

Best Practice for Marketing Heritage Site: Analysing the Medina National Museum in Saudi Arabia

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Abstract

Heritage tourism provides direct benefits for regional economies and enhances economic development within the local communities. This study investigates the best practices of Medina National Museum in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia by analysing the values of the site, tourist motivations, stakeholder's collaboration, and promotion management of the site. Applying the interpretive social science paradigm, this study is based on secondary data, which means that the researcher has gathered data from other scholars. This study finds religious and socio-cultural values of the site that could be taken into account as important values for a heritage site. This study also finds that religious, educational and authentic are the most important tourist motivations to the site. It has also identified the related stakeholders in Saudi Arabia and Madinah region and concludes that bureaucracy prevents effective partnerships between the related stakeholders, including private and public sectors. Finally, based on the results, the study offers some suggestions and recommendations to increase the number of visitors to the Medina National Museum, including applying appropriate marketing strategy focusing to the targeted Muslim tourists, whether domestic or international tourists.

Keywords: *Medina National Museum; heritage tourism; destination value; marketing strategy; tourist motivation.*

1. Introduction

Heritage tourism has grown fast in the tourism industry in the last decade (Huh, Uysal & McCleary, 2006). Heritage sites can be defined as "sites of great cultural significance and geographic areas of outstanding universal value. They include the Pyramids of Egypt, the Taj Mahal of India, and the Great Wall of China" (European Environment Information and Observation Network – EEIONET, 2012). They have various values such as historical, religious, and socio-cultural values (Mason, 2002).

Heritage tourism has many positive economic impacts for a destination. For instance, a study conducted by Bowitz and Ibenholt (2009) demonstrated that heritage tourism creates jobs for local people, and contributes to the economic revenue. Cela, Lankford and Lankford (2009) found that heritage tourist expenditure is greater than that of other groups of travellers, and supplies the local economy with large amounts of foreign currency. Heritage travellers spend an average of \$994 per trip, and they supply more than 192 billion US Dollars annually to the US economy (Mandala, 2009). This study further indicated that heritage tourists have a positive impact on

the Silos and Smokestacks National Heritage Area where heritage tourists spent US \$42 million in 2004, demonstrating that heritage sites act as a significant source of income for a tourism destination and indigenous people.

It is essential to adopt best practice in order to obtain maximum sustainable benefits for regional heritage sites (Macintosh & Wilkinson, 2011). Best practice is the key to success for any tourism project or destination. To create an appropriate best practice it is important to know several fundamental issues at heritage sites in regional tourism destinations, such as assessment of values, motivational factors, and how best to market heritage sites at tourism destinations. This study, therefore, investigates the best practices for marketing heritage sites at the Medina National Museum in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The aim of this study, using the example of the Medina National Museum, is to establish best practice for increasing the number of visitors to regional heritage sites in order to gain maximum sustainable economic benefit for government and local host communities.

Heritage sites in Saudi Arabia are potentially key attractions (Thomas, 2007). This study is going to examine the best practices to increase visitation to heritage site by analysing the Medina National Museum in Saudi Arabia. The site is located in the Hejaz Railway, which was suggested to help reduce the amount of time taken to trek to the holy city Madinah during the Hajj season. Previously, pilgrims had to travel by camels from Damascus to Madinah for more than 40 days through rough terrain, which included mountainous regions. At the behest of Sultan Abdulhamid II of the Ottoman Empire, the railway line began construction in 1900 and was opened on 1st September 1908 (Nicholson, 2005). The Hejaz Railway has linked many Islamic countries to the Holy Cities of Madinah and Makkah in Saudi Arabia (Orbasli & Woodward, 2008) and played a significant role in transporting pilgrims during the annual Hajj pilgrimage as well as being used by frankincense traders from Arab countries, such as Oman to Saudi Arabia (Nicholson, 2006). The length of the railway from Damascus to Madinah is 1,303 km. The Hejaz Railway Station at Madinah is the last terminus for the Hejaz Railway and has become a tourism attraction in Saudi Arabia. It has a strategic location close to the Al Masjid Nabawi, the second largest mosque in the world. There are various tangible

physical elements in the museum that give the site a distinctive sense of place, such as the landscape settings, the trucks, carriages and station buildings (Orbasli & Woodward, 2008). The museum opened officially in December 2014, and consists of 8 halls as follows: the entrance hall, Medina before Islamic civilization, Medina during era of Prophet Mohamed, Medina during the era of Rashidun Caliphs, Medina during the era of first Saudi State, Medina during the era of King Abdulaziz, and the heritage hall of Medina (SCTH 2014).

