflict between its communities.

In addition to the Muslim community, the KRI recognizes seven other religious communities: Christians, Yezidis, Jews, Baha'is, Zoroastrians, Sabeans, and Kaka'is. Today, these eight different religious groups live together peacefully and enjoy robust religious freedoms across the KRI.

## CHRISTIANS

The KRI is home to an estimated 245,000 Christians, who, since its establishment in 1991, have considered the KRI a safe haven. Christians in the KRI primarily belong to three main denominations: the Chaldean Catholic Church, the Assyrian Church of the East, and the Syriac Orthodox Church.

In the realm of politics and society, Christians remain a prominent part with robust religious freedoms in the KRI. Constitutionally, they are allocated six seats in the Kurdistan Parliament, and the Ministry of Religious Affairs includes a dedicated Directorate for Christian Affairs.

The KRG has actively supported Christian communities by allocating land and funds for building churches and Christian cultural centers. Since 2003, more than 30 Christian villages and churches have been rebuilt or renovated by the KRG. Across the KRI, there are a total of 135 churches, 92 shrines, and 13 monasteries, reflecting the region's commitment to preserving Christian heritage.







CHAPTER — 5 CULTURE

#### His Holiness Pope Francis' Visit to the KRI

His Holiness Pope Francis made a historic visit to the KRI on March 7, 2021, becoming the first pope to do so. During his visit, His Holiness expressed his gratitude to President Nechirvan Barzani for the protection of displaced Christians and other minorities.

"I am grateful that, despite being in war, you received the displaced Christians and other minorities from Mosul, Nineveh Plains, and Qaraqosh. You opened your arms to Christians."

**His Holiness Pope Francis** 



## **JEWS**

Jewish settlements in what is today known as the KRI date back to the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC, with Amedi and Zakho being important centers of Jewish life for centuries. Today, a very small number of Jews live in the KRI, dedicated to restoring historical sites, and building a synagogue and cultural center.

In 2015, the Kurdistan Parliament passed the Minority Law, entitling Judaism to official representation in the KRG's Ministry of Endowment and Religious Affairs.

The KRG preserves the remains of ancient Jewish places of worship to promote peaceful coexistence and honor the Jewish heritage. The KRG's efforts serve as a reminder of the KRI's diverse religious history and contribute to fostering mutual respect among different communities.

There have been no recorded cases of anti-Semitic abuse or threats in the history of the KRI.







CHAPTER — 5 CULTURE

### **YEZIDIS**





550,000, constitute the largest religious minority in both the KRI and Iraq. Most of them speak Kurdish and consider themselves ethnically Kurdish.

The KRG officially recognizes Yezidi religious holy days, and the Yezidi New Year's celebration, Seri Sali, is considered an official holiday in all institutions throughout the KRI. The genocide against the Yezidis, carried out by ISIS in 2014, is internationally recognized. The KRG played a crucial role in raising global awareness about the Yezidi genocide. President Nechirvan Barzani established a committee to document the atrocities committed. Thanks to the KRG's support, many Yezidi survivors were brought to the safety of the KRI, where they received international support.



Yezidism is one of the ancient monotheistic religions of the East that combines customs, rituals, and symbols from Islam, Zoroastrianism, and Mithraism. The Yezidis, estimated to number around

#### Lalish

Yezidis share a strong connection to their land and monuments, especially to their main temple in Lalish, which houses the tomb of Sheikh Adi ibn Musafir. They believe that Lalish is also the site where creation began anew after the Great Flood. Located 14 kilometers from the Sheikhan District, the small mountain village of Lalish is believed to have been sacred not only to Yezidis but to the ancient Sumerians as well.

### ZOROASTRIANS

It is estimated that there are around 15,000 Zoroastrians in Iraq, with the majority residing in the KRI, primarily in the governorates of Duhok (especially in the city of Zakho) and Slemani.

