

Planning for a Successful Tourism “The Experience of Saudi Arabia”

Dr. Omar S. O. BaHammam



Planning for a Successful Tourism “The Experience of Saudi Arabia”

Dr. Omar S. O. BaHamam

Abstract:

Tourism plays a vital role in modern life. It is associated with leisure and recreation. They can be seen as a form of modernization in our time. One of the main contributions to the status of tourism in this century is the participation of governments. This contribution was in the form of developing national plans of the countries with emphasis on improving and increasing tourism and its revenue. Saudi Arabia as one of the largest countries in the Middle East in regard to square area, has been drifting towards the development of its tourism potentials because of the increasing demand on tourism more specifically domestic tourism. Planning for successful tourism demands recognizing many factors to support the business especially when we are talking about a country the area of which is equal to one third the area of the United States. This study emphasizes the role of planing in the development of tourism with suggested planning processes on the national scale to work as a framework, reference and guide for lower levels of planning.

Introduction:

Tourism is a rising activity in modern life. It is tightly associated with leisure and recreation. They can be seen as a form of modernization in our time. Tourism, as a business, which provides for the needs of travelers, has reached major proportions in the global economy. Since the mid-1960s, domestic and international tourism has become one of the most important social and economic activities of today's world. The importance of tourism was exemplified in the sponsorship by the United Nations of a conference on International Travel and Tourism held in Rome between August-September 1963

* Assistant Professor, College of Architecture and Planning, King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

which was attended by 600 persons from 84 countries. At the conference, world attention was focused on international travels and tourism as "an economic and social force of major proportion in the world" (McIntosh 1977).

The number of travelers for leisure and tourism is increasing steadily. Based on the growth rate during the 1980s, the World Tourism Organization (WTO) estimates that international tourist arrivals could increase at a rate of 4 percent annually during the 1990s and could reach 637 million arrivals by the year 2000 (Inskeep 1991). Domestic tourism will also continue to grow rapidly, especially in the developing countries that are experiencing rapid economic development and that are adopting policies for encouraging domestic tourism. Official reports from WTO point out that domestic tourism constitutes the majority of tourism in the world today. The expenditure on domestic tourism varies between 75-80% of the total world tourism expenditure which reached 150,000 million American Dollars in 1987 (Al Tejarah 1989).

One of the main contributions to the status of tourism in the last half of the century is the participation of governments. This contribution was in the form of developing national plans for the countries with emphasis on improving and increasing tourism and its revenue. Because of the new emergence of tourism, many countries have little or no experience in developing it as an important sector of the economy. In the context of the phenomenal growth of tourism over the last few decades and the estimates that it will become the world's largest export industry by the year 2000, countries are bound to give increasing importance to the development of tourism.

The number of tourist-attracting countries is increasing. In addition to the existing well-established market countries of Western Europe, North America, Japan, and Australia, the newly industrialized countries of East Asia, Latin America, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East may provide important markets in the near future.

Saudi Arabia as one of the largest countries in the Middle East in regard to square area, has been drifting towards the development of its tourism potentials. Saudi Arabia is one of those countries mentioned earlier which discovered the importance of tourism but lacks the experience in dealing and developing it as an important social and economical sector because of its new emergence.

This paper will try to tackle the issue of tourism planning in Saudi Arabia as a pilot study for a successful planning for tourism. The physical requirements for successful tourism will be discussed with emphasis on the planning processes aimed at integrating these on going processes as well as to guide the new and needed developments. Suggested planning processes on the national scale are provided and discussed to work as a framework, reference, and guide for lower levels of tourism planning. In the discussion of the national tourism planning, other levels will be discussed occasionally when needed.

Definition of Tourist and the Concept of Tourism

In order to discuss the issue of tourism in this study, it is important to understand the definition of tourist and the concept of tourism. Furthermore, this initial step is important in that it allows us to consistently utilize these definitions throughout the planning process so that there is a rational and common basis for research.

The word tourist in the English language means "a person who makes a tour (travel from place to place) especially for pleasure" (Webster s 1989). The commonly used definition of International tourist is that recommended by the United Nations Conference on International Travel and Tourism in 1963. It stated that a tourist is "any person visiting a country other than that in which he has his usual place of residence, for any reason other than following an occupation remunerated from within the country visited" (WTO 1977). It is important to note that the definition of tourists is encompassing not only holiday travelers but also, visitors to a country for business, meetings, conferences and conventions, as well as people traveling to

visit friends and relatives, to study, religious purposes, or for other various purposes.

There is no widely accepted definition of domestic tourists (Inskeep 1991). Different organizations and countries adopted various definitions. The U.S. Travel Data Center defines a tourist trip as each time a person goes to a place at least 100 miles (approximately 160 kilometers) away from home and returns (U.S. Travel Data Center 1984).

Gee, Makens and Choy (1989, p. 14) proposed four basic dimensions which need to be considered for defining travelers in relation to the travel industry. These dimensions are: "distance, length of stay at the destination, residence of the travelers, and purpose of travel." Combining these dimensions and the above definition, we may suggest that in this study, domestic tourism in Saudi Arabia refers to in-country travels over 160 kilometers from the place of residence, excluding trips taken as part of an operating crew or as a commute to place of work.

Tourism in Saudi Arabia

Tourism as an issue is often associated with recreation. Both can always be seen as an active form of leisure. The historical development of tourism and recreation can hardly be split apart. The basis for modern tourism and recreation laterally started with the Industrial Revolution, commencing in the late eighteenth century in Europe, slightly later in North America, and still later elsewhere. The economic and social revolution greatly increased labor productivity through the technical and industrial advancement, leading to large-scale urbanization, rapid growth of the middle class, better education levels, more leisure means of transportation by railway and steamship (Inskeep 1991; Chubb and Chubb 1981; McIntosh 1977).

Tourism in Saudi Arabia is slightly a different story. There are many factors that shaped and influenced tourism in the past as well as in the present time. Until recently, the difficulty of the terrain, its

aridity and the consequent scarcity of good soil sharply controlled the way of life within Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia was able to support only a small population, estimated at 1.5 to 2 million in the 1930s (Schofield 1986). With such a harsh lifestyle, the majority of the population had neither the time nor the effort for any planned and organized recreation and tourism activities. The only considerable form of travel that occurred within Arabia was the pilgrimage to Makkah. For over one thousand five hundred years, Arabia has been the scene for what can accurately be described as the world's single most important annual tourism event: the Hajj (Economist Intelligence Unit 1985).