2. Method

The paradigm of this research is the interpretive social sciences as it allows multiple explanations about the research area as well as multiple realities within natural world data (Jennings, 2010). The interpretative social science paradigm supports examination of people's experiences in their real world based on their own historical and social perspectives (Creswell, 2009). This paradigm allows the researcher to draw multiple viewpoints from data through interpreting data subjectively rather than objectively (Jennings, 2010). This study will deal with many aspects, such as visitors' feelings about the site along with assessment of heritage values and motivational factors.

This study mainly applies secondary data which have been previously collected by other researchers (Dawson, 2009). There are distinct advantages of using secondary data; it is easy and fast to access and it can minimize the cost of research because many of the sources are free (Jennings, 2010). Jennings (2010) holds that using secondary data can enable the researcher to re-test and/or reinterpret the data. While Harris (2001) highlights that secondary data can provide the researcher with a triangulation view on the aims of the study, increasing the reliability and credibility of the research.

In this study, sources of the secondary data include public documents and statistical reports from international and regional bodies, organizations, associations, councils and commissions, such as the United Nations World Tourism organization (UNWTO), the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), and the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). In this study, statistics such as visitor numbers to the Medina National Museum, tourists' motivational factors and activities that enhance tourists visits to

heritage sites are required. The appropriate sources of that information are Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage (SCTH) and Tourism Information and Research Centre (TIRC).

This study has reviewed many academic journals, books, official websites, magazines and newspapers. In addition, this study has also undertook some personal communications. The journal articles for review were identified through searches of journals in tourism and other connected fields. The keywords used included a combination of the following terms: heritage sites, values in heritage sites, motivational factors in heritage sites, heritage management, marketing strategies in tourism destination, and best practice in heritage sites. This study has chosen to include reports from non-academic backgrounds, including websites, magazines, and newspapers. The major reason for adopting these sources was to increase the number of studies available for review and analysis to find specific information about Medina National Museum in Saudi Arabia.

3. Religious and socio-cultural values of Hejaz Railway

This study finds that the Medina National Museum is a unique attraction with religious values, such as discussed by a number of scholars (Nicholson, 2005; Nicholson, 2006; Burns, 2007; Orabasli & Woodward, 2008; Roth 2013). Spiritual value refers to an intangible value embodied or evoked by a place that is important in the spiritual identity, or the traditional knowledge, art and practices of a cultural group (Deacon, 2004). Spiritual values have strong relevance to people's beliefs about a site; therefore, it could be said that this is a type of religious value (Mason, 2002).

The religious value of the site is due to the location of the museum in the Hejaz Railway station which was the only route that transfers pilgrims from Turkey to the holy city of Madinah (Nicholson, 2006). People travel from Turkey to Madinah to perform Umrah and Hajj. Karcic (2014) said that Muslims in many countries around Turkey connect with the Hejaz Railway because of its religious and spiritual values. Kezendar (2012) also argued that the main purpose of the Hejaz Railway was religious because it helped pilgrims to reach the holy city of Madinah.

This value suggests that Saudi authority could use the religious and spiritual values evoked by the Museum to attract tourists to the site and increase the visitation numbers. In addition, managers and planners at the site should integrate those values in their management planning to obtain more visitors to the site. The spiritual-religious values of the site could be used as one of best practice to attract and increase tourist numbers.

In addition, this study also finds the social, historical, aesthetic and cultural values of the site that could be recognized as important values for heritage site (Shearing, 2006). A research study conducted by Orbasli and Woodward (2008) demonstrated that the Museum has historic value because it represents a part of Islamic history since 1908. While Eman (2005) argued that the ancient Hejaz route has historical value because it played a significant role in the Islamic history and civilization prior to the railway, reducing the Hajj trip from 45 days to only 5 days. In addition, Kezendar (2012) stated that the Hejaz Railway is a major part of the modern Arab history because it was the first railway route which transferred passengers between many Arab countries. Similarly, Nicholson (2005), in his book about the Hejaz Railway, argued that the railway played a significant role in the Islamic civilization in the Middle East because it was the only route which connected the Islamic countries and also linked Asia to Europe through Turkey.