Duhok Governorate was an important center of Zoroastrianism during its first golden age, as evidenced by the recent discovery of a Zoroastrian tablet dating back to the 2nd century BC just outside Duhok City. Today, the city hosts a branch of Yasna, an international Zoroastrian association, which means "devotion" in Avestan. Another significant Zoroastrian center is Slemani, which is home to the Zoroastrian Cultural and Heritage Center and the only functioning Zoroastrian temple in the KRI. Opened in September 2016, the Zoroastrian temple in Slemani hosts rituals that are the first of their kind in the history of Iraq.

Zoroastrians enjoy religious freedom and recognition in the KRI, as per the Minority Rights Law of 2015. The KRI's Zoroastrian community is represented in the KRG's Ministry of Religious Affairs.













### SABEAN MANDEANS

The Kurdistan Region is the only place in Iraq where Sabean-Mandaeans feel they can freely practice their ancient faith without fear. Due to systematic harassment in the southern part of Iraq, this inherently peaceful community was compelled to migrate north to seek safety in the Kurdistan Region.

The Sabean-Mandean faith was officially recognized as a religious minority by the Kurdistan Parliament in 2015. Since then, they have been officially represented in the KRG's Ministry of Endowment and Religious Affairs. The Sabeans in the KRI have established a house of worship and a cultural center. Additionally, they have the opportunity to obtain goldsmiths' licenses, which enables them to practice their traditional profession.



### **BAHA'IS**

The Kurdistan Region is the only part of Iraq where Baha'is enjoy official status and protection, enabling them to freely practice their faith without any restrictions. Despite being a small community scattered across the KRI, Baha'is are officially recognized as a religious minority by the KRG's Ministry of Endowment and Religious Affairs.

The Sar-Galu Cave, located northwest of the city of Slemani, holds great significance as the most important holy site in the KRI for the Baha'i community. It was within this cave that Baha'u'llah embarked on a two-year spiritual retreat, during which he had profound revelations. These revelations would later serve as the foundation for his renowned works such as "Seven Valleys," "Hidden Words," and the "Kitāb-i Īqān" (Book of Certitude), which he penned upon his return to Baghdad.

## **KAKA'IS**

The Kaka'i religion, also known as Ahl-e Haqq or Yarsan, originated in the 14<sup>th</sup> century in Western Iran with the teachings of Sultan Sahak, who was born in what is now the Slemani Governorate. This syncretic religion incorporates elements from Zoroastrianism and Shi'a Islam. According to the KRG's Ministry of Endowment and Religious Affairs, it is estimated that there are around 200,000 Kaka'is in Iraq, with approximately 30,000 residing in the KRI. The Kaka'i community, predominantly consisting of ethnic Kurds, speaks a Kurdish dialect called Macho. In the KRI, Kaka'is are able to freely practice their beliefs without facing any discrimination from the authorities.



President Nechirvan Barzani

"We know that we are stronger when we embrace diversity and encourage inclusion, which is why I reaffirm our commitment to freedom and equality, regardless of faith or affiliation. The Kurdistan Region of Iraq will always be a safe home for those seeking peaceful coexistence."

## Honoring the Victims Halabja Memorial

The Halabja Monument stands as a tribute to the victims of one of the darkest episodes in Kurdish history, specifically honoring the estimated 5,000 individuals-predominantly women and children—who lost their lives during the devastating Halabja chemical attack on March 16, 1988. Occurring between February and September 1988 under the regime of Saddam Hussein, the Iraqi army's military campaign, known as "Anfal," was a grim highlight of the genocidal campaign against Iraqi Kurds. During this period, about 4,000 Kurdish villages were obliterated, and nearly 180,000 Kurds were killed, marking the Halabja attack as one of the most horrific atrocities of modern times.

Inaugurated in 2003, the 30-meter Halabja Memorial includes a museum that displays photographs, artifacts, and poems encapsulating the tragedy. It also features a list of the victims' names, offering a personalized homage to those who perished. The memorial offers residents of Halabja and people around the world a somber space to reflect on and honor the memories of family members and loved ones who fell victim to this tragedy.