Since the discovery of oil in Saudi Arabia in the 1930s, specifically, after the mid 70s, there has been a great change in living and working conditions, as a result of the improved economy, in both the urban and rural environment. Increasing number of citizens started working for the government and as a result of that, they enjoyed the privileges of short working hours, weekly and yearly holidays, and the other official holidays. With the increased leisure time and the increased awareness of the world, Saudis started to travel around the globe.

In a very considerable short time, especially between 1970s and 1980s, Saudi Arabia became the fastest growing outbound travel market in the world (Seekings 1987). By 1985, it was reporting foreign travel expenditures of \$5 billions, similar to that for France, a country with a population more than five times as large (Seekings 1987). With time, the tendency to travel purposes grew deeper and deeper in the society until it became part of the lifestyle of many urban residents in the country at the end of the 1980s.

Domestic tourism and recreation took place along the international tourism as a result of the economic prosperity. The availability of the car for almost every household, and the spread of the road network throughout most of the country, over 25611 kilometers of paved roads by 1988 (Farsi 1989) have encouraged people to travel for

long distances in search for enjoyable forms of recreation. During the long holidays, people travel to remote natural unique areas in the desert as well as attractive natural lands and wonders.

The government was fully aware of the economic and social repercussions resulting from Saudis traveling as international tourists abroad. To give but one example, the Saudi Arabia Monetary Agency (Sama) published a figure for "travel debits" totaling 2.3 billion SRs⁽¹⁾ in 1981 (Seekings 1987). It is widely held that the attention given to tourism, world wide, is due to its economic benefits. Tourism is often considered to be "the goose that lays the golden egg" a source of income, and a stimulus for more employment (Jansen-Verbeke 1986).

As part of the awareness of the development that took place in the Kingdom, the government has felt the need to develop its tourism potentials in order to control the expenditure being lost to the international tourism. Such investment will strengthen the national economy and will provide employment opportunities for Saudi youth. One of the first attempts by the Saudi Authorities to promote domestic tourism was the establishment of Asir National Park in 1980, covering an area of 450,000 hectares in the Asir Province of Saudi Arabia (Figure 1) (Paul & Rimmawi 1992).

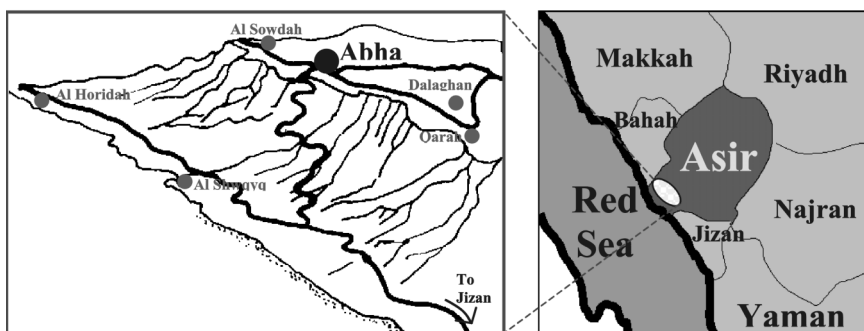


Figure 1: Location of Asir National Park.

(1) SRs: "Saudi Riyals": Saudi Arabian Currency.

Since the establishment of Asir National Park, a number of selected sites have been designated as national parks under the management of the Ministry of Agriculture and Water. By 1986, the Meteorological and Environmental Protection Administration, an agency within the Ministry of Defense (MEPA), had recommended the protection, country-wide, of forty terrestrial sites, some of which were officially adopted since 1987, and of thirty six marine sites (with assistance from the International Union for the Conservation of Natural and National Resources (IUCN) (MEPA 1994; Ady & Waller 1989).

Also many archaeological sites, under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education have been identified, dug out and protected for future tourism use. Various municipalities, such as the Municipality of Jeddah, have conservation areas of specially protected historic buildings within the city's limit (Ady & Waller 1989). In the private sector, there has been a considerable work by commercial organizations to establish programs and projects serving domestic tourism.

Due to the new interest, tourism planning in Saudi Arabia is still in its first stages. Most of the planning processes and developments have been done by various agencies in the country with no national plans to integrate the efforts and guide the new and needed developments. In its broadest definition, planning is organizing the future to achieve certain objectives. There is a strong element of predictability in planning because it attempts to envision the future especially when dealing with a subject such as tourism in Saudi Arabia that suffers from a severe shortage of quantifiable data and is strongly influenced by fluctuating oil market and world economy.

Because of these reasons and due to the nature of the study, the research methods used here are based mainly on archival work and observational travel techniques. The observational travel consists of visiting many sites in the country of Saudi Arabia to study the role and

impact of many sites on tourism and to obtain new data and update old ones.

Archival technique was used because of the nature of this study. Zeisel (1991) gives a good and simple example of the usefulness of archival method by saying:

"If you borrow a friend's ill equipped country house for a winter weekend and find that the front door does not close, you might look in the basement for a screwdriver and machine oil. If these were not available and nearby stores were closed, you would find another way to close the door: an old knife and cooking oil in the kitchen, picture wire, a large nail to replace the hinge bolt. What you uncover may serve your purposes better than the tools you originally thought you needed."

The researcher is often caught in an old, cold house without a screwdriver, especially when he investigates the historical side of the planning process to prepare a national plan in order to integrate the efforts and guide the new and needed developments for tourism in a country such as Saudi Arabia. Therefore, an archival method was chosen in this study to gather information that cannot be obtained through other research methods. Archival data for this study was collected from libraries, various governmental agencies in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and the publication of some concerned international agencies. The search covered books, journals, surveys, reports, and newspaper reports.

Planning for Successful Tourism

Ideally, tourism should be planned as one sector, but at the same time it should be part of a comprehensive planning that is done for the whole country. In other words, tourism planning must be done in such a manner that it can be integrated as a distinct sector into the overall development policy, plan, and program. Tourism planning is usually prepared at various levels, with each level focusing on a different degree of specificity. Although not always possible to achieve, the planning should be prepared in sequence from the general to the

specific, because general level provides the framework and guidance for preparing specific plans. To start with the general level of planning, several considerations must be highlighted in the planning processes. These considerations are:

General Considerations

- * Tourism development should not disrupt or cause conflict with religious, cultural, social and/or traditional beliefs and lifestyles of the area s local communities;
- * Tourism development should not disrupt the natural environment, rather it should enhance the local ecology;
- * Finally, tourism development should improve the economic welfare of the local people.