The Hejaz route linked together many Muslims cultures, including Turkish, Syrian, Jordanian and Saudi Arabian cultures, and through thereby improved communication between multiple cultures and countries. Ideas and traditions were then exchanged between those Islamic countries (Orbasli & Woodward, 2008). For example, Saudi people in the Madinah region call the railway station 'Istasyun' which derives from the Turkish word meaning train station (Al-zaydi, 2014). Kezendar (2012) asserted that the Hejaz Railway has cultural value because it linked the Hejaz region in Saudi Arabia with other Arab countries through Damascus in Syria.

This study finds that the local community has strong association with the site. The opening of the Hejaz route of the 1st September 1908 was a special day for the local people (Nicholson, 2005), which they celebrated

because it brought electricity to the Madinah region, improving the quality of life and providing more commercial opportunity for the local people (Al-zaydi & Al-ahamadi, 2007). At this point, it should be recognised that the social values of the site are transferred from one generation to another and that it is very important to consider those values in the conservation management of the Medina National Museum.

Socio-cultural values have been considered essential criteria for conservation practice at heritage sites. Cater and Bramley (2002) argued that successful heritage conservation requires a clear evaluation of values and significance. Petrie (2005) argued that cultural significance is a part of the conservation process for any site across the globe and decision-makers should consider these social values in order to achieve successful conservation planning for heritage sites. Social-cultural values have a pivotal role in the assessment process in heritage management and

a regional destination should focus on the importance of the socio-cultural values of a heritage site in order to obtain the appropriate management and best practice.

In the context of study site, the museum and its physical elements have exciting potential for great positive impact on both the local people and international visitors. This positive impact could provide significant economic benefits through an appropriate framework which integrates the above values into the management and strategic planning of the site.

4. Tourist motivations

This study finds three types of visit motivations to the site, namely religious, educational, and authenticity motivations. The research also reveals that the majority of visitors were attracted by the religious purposes to travel to Madinah, which is the second holiest city in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Table 1. Propensity to visit heritage sites by purpose

Purpose of visit	Historical or archaeological site	Antiquities site	Religious site
VFR	8%	4%	15%
Holiday	6%	11%	19%
Umrah	19%	22%	98%
Ziara	15%	10%	58%
Business	3%	2%	15%
Other	1%	*	5%

Source: SCTH (2016)

The table shows that the religious tourists who perform Umrah seem to be the majority of those visiting heritage sites. 19% of religious tourists to Saudi Arabia have a propensity to visit heritage sites and 22% of them desire to visit the antiquities sites. Not surprisingly, 98% of the religious tourists desire to visit religious sites. In addition, 15% of visitors who came for Ziara desire to visit heritage sites. Ziara means visiting Saudi Arabia with two purposes, namely religious and leisure (Farahani & Henderson, 2010).

According to SCTH (2016), 48% of religious visitors who came to perform Hajj also desired to visit heritage sites. In addition, 40% of religious tourists who came to perform Umrah wished to visit heritage sites. These statistics demonstrate that a substantial percentage of religious tourists have a desire to

visit heritage sites and indicate that religious motivations could play a significant role in attracting tourists to heritage sites, especially to the Museum and Hejaz Railway Station.

A report by SCTH (2016) about the museum also shows that Muslim visitors from many different countries wish to see the Madinah prophetic era hall, the prophetic mosque hall, and the prophet Mohamed's family's hall. In addition, many media reports indicated that hundreds of visitors have visited the Museum and the Hejaz Railway Station and the main motivation was religious factor (Al-harbi, 2012). While Orbasli and Woodward (2008) mentioned that 73% of international visitors come to Madinah for religious reasons. Religious tourists are recognized as the highest spenders in the holy cities (Bogari et al., 2004). According to SCTH (2016), Madinah city

received millions international visitors annually for religious purposes. Again, it shows the significance of Islamic values in the site which motivate Muslims to visit. It could be argued that the first target market for the Hejaz Railway is religious tourists who come to visit the holy cities every year. Therefore, focusing on the religious intentions as a motivational factor will lead to the increase of visit to the museum.