## **Time to Remember** *Yazidi Genocide*

In the summer of 2014, as ISIS swept through northern Iraq and Syria, they targeted the Yazidis with particular severity. Fleeing the onslaught, an estimated 5,000 Yazidi men were executed by ISIS while trying to escape from the town of Sinjar to the mountains. Additionally, approximately 6,500 Yazidis were taken as slaves. This brutal campaign has been recognized internationally as an act of genocide. To date, 83 mass graves have been uncovered. This violence triggered a significant migration of Yazidis into the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), with 360,000 people fleeing from Sinjar and another 60,000 from smaller towns like Bashiqa and Bahzani. In coordination with the KRI's security establishments and Peshmerga forces, the Yazidi Rescue Office, part of the Special Office of President Nechirvan Barzani, played a crucial role in bringing most of the Yazidi survivors to safety. To date, while 1,208 women, 339 men, and 2,023 children have been rescued, 1,244 kidnapped Yazidi girls and women, and 1,402 men and youths are still missing.











## Newroz Remember the Past and Hope for the Future

Newroz, meaning "New Day" in Kurdish, marks the first day of spring and the start of the new year. Celebrated annually between the 21<sup>st</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> of March, Newroz is the most significant festival in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. During the celebrations, Kurds don traditional clothes, perform folk dances, and light bonfires and torches.

Newroz symbolizes the Kurds' struggle against injustice. Legend has it that one year, spring did not arrive due to the tyrannical reign of the evil King Zuhak. The blacksmith Kawa led an uprising against this unjust king and defeated him on the eve of Newroz. To celebrate his victory, Kawa lit a fire on a mountaintop, signaling the end of tyranny. The next day, spring returned to Kurdistan, symbolizing the rebirth of freedom and nature.

## Flag Day

Flag Day of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq has been commemorated every year on December 17<sup>th</sup> since its first launch in 1993 by the Kurdistan Parliament.

The flag of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq symbolizes its past and its aspirations for the future:



YELLOW

Represents the life and light of the people, with the sun, associated with Newroz, as a central element.



Symbolizes the sacrifices of previous generations who laid the foundations for the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, and honors the nation's martyrs and their achievements.

#### GREEN

Reflects the landscape, green environment, and vitality of the Region.



Symbolizes the Region's

dedication to peace and equality.

WHITE





Kurdish national dress, known as Jli Kurdi, is an integral part of Kurdish identity and the ultimate expression of their national heritage.



## Kurdish **Clothing Day**

Kurds wear some of the most recognizable, distinctive, and colorful traditional outfits in the Middle East. For men, this attire includes baggy pants and a fitted top, often in muted earth tones, complemented by a large sash known as the pishtend wrapped around the waist. Some men also don a scarf around their heads. Women's outfits feature a long, flamboyantly embroidered dress paired with a jacket and a multi-hued belt, often complemented by gold jewelry. March 10 is celebrated as Kurdish Clothing Day across the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

## **Erbil Marathon** *Run in one of the world's oldest cities.*

The Erbil Marathon is an international sporting event aiming to nurture peace and nonviolence in Iraq, demonstrating to the world the strong community of civil society leaders in Iraq committed to dialogue and harmony.

The first Erbil International Marathon was held in 2011. Over the years, it has become one of the most popular sporting events in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. In 2023, more than 4,000 runners participated in the tenth Erbil International Marathon. The event features a full 42-kilometer marathon, along with two shorter routes of 12 kilometers and 2 kilometers for a family run. In 2023, more than 4,000 runners participated in the tenth Erbil International Marathon.