Planning for tourism on a national scale should start with the basic components of tourism development and their interrelationships as ingredients of the plan. Although various categories of these components are presented in the literature on tourism, some basic components are always included. The attraction features of tourist destinations provide the basis for developing tourism in any country. They form the most essential elements of the tourism product. It is historically known that Greeks and Romans frequently traveled to distant sites for pleasure and other purposes (Balsdon, 1969).

In order to reach an attractive destination safely and comfortably, transportation issues ought to be considered. It is a vital component of tourism development. It provides critical linkage between market source and Tourism (Gunn 1994). Other basic framework for destination planning and development is infrastructure. Adequate infrastructure is essential for successful development of tourism and can be a particularly critical factor in less developed countries and regions (Heraty 1989). Potential tourism development areas such as resorts and major attraction features need to be examined more closely with respect to the availability of local infrastructure in order to help determine their feasibility for development. It would be pointless, for

example, to assign a place for tourism development with large resorts and facilities in a remote area where there are no existing infrastructures.

To ensure successful tourism, accommodations and tourist facilities and services must be available in sufficient quantity to match the demand of the tourists who arrive at the destination. Accommodations refer to hotels and other places and facilities where tourists stay during their travel. Other tourist facilities and services include tour and travel operations, restaurants and other types of eating establishments; retail outlets for handicrafts; souvenir; banks and other financial facilities. It also includes tourist information offices (Inskeep 1991).

The final component of tourism planning is the institutional planning and management system. By institutional planning and management system is meant those tools which are necessary to develop and manage tourism, including manpower planning and educational programs; marketing strategies and promotion programs; public and private sector tourism organizational structures; tourism-related legislation and regulations; public and private sector investment policies; and economic, environmental, and sociocultural programs and impact controls (Gunn 1994 and Inskeep 1991). The institutional planning and management system is an effective factor that achieves integrated planning and successful tourism development.

Given the approach adapted to this paper and the stage of tourism in the country, the basic components of tourism planning in Saudi Arabia will be classified as the following:

- * tourist attractions and activities;
- * transportation facilities;
- * infrastructure;
- * accommodations and tourist facilities and services; and
- * Institutional planning and management system.

Tourist Attractions and Activities

In the kingdom of Saudi Arabia, many tourist attractions have been identified and some have been developed either as scattered single attractions such as the 10 wild life protected terrestrial sites, country-wide, by MEPA in 1987 (MEPA 1994), or as focused attractions in a regional context such as Asir Province in the south western corner of Saudi Arabia that is nationally promoted as the summer tourist region of Saudi Arabia. In the last few years, many attractions have been identified and some started developing in many parts across the country.

The identification and development of the tourist destinations, although strongly encouraged and approved by the government, is completely done by the local authorities of each region, except the case of Asir National Park. There is no national plan for identifying and developing attractive tourist destinations. Without the existence of a national plan, scattered away destinations that lack the stimulation to attract tourists will be the final very expensive result.

In order to identify tourist attractions, it is important to understand two key factors: first, the available resources and attractions in the country; and second, the market demand (figure 2). To satisfy this market demand, a national plan, before anything, must recommend steps to guide for providing a variety of attractive destinations with adequate development and services.

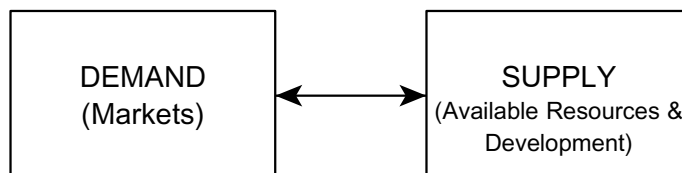


Figure 2: Demand-Supply Balance. The planning of tourism should strive for a balance between demand (market) and supply (development and services). This requires an understanding of market characteristics and the available resources as well as the process of planning and development to meet market needs (Source: Gunn 1994).

Since the advent of mass tourism, especially after World War II, the different types and number of attractions have greatly increased (Inskeep 1991), and this proliferation of tourist attractions and its related activities is still taking place. Attraction development has now become one of the most exciting areas of tourism. There is no one way for classifying tourist attractions and the literature on tourism abounds with such classifications. A classified scheme for the identification and development of tourist attractions represents an important step in setting up a future plan for tourism based on demand and supply concept. Tourist attractions, as mentioned earlier, can be classified in several ways. The following classification can be used considering the present situation in Saudi Arabia and the nature of the already identified attractions in the country.

Religious Attractions

Religious pilgrimages constitute one of the major reasons for people to travel to many places in the world, and very important sacred places generate a strong market for tourism. Saudi Arabia is the most important country in the world in regard to religious tourism. It hosts the most important religious destinations for Moslems in the world. Makkah and Madinah, as focused religious attraction cities, are long-established religious destinations that are attracting millions of domestic and international pilgrims every year. The government of Saudi Arabia has invested heavily (about 70,000,000,000 SRs⁽²⁾) in the development of the religious attractions of these two holly cities of Islam as well as in the development of the needed facilities and services for the pilgrims. Religious tourism in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is the only and the most important source for international tourists into the country. Many other religion related sites within the country need to be identified and developed for their potentials in order for them to

(2) Al Riyadh (Newspaper) - Issue number 10698 - 33rd - Saturday 9-10-1997.

generate considerable socioeconomic benefits to the society, especially if they do not conflict with the Islamic beliefs and laws.

Natural Attractions

A great variety of combinations of natural resource factors can create environments that are conducive to tourism development. The basic elements in this category include climate, scenic beauty, beaches and marine areas, conservation areas, and special environmental features (Gunn 1994; Inskeep 1991; McIntosh 1977).

Climate plays a major role in giving character to the areas and creating tourist attractions. Most tourists from hot and dry areas typically consider a moderate, relatively humid climate, such as the mountain range of the southwest Saudi Arabia, desirable. On the contrary, a warm and sunny climate, such as Jizan Province, on the extreme southwestern corner of the country, is an excellent destination for tourism in the winter. This combined with other attractions such as the beach and marine activities on the Red sea coast and the hot springs Fifa and Bani Malik Mountains in the east of the province can definitely be an excellent lure to tourists from other areas within Saudi Arabia or from Europe and North America trying to escape the harsh winters in their regions.

Scenic beauty of natural and man-made features of the landscape is a strong motivation to bring tourists as well. Many activities are usually associated with areas of scenic beauty. Pleasure driving with stops at scenic view points, hiking, picnicking camping, and wildlife viewing are just few of these activities. Outstanding scenic areas are usually designated as national or regional parks. An excellent examples of such categories in Saudi Arabia are Asir National Park and Al-Thomama National Park, north of Riyadh, although these activities are not the only ones available in these two parks.