# Lara Dizeyee: The Designer to Watch



Lara Dizeyee, a Kurdish national born in Vienna and raised in the United States, embodies a global spirit deeply rooted in the rich tapestry of her culture. After earning a degree in international relations from George Mason University, Lara has dedicated the last 15 years of her life to living and working in Erbil. Lara Dizeyee took a significant step

towards realizing her true desire by entering the world of fashion—a realm where she could blend her heritage with her passion. In July 2023, she made a striking debut at Paris Fashion Week, captivating the audience with

her collection's narrative depth and creative appeal. Lara's designs intricately weave the story of Kurdish women, celebrating their femininity, sensuality, passion, and strength on the global stage. Through her innovative approach to Kurdish costumes, Lara aims to raise awareness of Kurdish culture, fashion, and the profound stories embedded within her people. Lara's work is a heartfelt invitation to the world to explore the essence of Kurdish heritage.



## Media to Watch

Rudaw, an Erbil-based multi-platform media organization, plays a crucial role in raising awareness about the Kurdistan Region of Iraq on both regional and global scales.

Founded in 2013, Rudaw Media Network has become one of the fastest-growing multi-platform media organizations in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). The establishment of Rudaw, which has pioneered "Made in Kurdistan" news and content, marks a significant milestone in the evolution of Kurdish news media and represents the most notable breakthrough to date.

This multi-platform news media company is dedicated to informing the world about the KRI by offering content in English, Kurdish, Arabic, and Turkish. Rudaw's commitment to high-standard journalism has rapidly positioned it as a trusted source for regional media agencies, especially for their coverage related to the KRI and Iraq. Additionally, Rudaw's effective social media management, in tune with regional and global trends, has established it as a frontrunner in the media industry in both the KRI and wider Iraq.

Over the last decade, Rudaw has also revolutionized the Kurdish media landscape by merging talent with opportunities in the media sector. It has opened new avenues for Kurdish youth, sparking creativity and nurturing local talent with skills that are applicable both locally and regionally.



## Women Making a Mark

Kurdish women are gradually making their voices heard in various male-dominated fields. Their success not only demonstrates their ability to contribute significantly to advancing gender equality in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, but also to further its economic development.









Over the past two decades, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) has seen remarkable improvements in women's status. Women's roles have expanded significantly across politics, business, education, media, and art, becoming more prominent and influential.

While challenges persist and the need for further progress is evident, the strides made during this period are substantial. The KRI has transitioned from a Region where women were marginalized to one where they enjoy representation and influence across various fields. Today, the younger generation of women in the KRI is making its mark in every sphere of life.

- Begard Talabani
- 2 Rewaz Faeq Hussein
- Vala Farid Ibrahim
- 4. Kwestan Maarouf
- Lanja Dizayee 5
- Nigar Ahmad Mohammad 6.
- Tarza Salar Othman 7.
- 8. Bayan Sami Abdul Rahman
- 9. Rezan Kader
- 10. Treefa Aziz
- 11. Nuxsha Naseh
- 12. Kwestan Ahmed
- 13. Dr. Khanzad Ahmed
- 14. Buzha Akhir Jamal







### WOMEN IN **POLITICS**

The political landscape in the KRI has evolved significantly with regard to women's participation. A notable achievement is the increase in the number of women MPs in the Kurdistan Parliament. From having only 6 women MPs in the first parliamentary elections of 1992, the number rose to an unprecedented 37 out of 111 seats in the most recent elections. Today, women are actively participating as ministers, parliamentarians, mayors, and civil servants, contributing significantly to the decisionmaking processes in the KRI.

Number of women MPs: 37 out of 111

**Ouota for Women in the Parliament:** 30%













### **WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE**

Over the last decade, women's participation in the workplace is gradually becoming the new norm because of the steady rise in women's education levels in the KRI. Today, women have evolved into successful entrepreneurs and business leaders, founding enterprises that range from small-scale businesses to larger companies. A growing number of women across all age groups are now part of the workforce, even in fields traditionally dominated by men.