Beaches and marine areas are associated with a variety of interesting activities such as swimming, boating, wind and board surfing, water skiing, scuba diving, fishing and other water recreation

activities. These features attract tourists who are seeking relaxation and recreation as well as those who engage in sport activities. Many tourism developments of such kind have begun to emerge in different parts of the country, although the demand for additional developments is yet to be fulfilled. The two most developed promenades are the ones in Jeddah and Khobar cities. However, recently, the new tourism resort villages on the red sea coasts in the north of Jeddah city and in the north west of Tabuk Province have been developed.

Conserved natural areas and their flora and fauna are becoming popular attractions for tourism with the rising global environmental protection awareness. Areas of unique natural characters should be designated for some type of conservation status, such as the 10 protected sites which were adopted in 1987 by the Meteorological and Environmental Protection Administration in the Ministry of Defense (MEPA) with assistance from the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) (MEPA 1994; Ady and Waller 1989). In the survey identifying tourist attractions, conservation areas should, naturally, be included in the evaluation for the potential use.

Special environmental features such as mountains, unusual geological formations, caves, hot springs, bodies of water, unique volcanic formations and other features are important attractions for both general sight-seeing and interested tourists (Inskeep 1991). Saudi Arabia is a vast country with a variety of topographic and geological features that need to be identified explored, and evaluated for their potential development as tourist attractions. Very little work has been done in this category compared to the other categories of natural attractions. Ahlan Wasahlan Magazine, the complimentary magazine of the Saudi Arabian Airlines, has the upper hand in publishing reports and articles about various special environmental features in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Few other individual works have been accomplished in the field of identifying and guiding tourists to

attractive places in the Kingdom such as the work of Thompson (1994) and Barbor (1996).

Cultural Attractions

There are various kinds of cultural attractions that provide tourism opportunities. Major types of cultural attractions are those that are based on man's activities such as programs and facilities that provide pleasurable knowledge of the culture of the place. These major types are: archaeological and historical sites; arts and handicrafts; interesting urban areas; museums and other cultural facilities and cultural festivals.

Archaeological and historical sites, including cultural and national monuments, historical buildings, districts, and towns and places of historic events such as battlefields, constitute a major type of attractive destinations in most parts of the world (Inskeep 1991). Saudi Arabia is rich in archaeological and historical attractions. As part of the old world, the country contains probably the second oldest archeological site of the pre-historical era in the world: Al-Shwihitia site in Al-Jouf Province (Al-Muaikeel 1996). It, also, sites many interesting archeological monuments, such as Madain Salih, Qasr Marid in Dumat al-Jandal and many others, some of which have been designated by UNESCO as world cultural heritage sites.

In addition, the country is the birth place of Islam which made it a living history of Profit Mohammed (peace be upon him) and there are many sites associated with this history. There are, also, many existing historical architectural monuments from the last couple of centuries which tell stories of both the major events of the past and the lifestyle and tradition of the society.

Attention has been given to this side of tourism attractions throughout the country. The Ministry of Education, as the authority over archeological sites, has finished surveying the known archeological sites in the whole country and has begun restoring some of the most important archeological sites such as al-Masmuk, the historical

monument in Riyadh which was turned into a museum and which tells the story of the establishment of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Other governmental agencies are helping in the excavation of the new discovered sites. Example of such work is the work of King Saud University in ancient site of Qaryat al-Fau (Al-Ansary 1982).

Archaeological sites have proved to be important in attracting tourism and reflecting tourism trends in recent years (Inskeep 1991). Many archeological and historical sites throughout the country ought to be declared as national archeological and/or historical parks or monuments and developed for attracting domestic and international tourism which in turn, will pay for their conservation cost with sound management. Heritage sites can be developed in many parts of the country by integrating presentation and explanation of the site through exhibit, demonstration, and animation techniques such as in Williamsburg in Virginia, USA. A local example of such Heritage is al-Meftaha Village in the Asir Province.

Arts and handicrafts centers are often developed at considerable cost, primarily for the benefit of residents but they are often substantially supported by tourists. Al-Meftaha Village, previously mentioned, is an example of such development. Traditional handicrafts of an area can be both an interesting attraction for tourists and a source of income for local artisans. Examples of such categories are the traditional weekly markets such as al-Khamis Market in Abha city in Asir Province and al-Khobah Market in Abu-Areesh city in Jazan Province. (Related to arts and handicrafts are the traditional or distinctive architectural techniques and styles of building that can be of much interest to tourists (Inskeep 1991). The restoration and preservation of traditional architecture in many areas in the Kingdom, for example the restoration of the historical section of al-Deriyah village near Riyadh city and the old neighborhood in Jeddah city and many other places, provide interesting attractive destinations for encouraging the flow of tourists.

Many tourists enjoy general urban lifestyle of large cities for their varied architectural styles, historic buildings and districts, civic centers, shopping facilities, restaurants, parks, and street life. In the 1980s, the leading destination for foreign travel by Saudi nationals were the major cities of the world, such as Cairo, London, Limassol in the south coast of Cyprus, Istanbul and Bangkok (Seeking 1987). In recent days, with the rising of the domestic tourism, the most popular destinations are the large urban areas in the country.

The holy cities of Makkah and Madinah get their visitors because of their religious attractions. Jeddah city, on the Red Sea, on the other hand, is the most popular destination in the country⁽³⁾ thanks to its varied urban attractions, such as the old preserved neighborhood, modern and traditional shopping centers, restaurants, hotels, amusement parks, museums, and the recreational facilities on the sea side, which draw tourists throughout the year, especially in the holidays. Ad Dammam city, on the Arabian Gulf, is also a major urban destination attracting mostly residents of the central regions of Saudi Arabia. Riyadh, as the capital city of the country, attracts thousands of visitors daily who come for business or for official missions to the various agencies of the government's headquarters.

Many other cities and towns across the country began developing their urban facilities and services to share in the tourism explosion. Municipalities ought to consider developing the facilities and services that benefit the local people and at the same time attract the tourists. The best thing is to keep in mind, at the planning stages of the development of tourism, the area's local urban lifestyle and its strength in order to create attractions that can neither be copied elsewhere nor suffer the competition.

(3) There is no official available quantifiable data but, through observation, the air travel to the city and the accommodation is always booked full on national holidays.

Museums and other Cultural Facilities

Museums and cultural facilities are usually related to various aspects of both natural and cultural features of an area presented in different themes such as archeology, history, ethnology, natural history, arts and crafts, science, technology and industry, and many specialized subjects. These facilities are usually developed primarily for local enjoyment but, if conceived well, they can also be important attractions for domestic and international tourists (Inskeep 1991). The government as well as the private sector have begun giving attention to this category for its importance. An excellent example is the establishment of King Abdulaziz Historical Center at the heart of Riyadh. The project covers an area of 374,000 m², and contains a national museum, King Abdulaziz historical buildings, a technical show building, a mosque and a huge central park (Riyadh Development Authority 1997). The project is considered to be one of the main attractions of Riyadh city. Many other examples in Riyadh, as well as in other cities and towns across the country, need to be established and consider developing their own cultural attractive facilities.

Cultural Festivals

The last type of tourist attraction is the cultural festivals, which are related to the local tradition, lifestyle and arts. Large festivals around the world such as the Carnival of Rio de Janeiro in Brazil and Mardi Gras in New Orleans have proved to attract many tourists as well as residents. Al-Junadria Festival in Riyadh is an excellent example of such category. The festival has been taking place for thirteen years and has proved to be a success in attracting domestic as well as international attention.

The festival is a large exhibit of all aspects of life in Saudi Arabia. The festival among other things features international camel racing, expositions and markets for craftsmen, art and traditional lifestyle shows, theater performances, traditional dances, and intellectual debates and lectures. Al-Junadria Festival is expected, in the future,

to draw international as well as domestic tourists because of its various activities and performances that express the Saudi cultural and traditional way of life. Other local festivals ought to be developed in various parts of the country for local cultures, traditions, and arts to act as tourists attractions.

Occasional and/or Special Types of Attractions

Special types of attractions refer to the artificially created attractions that might relate to either natural or cultural issues. These attractions are usually developed in or near cities or towns. Special types of attractions can include: first, theme parks, amusement parks, and circuses (Inskeep 1991); second, shopping, which is a significant activity of many tourists and must be considered in tourism planning as a possible attraction and service; and third, recreation, sports, and special events, which can be important primary or secondary attractions for tourists, such as the Third Soccer Continental Championship, that was held in Riyadh , Saudi Arabia, in December 1997. Expositions, also, can be major attractions for short time periods.

Considerations for Tourist Attractions:

- * Attractions should not be promoted for tourism until a site has been identified, designed, built and managed for visitors. Without proper design and management valuable assets may be eroded.
- * Attraction themes are best carried out when attractions are grouped together in close proximity. Clustered attractions have greater promotional impact and are more efficiently serviced with infrastructure services. In today s mass tourism, the minor and isolated attraction requires too much time and effort by the visitor.
- * Attractions-services linkage must be within reasonable time and distance from travelers. Attraction, although fulfilling a major portion of the travel experience, need to be supported by travel services such as food, lodging, and supplementary services.
- * Attractions should be developed in both rural and urban areas. Urban locations are equally viable for tourism development of

both cultural and natural resource attractions such as sea sides, wadis (valleys), parks, nature centers as well as museums, theaters, universities, convention center and industries. Rural areas and small towns also have their own assets to support attraction development. Some market segments prefer the less congestion of these areas and small towns (Gunn 1986).

Transportation Facilities and Services

In planning transportation for tourism development, two major considerations ought to be given attention: first, access to the country or region and the internal transportation system; and second, the various modes of transportation to be considered such as air, land, and water transportation (Gunn 1994; Inskeep 1991). Except when touring is used as an attraction, transportation is not usually a goal; it is, however a necessary evil of tourist travel. Therefore, it is essential to consider all travel modes and their capacity, within the country or region, to serve present and future levels of tourism. Special attention should be given to the level of accessibility from the tourists entry points to the tourism development regions or areas.

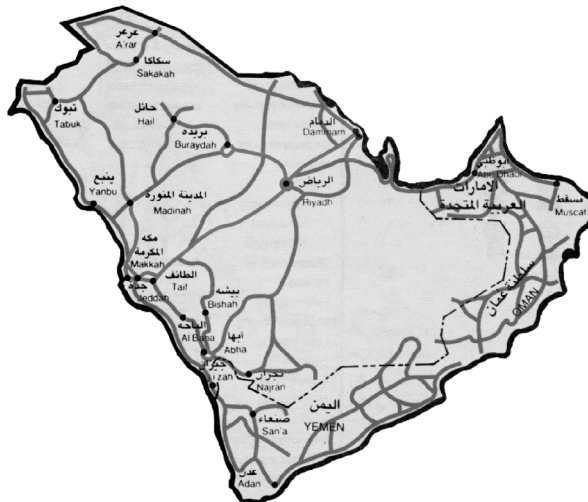


Figure 3: Saudi Arabia road network (Source: Farsi 1989).

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a vast country, about 2,000,000 km². Until approximately 70 years ago, the most popular way of transportation was camel caravans. The Kingdom today enjoys a sophisticated road system that links almost all the corners of the kingdom (figure 3), with a total of more than 25611 km of road length (Farsi 1989). The road system in the country has been carefully designed with special specifications to ensure a high standard for traffic safety (Farsi 1989).

Land transportation services for tourism require more than a complete roads system. They require the provision for limousine and car rental services, in cities and from airports, and bus services from one city to another. These services have been sufficiently available in the major cities. Up to 1989, the Ministry of Transportation had issued licenses for 171 offices for rental of small cars; 25 offices for airport passenger service by limousine cars; and 83 offices for in city passenger service by limousine cars (Farsi 1989). In regard to the bus service, a Saudi Public Transportation Company (SAPTCO) was established in 1979 with a capital of 1000 million Saudi Riyals, 30% of which is owned by the Government, as a national bus service company with a fleet of 1117 buses (Farsi 1989). The company's buses provide services both within and between major cities. The company transported 640 million passengers from the date of foundation up to 1987 (Farsi 1989).

The Kingdom also has a railway service that was established in 1951 between Ad Dammam and Riyadh cities. The General Organization of the Saudi Railways manages passenger and commodity transportation by rail. Its original purpose was to transport goods and materials from Ad Dammam Port to Riyadh. Studies to examine the feasibility of extending the rail system, within the framework of the general transportation plan for the Kingdom, are carried out by the organization (Farsi 1989). By extending the service of the rail system to the various parts of the Kingdom, tourism will benefit immensely from the reliability, the low cost and joy of traveling by rail service.

Due to the rapid economic growth and development of the Kingdom, the great distances between major cities and the difficult terrain, travel by air is an essential complement to road travel. This has led to the establishment of a comprehensive airline network to connect the remote areas and cities with each other. The Kingdom has now 23 international and local airports (Farsi 1989). Air travel plays an important role in boosting religious tourism in the Kingdom and it really needs to be considered in tourism planning.