- 1. Naz Bajger
- 2. Sara Salahaddin Mustafa
- 3. Kavin Awara
- Rivan Abbas 4.
- Shahla Abdullah 5
- Vazhin Tayeb 6.
- Dilman Azad Khosnaw
- Rezhna Hussain Qadr 8
- 9. Ranw Shaho Jaff























1. Prof. Mahabad Kamil

2. Shelan Khalil Junaid

Abdullah

The KRI has achieved considerable progress in ensuring equal access to education for girls and women over the last two decades. This has been a key factor in narrowing the gender gap in school enrollment rates. The past decade has seen a significant drop in female illiteracy rates. Currently, females constitute half of the student population in primary and secondary schools, and there are more female than male students in high schools. The establishment of new universities has further enabled young women to attain degrees in diverse fields, empowering them to assume roles in traditional male-dominated fields.

#### **ADVANCEMENTS IN EDUCATION**

Female literacy rate: 84%

Female Primary & Secondary Enrollment Rate:

97%

Compulsory education age for girls:

15

#### WOMEN IN NEWS MEDIA

The KRI's news media landscape has transformed considerably in recent years, with many of the current television channels, radio stations, and magazines established only in the last decade. With the establishment of these news outlets, there is an emergence of confident and capable female media professionals in the KRI. Many women working as reporters and presenters have reached prominence in the KRI's news media.

Women's growing influence in journalism has implications for media content concerning women's rights and gender equality. Female reporters and presenters challenge gender stereotypes and bring a gender perspective to their news stories. They also encourage women to share their perspectives and concerns on issues related to women.



2. Avan Jaff

- 1. Lilo Majeed
- 2. Midya Masti







#### WOMEN IN PESHMERGA FORCES

As of 2024, approximately 1,700 women serve in combat roles within the Peshmerga, the KRI's official military force. They are afforded the same opportunities as their male counterparts, with very few reporting gender-based discrimination during their service. The Peshmerga subjects its female units to rigorous physical and mental training, including basic and specialized combat training. Women actively participate in combat operations, protect the KRI's borders, and provide medical, technical, and communication support.

As of 2024, approximately 1,700 women serve in combat roles within the Peshmerga, the KRI's official military force.



### **WOMEN IN NGOs**

Since 2005, a broad range of women's organizations have been established in the KRI, aimed at addressing the needs and interests of women. In the same period, awareness of women's rights among the Kurdish public has increased, and female empowerment has become part of mainstream discourse, largely thanks to the unyielding efforts of these women's organizations. Women's organizations have successfully applied pressure on the KRG to enact new laws and policies. This effort provides an essential foundation for enhancing gender equality, prohibiting violence and discrimination, and empowering women in both public and private spheres.

- 1. Bahar Ali
- 2. Shokhan Ahmad
- 3. Taban Shoresh
- 4. Tanya Gilly Khailany











### "Without women's involvement, neither political nor social progress is possible in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Women must be empowered, and their rights must be guaranteed by law."

President Nechirvan Barzani

## Erbil Civilization Museum



Opened in 1961, the Erbil Civilization Museum houses the second-largest collection among all museums in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. It offers a captivating display of artifacts that span from pre-history to the late-Abbasid period. In recent years, the museum's content and collections have been steadily expanding.







## Kurdish Textile Museum

The Museum exhibits the spinning and weaving processes of textile items, alongside fabrics, raw materials, and methods of natural wool dyeing using wild plants and flowers.

Located in Erbil Citadel, the Kurdish Textile Museum is a cultural hub for Erbil and an exemplar for future generations. Opened in 2004, the museum showcases Kurdistan Region of Iraq's rich textile history and cultural heritage. It exhibits the spinning and weaving processes of textile items, alongside fabrics, raw materials, and methods of natural wool dyeing using wild plants and flowers. Featuring some exhibits that are several centuries old, the museum aims to preserve the art and customs of Kurdish tribes. It seeks to revive interest in Kurdish weaving, ensuring this traditional craft is not lost to history.

## Barzani National Memorial



Now open to the public, it offers a captivating journey through Kurdish history, shedding light on the nation's challenges, triumphs, and aspirations. More than a source of historical memories, the memorial serves as a beacon of inspiration for future generations, fostering cultural understanding and instilling pride in Kurdish identity.