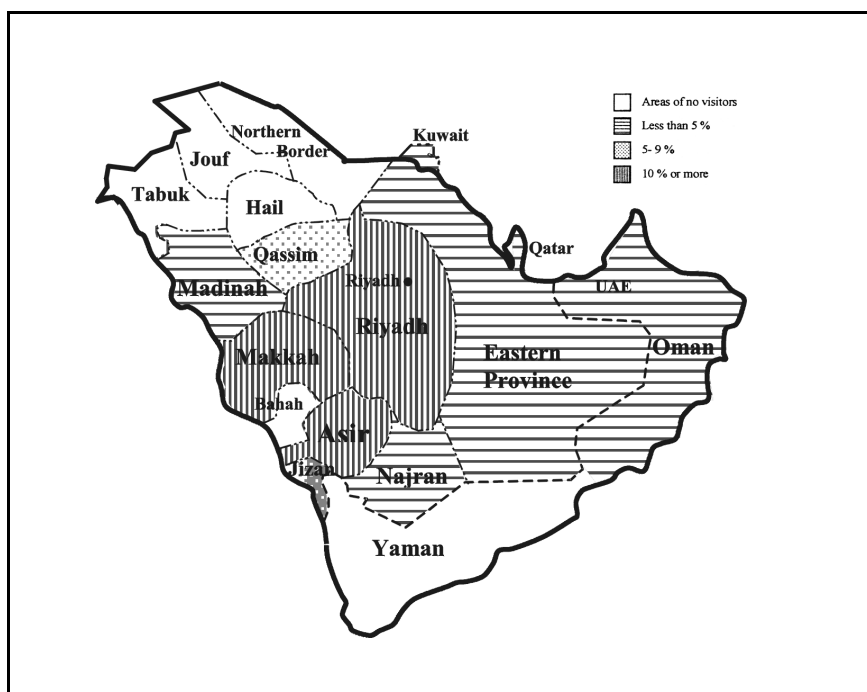


Figure 4: Origins of Asir National Park Visitors
(Source: Paul and Rimmawi 1992).

The excellent transportation services in the Kingdom have been accounted for the improvement of the domestic tourism market. People from various parts of the kingdom as well as from neighboring

country drive long distances for the sake of enjoyment and tourism. Paul and Rimmawi (1992) in their study of Asir National Park found that most visitors to the Park were from distant places and were using private cars. The study reveals that 38% of the visitors came from Makkah and Riyadh provinces; 12% from Madinah and Qasim provinces; 13% from Bahah, Jazan, and Najran provinces; and 4% from the Gulf States (Kuwait, Qatar, United Arab Emirate, and Oman) (see figure 1 and figure 4). Although this study is specific for Asir National Park, but it, however, gives an indication of the role of transportation in encouraging domestic tourism. Other places and attractions all over the country have benefited from the adequate transportation services in posting the domestic tourism especially for religious tourism to Makkah and Madinah Holy cities.

Considerations for Transportation:

- * Transportation planning and development must consider tourism implications. A closer cooperation and integration between the two sectors can advance the development of tourism at the national level.
- * Greater sensitivity to the human dimensions is required when planning for transportation. Better road signs and travel information continues to present a planning challenge on free-ways and major roads. On the other hand, rural routes and byways are often considered a part of the tourism product.
- * Utmost care should be given to the local social and physical environment when building new highway routes.
- * Inter-modal transportation centers are required for greater integration of travel modes. Access to the specific attractions and circulation within a destination frequently put several modes of transportation into play; therefore, tourist demand is seldom directed toward a single transportation mode.

Infrastructure

The on going story of the development that has been taking place

for the last 50 years, has succeeded in providing major infrastructure services to most parts of the country, especially to major cities and towns. The importance of this development can be clearly noticed in the increased level of urbanization. The urban population in Saudi Arabia rose from one million in 1970 to 13 million in 1992 (Al Kudairy 1997) thanks to the improvement of the living condition in the urban centers due to the availability of infrastructure services and facilities in the country. Hopefully, the intention of the government to link the major facilities (especially the water, electrical power, and the telecommunication services) in the Kingdom with the GCC countries will help in spreading the services into previously uncovered areas.

Tourist attractions, especially historical and natural ones, are usually located in remote places. The biggest obstacle in the way of tourism development for such attractions is the absence of essential infrastructure. The ancient site of Qaryat al Fau (al Fau village) in the Empty Quarter Desert in the south of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia provides a good example. Development of such attractive areas ought to be looked at in its regional context for the benefit of the local population as well as the developer and the tourists. Also, in the case of a remote attraction, the best way to overcome the remoteness and the absence of the required services is to plan for what we referred to earlier as the clustering of attractions. This means creating several attractions in an area and linking them to a more sophisticated center equipped with the needed services.

Considerations for Infrastructures:

- * Water supply and availability is typically the most critical component for tourism development (Inskeep 1991). Other infrastructures can usually be provided through adequate investment in facilities and services. The demand for water supply to serve tourism development varies greatly depending on the type of development and the environmental situation. Some developments like large resorts with swimming pools, extensive land-

scaping, and gulf courses located in a hot desert environment, such as that of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, will have a much higher demand for water than similar developments in a wetter and cooler area. In the planning analysis of tourist developing area, analysis should proceed with an investigation of whether a sufficient water supply can be provided at an environmentally and economically justifiable cost. If an adequate water supply is not available, then another resort site will need to be found. If a limited water supply is available, the type and size of resort to be developed will have to be modified.

- * The cost analysis of infrastructure services must consider both the initial installation and operational costs. The cost benefit analysis should include both costs and benefit to the society and the economy in general.
- * In the development of tourism, in the Kingdom, we should investigate the possibilities of conservation of infrastructure and resources. Conservation policy will provide better opportunity to develop tourism in remote areas. Examples of such conservation of resources are:
 - Alternative energy sources such as solar, wind towers, and tidal action;
 - Desalination of salty water;
 - recycling of sewage effluent for landscape irrigation;
 - Use of surface catchment and storage of rainwater;
 - Recycling of solid waste material for reuse and burning of material for heating and power; and
 - Use of fiber optics for telecommunications and satellite communication techniques.

Accommodations and Tourist Facilities and Services

Accommodations, more specifically, should precede any other type of development (McIntosh 1977) because of their vital importance in the tourism development. The greatest economic impact from travel occurs through the travel service businesses (Gunn 1994). Accommo-

accommodations and most travel services and businesses provide the greatest amount of employment and income. This category is commonly called the hospitality service industry (Gunn 1994). Therefore, accommodations and related services should be given due attention in the regional plan because of the important role they play in boosting tourism and the local economy and to grace the landscape for a long time because they are permanent and costly structures.

Accommodations and other travel service businesses have been spreading all over the Kingdom especially in major cities such as Riyadh , Jeddah, and Ad Dammam. The establishment of tourist accommodations and other travel service businesses is encouraged by many related governmental and official agencies in the Kingdom. The support and advice of the Commerce Chambers Union and the Higher Committee for Boosting Tourism is very important in helping the tourism development (Al Sayeed 1988).

The Municipalities, especially those located in tourism oriented cities such as Riyadh Jeddah and Ad Dammam and/or provinces such as Asir and Al Baha, play major roles in encouraging the development of accommodations and other travel service facilities by properly considering their location in the development of the regional and city plans and by providing the services and infrastructures for the business free of charge (Al Gahtani 1988). As a result of the government s encouragement, several large companies, specialized in travel service businesses, have been established such as Saudi Company for Hotels and Tourism Areas and Al Jouf Tourism Company.

Considerations for Accommodations and Tourist Facilities and Services:

- * Utmost care should be given to the investigation of the local people s opinion in the development of the accommodation s types and surfaces and to the various related facilities in order to avoid any future conflict between the local residents and the proposed development;

- * The travel and vacation habits of the prospective guests (Saudi tourists) should be considered to tailor the accommodation and other facilities to the requirements and desires of the guests;
- * Harmonious relationships between various elements of the accommodations and tourist facilities and services and the local environment and infrastructure should be developed;
- * Special care should be given to the placement of the accommodation facilities within the regional and local plans to ensure their proper role as the most important tourist facilities at the arrival destinations;
- * Clustering of the accommodations and other tourist facilities and services in reasonably close proximity offers several advantages:
 - Opportunity for integrated planning and application of development, design and environmental controls;
 - More efficient provision of transportation access and other infrastructure;
 - Convenience for tourists having facilities and services being in close proximity; and
 - Limitation of any negative environmental and sociocultural impacts in specific areas.

Institutional Planning and Management System

In order to plan, develop, market, coordinate, and manage tourism in a country or region, effective organizational structures are essential. Organizational structures for tourism planning and management must include public and private types of organizations at all levels of planning from the national level down to the urban and community level in tourism areas (Inskeep 1991). However the types and involvement of these organizations in tourism must be adapted to the particular needs and ideological and political structure of the country and the type and extent of tourism development expected. As mentioned earlier, the need to develop policies and planning and to set

service standards puts the responsibility of directing the organizational structures of tourism management on the governments.

In recent years, many governments have been actively involved in developing policy and planning for tourism. Even in more open and developed markets such as those of Western Europe, the involvement of national governments has been growing as in Spain, Portugal, and France (van Lier and Taylor 1993). Other European governments are becoming more involved in developing policy and planning for tourism as they recognize the increasing importance of tourism to their economies (Inskeep 1991). In less developed countries that still have rather weak private sectors, governments naturally must play a stronger role in tourism development, including marketing and making capital investments or offering investment incentives (Inskeep 1991) in order to encourage the emergence of tourism.

Since tourism in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a new industry, the institutional support of tourism is still inadequate and tourism needs a lot of attention and organization. Although there are some promising signs such as the establishment of the Supreme Commission for Tourism (Al Sayeed 1988) and that of local committees for boosting tourism in many cities in the Kingdom like Al Taif, Al Baha, Abha, Ad Dammam, Jeddah, and Riyadh. These organizations were responsible for planning, guiding, directing, controlling and managing tourism at various levels. Unfortunately, the mission is not an easy one. In the case of Saudi Arabia, where the increasing demand on domestic tourism play an important factor due to the large size of the country, an urgent need for different levels and types of organizational structures, that represent public and private sectors, is in demand to plan, develop, market, coordinate and manage tourism from the national scale of the nation down to the urban and community level.

Considerations for Institutional Planning and Management System:

- * An urgent need for a national organization that initiates, markets,

coordinates, and manages the development of tourism in the Kingdom. Sub-organizational structures, within the framework of the main one must be established in the public and private sectors to help in the planning processes for developing tourism. The role of these organizational structures in guiding the development of tourism will include:

- Initiating and planning the direction and trend of tourism development in the country;
- Coordinating the work of the various related governmental agencies who are responsible for tourism development;
- Initiating and guiding the private development of tourism projects;
- Preparing proper planning for developing the needed manpower through establishment of training programs with universities and specialized institutes in the country;
- Monitoring the impact of tourism on the environment;
- Establishing a data bank for collecting all sorts of information related to tourism in Saudi Arabia for use in the planning and guiding the development of tourism in the country;
- Preparing proper training programs to enlighten the local population of the importance of tourism business and to improve the ability to properly greet visitors; and
- Preparing and managing the programs and information needed to boost travel businesses such as promotional programs and informative literature of tourists attractions and facilities;

- * A national and regional information system is needed to provide a network of information centers to guide travelers. At these centers, travelers can obtain additional literature, maps and direction. The centers can be incorporated into local businesses, such as shops, in order to reduce costs.

Conclusion

Tourism is a growing activity in modern life. In the context of the phenomenal growth of tourism over the last few decades and the forecast that it will become the world's largest export industry by the year 2000, countries are bound to give increasing importance to the development of tourism. Governmental participation comes in the form of developing national plans of the countries with emphasis on improving and increasing tourism and its revenue. This participation is considered to be the main contribution to the status of tourism in this century.

Because of the importance of tourism, the number of attracting countries are increasing. In addition to the existing, well established tourism destination countries of Western Europe, North America, Japan, and Australia, East Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe, the Middle East is emerging as an important tourism destination. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as one of the major countries in the Middle East, and because of its religious, historical, natural, and socio-cultural uniqueness, it has the opportunity to become a major tourism destination in the region if it develop its tourism potentials through careful planning.

Although there are some incredible examples of successful development of tourism attractions and destinations, comprehensive planning should cover all levels from a national to regional and local planning. A national policy, plan, and program for guiding the development of tourism should be developed and integrated into the overall national plan of the country. The first step in planning for successful tourism is to start with the basic components of tourism development and their interrelationships. The basic components for tourism planning are: tourist attractions and activities; transportation facilities; infrastructure; accommodations and tourist facilities and services; and institutional planning and management system.