PAGE 328



## Mullah Mustafa Barzani

1903 - 1979

Mullah Mustafa Barzani is revered as a national icon within the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), embodying the spirit of resilience and the relentless pursuit of dignity for his people. Through his monumental contributions, he has left a lasting impact that continues to inspire hope and aspiration for generations to come. Deeply etched in the hearts of the people of the KRI, his legacy stands as a testament to the power of resilience and an enduring will to seek peace, stability, and prosperity in the region.

#### **IMAGE CREDITS**

#### CHAPTER - 1**GOVERNANCE**

08 - 41

Page 12-27: KRP Media Page 29: KRG Page 31-33: Kurdistan Parliament Page 34: KRG Page 39: KRP Media Page 41: 1-2 Jamal Penjweny, 3-4 Ari Jalal

#### CHAPTER - 2BUSINESS

Page 45: 1-Med Steel, 2-3 Rudaw,

Page 101-103: KRG Department of IT

Page 128-134: Macair Flight Support

Page 155-159: AmCham Kurdistan

42 - 159

Page 47: KRG

Page 85: KRG

Page 137: KRG

Page 153: KRG

Page 48-65: Erbil Hills

Page 86-99: 4 Bridges

Page 68-82: Cihan Group

Page 104-112: Tenet Group

*Page 116-124: Al Hayat* 

Page 138-150: Moonline

4-KRG

#### CHAPTER - 3**HUMAN CAPITAL**

160 - 199

Page 162-171: SABIS Page 172-182: Rwanga Foundation Page 184-191: University of Kurdistan Hewlêr Page 192-199: Erbil Manpower

#### CHAPTER - 4TOURISM

200 - 279

Tourism

Heritage

Page 223: Raber Y. Aziz

Page 203: Jamal Yad Page 230: Mesopotamia Heritage Page 204-205: 1-2 Jamal Yad, 3- Hisham Yahya Page 231: Hemn Raniaiy Page 232 Hiwa Sherzad *Page 206-207: Sabr Dri* Page 208-209: Farhang Ahmed Page 234-235: KRG Board of Tourism Page 211-212: Adam Mirani Page 237: Hemn Raniaiy Page 213: Mesopotamia Heritage Page 240-241: Raber Y. Aziz Page 242: Jamal Yad Page 214: 1-KRG Board of Tourism, 2-3-University of Page 244: Sebastian Meyer Cambridge Page 245: KRG Board of Page 215: KRG Board of Tourism Page 246: Adam Mirani Page 216-217: Hemn Raniaiy Page 248-249: Karl Allen Page 218-219: Stafford Clarry Lugmayer Page 220-221: KRG Board of Page 251: Ahmed Nihad Tourism Page 252: Darbaz Dara Page 222: Mesopotamia Page 253: Baizac Page 254: Johlige Page 255: Saeschie Wagner Page 224: Untamed Borders Page 256: Stafford Clarry Page 225: KRG Board of Page 257: Raber Y. Aziz Tourism Page 260-269: Divan Erbil Page 227: Sebastian Meyer Page 270-278: Don Gennaro Page 228-229: KRG

PAGE 332

#### CHAPTER - 5CULTURE

280 - 331

*Page 286-287: Baizac* Page 289: KRP Media Page 290: 1-2 Mesopotamia Heritage, 3-Joseph Samuel Page 291-292: Stafford Clarry Page 293: 1-Lena Ha, 2-Stafford Clarry Page 294-297: Safin Hamed Page 231: KRG Page 302-303: KRP Media Page 304: Adam Mirani Page 307: 1-Agreen Duhoki, 2-3- KRP Media Page 308: 1-Rudaw, 2-AUIS Page 309: Mr. Erbil Page 310: Erbil Marathon Page 312-313: Lara Dizeyee Page 315: Rudaw *Page 317-322: Baizac* Page 324-325: 1-2-Erbil Governorate, 3-Cihan University Page 326: Baizac Page 329: 1-2-3- Barzani National Memorial, 4- Jamal Yad Page 330-331: KDP Media