The study has taken a step in the direction of building a national

plan and policy to develop tourism as a competing economic and recreational sector. One of the main problems that confronted this research and is expected to hinder future ones is the extreme shortage of information about tourism and travel businesses. Such an obstacle ought to be overcome through a serious cooperation among the governmental agencies, especially those ones responsible for operating and/or regulating the travel businesses, in order to document and gather all types of data that can make envisioning the future of tourism development easier and more accurate. Finally, more serious work is required on the various levels of planning to develop a comprehensive national policy that guides and regulates the development of tourism in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to a satisfactory stage that echoes the role and weight of the country in the region.

References

- Ady, John and Edmund Waller. 1989. "A Contribution to the Debate on Internal Tourism in Saudi Arabia." Chapter 16 in *Urban and Rural Profiles in Saudi Arabia*. Berlin, West Germany: Gebruder Borntraeger.
- Al Gahtani, Abdulrhman A. 1988 (1408H). "Role of Municipality in Domestic Tourism." Article in Arabic, presented in The 3rd *Conference for the Head of Municipalities and Rural Urbanization Areas*. Abha, The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Municipality of Municipal and Rural Affairs.
- Al Kudairy, Abdulaziz A. 1997. "The Lasting Development and Sustainability of the Environment in Urbanization in Rapid Growing Society" article in Arabic. *The 11th Conference of Arab Urban Association*. Tunis: The Arab Urban Development Institute.
- Al Sayeed, Ibrahim. 1988 (1408H). "The Role of Municipality in the Development of Tourism in Asir Province." Article in Arabic, presented in *The 3rd Conference for the Head of Municipalities and Rural Urbanization Areas*. Abha, The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Municipality of Municipal and Rural Affairs.
- Al Tejarah (Magazine). 1989. "The Capital of Tourism and Trade, How to be Ready to Invest in Coming Century?" An Arabic Article. *Al Tejarah*, Issue no. 353, pp. 20-24.
- Al-Ansary, A. R. 1982. *Qaryat Al-Fau: A Portrait of Pre-Islamic Civilization in Saudi Arabia*. Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: University of Riyadh (presently King Saud University).
- Al-Muaikeel, Khaleel I. 1996. "Archeological Sites in Al-Jouf Province," in Arabic. *Al-Joubah*, no. 11, pp. 8-20.
- Ar-Riyadh Development Authority. 1997. *Developing Al-Muraba Palace area Project*, in Arabic. Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: Ar-Riyadh Development Authority.
- Balsdon, J.P.V.D. 1969. *Life and Leisure in Ancient Rome*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

- Barbor, Patricia. 1996. *Desert Treks from Jeddah*. London: Stacey International.
- Barnett, Jonathan. 1987. *The Elusive City: Five Centuries of Design Ambition and Miscalculation*. London: The Herbertt Press Limited.
- Borich, Timothy O. and Cory Fleming. 1993. "Making More of Loess: Promoting Tourism in the Rural Areas of Western Iowa." *Small Town*. July-August, 1993, pp. 20-21.
- Chubb, M., H. Chubb and S. Hollander. 1981. *One Third of Our Time? An Introduction to Recreation Behavior and Resources*. New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc.
- Economist Intelligence Unit. 1985. "Arabian Peninsula: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, UAE, Oman, Bahrain, Qatar, North Yemen, South Yemen." *International Tourism Quarterly*. London: Economist Intelligence Unit.
- Farsi, Zaki M. A. 1989. *National Guide and Atlas of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*. Jeddah, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Zaki M. A. Farsi.
- Gee, Chuck Y., James c. Makens, and Dexter J. L. Choy. 1989. *The Travel Industry*. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold.
- Gunn, Clare A. 1984. "Small Town and Rural Tourism Planning." In *Integrated Rural Planning and Development*, Floyd W. Dykeman (ed.), pp. 237-254.
- Gunn, Clare A. 3rd ed. 1994. *Tourism Planning*. New York: Taylor & Francis.
- Heraty, Margaret J. 1989. "Tourism Transport-Implications for Developing Countries." *Tourism Management*. Vol. 10 (4): 272-274.
- Ibrahim, Hilmi M. 1988. "Leisure Among Young Saudi Males." *International Review of Modern Sociology*, Vol. 18, Spring, pp. 57-60.
- Inskip, Edward. 1991. *Tourism Planning: An Integrated and Sustainable Development Approach*. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold
- Jansen-Verbeke, Myriam. 1986. "Inner-City Tourism: Resources,

- Tourists and Promoters." *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 13, pp. 79-100.
- Jansen-Verbeke, Myriam. 1993. "Sustainable Tourism Development." In *Environmental Management, Volume 2: The Ecosystem Approach*. Brussels, Belgium: VUB University Press.
- Mackie, Alan. 1984. "Entertainment city or Arabia desert?" *Meed*, 13 July, PP.25-29.
- McIntosh, Robert W. 2nd ed. 1977. *Tourism Principles, Practices, Philosophies*. Columbus, Ohio: Grid Inc.
- MEPA. 1994. *The Annual Report* (In Arabic). The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: the Meteorological and Environmental Protection Administration of the Ministry of Defense (MEPA).
- Mill, Robert Christie, and Alastair m. Morrison. 1985. *The Tourism System: An Introductory Text*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, Inc.
- Oldham, Ray. 1980. *Garden in Time*. New York: Lansdowne Press.
- Patmore, J. Allan. 1972. *Land and Leisure*. Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books Ltd.
- Paul, Bimal Kanti, and Hussein Snaf Rimmawi. 1992. "Tourism in Saudi Arabia: Asir National Park." *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 19, pp. 501-515.
- Robert, Kenneth. 1978. *Contemporary Society and the Growth of Leisure*. London: Longman Group Limited.
- Schofield, Daniel (ed.). 1986. *The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*. London: Stacey International.
- Seekings, John. 1987. "Saudi Arabian outbound: the changing structure of the Saudi Arabian travel market." *Travel and Tourism Analyst*, May 1987. London: The Economist Publications Limited.
- Talib, Kaizer. 1984. *Shelter in Saudi Arabia*. New York: Martin Press or London/St.: Academy Editions.
- Thompson, Ionis. 1994. *Desert Treks from Riyadh*. London: Stacey International.
- U.S. Travel Data Center. 1984. *National Travel Survey*. Washington, DC: U.S. Travel Data Center.

- van Lier, Hubert N. and Taylor, Pat D. (eds.) 1993. *New Challenges in Recreation and Tourism Planning*. New York, Elsevier.
- Webster's *Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language*. 1989. New York: Gramercy Book
- World Tourism Organization. 1977. *Integrated Planning*. Madrid, World Tourism Organization.
- Zeisel, John. 1991. *Inquiry by Design: Tools for Environment-Behavior Research* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 197.