This study also finds that visitors were also attracted by the educational aspects of the area. Aleqtisadiyah (2010) found that thousands of international tourists were interested in knowing about the history of the site. They wanted to know about the history of the Hejaz Railway Station and to learn more about the cultural values of the site. Most of the visitors to the Medina National Museum want to expand their knowledge about Islamic history and civilization (Al-zaydi, 2014). While Saudi families during the last Eid al-Fitr holiday visited the site and the museum to learn about the process of carrying pilgrims in ancient times, and to improve their children's knowledge of this history (Al-mogamsi, 2014). A recent report in Riyadh newspaper shows that many Saudi families like to visit the Medina National Museum and they were pleased after the restoration of the site (Muhammad, 2006).

In addition, analysis of the data finds that schools and colleges in Madinah region are also motivated by educational reasons to visit the museum. According to SCTH (2016), schools, colleges, universities and official delegations have all visited the Museum. They wish to gain knowledge of the history of the site.

The third motivation found in this study is authenticity. Significant numbers of tourists have visited the Hejaz Railway Station and official reports show authenticity as the motivation (SCTH, 2016). They not only desired to discover the desert life, but they also wore traditional dress in the sites and desired to have an authentic historic train journey (Al-naser, 2008). SCTH (2016) reported that 75% of international tourists from Arab countries and 68% of international visitors from Asia desired to visit heritage sites. International tourists hope to visit the Hejaz Railway because of its attractive style (Orbasli & Woodward, 2008). A media report in the Al-waten newspaper has also indicated that most of the visitors to the Hejaz Railway station and museum in Madinah region were international tourists (Al-harbi, 2012).

Authenticity is directly linked to tourists' personal feelings and emotions (Wang, 1999). Bhati, Pryce and Chaiechi (2014) who have conducted a study in museums in different countries demonstrated that an authentic experience is important in order to maintain a successful business in such sites. They illustrated that riding the steam train engine 'Puffing Billy' in Victoria, Australia, provides visitors a great opportunity to experience authenticity. To provide this authentic experience, the Tourism Development Council in the Madinah region arranges a festival of handicrafts and traditional cuisine in the Museum, under the auspice of the SCTH branch in Madinah city (Al-zaydi, 2014).

Knowing motivations of tourist to visit heritage sites is an important key element in obtaining best practice for such places. Poria, Reichel and Biran (2006) found that there is a link between tourists' reasons for visiting heritage sites and creating appropriate management for those sites. While Poria, Butler and Airey (2004) argued that knowing the reasons for visiting heritage sites helps in management planning, marketing, and interpretation. In addition, Yoon and Uysal (2005) noted that travel motivation is key for marketers and managers for a successful destination business.

5. Stakeholders' Collaboration

Cox and Wray (2011) have emphasized that stakeholders collaboration is an essential practice in strategic planning processes of tourism destinations. Aas, Ladkin and Fletcher (2005) argued that stakeholders collaboration to develop tourism and local resources is essential for sustainable management of heritage sites. While Wray (2011) asserted that stakeholders collaboration can improve the future development and management of the tourism destination region.

The SCTH has created partnerships with many stakeholders in private and public sectors (SCTH, 2016), as one of the most important strategies for the partnership between stakeholders to contribute effectively to a plan for the tourism industry in all regions, as well as to ensure effective conservation plans for heritage attractions in all regions in Saudi Arabia (SCTH, 2014). The SCTH plays a significant role in the collaboration between private and public sectors because it provides financial support and ensures the action plans for any

tourism projects or activities (SCTH, 2016). In the Madinah region, there are four sectors which collaborate with the Saudi Tourism Commission and National Heritage, namely the Saudi Heritage Preservation Society, the Consumer Protection Society, the Tourism Development Council, and the Al-Madinah Province Governorate. The main aim for the collaboration between these sectors and SCTH is to protect the heritage site's values and their potential as tourism resources (SCTH, 2016).

Although there appears to be appropriate partnerships between the SCTH and other stakeholders, this study actually finds that government bureaucracy could prevent tourism development in the Madinah region and in the conservation process of the Hejaz Railway route. Bureaucracy is the major challenge for partnerships between government stakeholders (Almadenh, 2014). In the case of the Hejaz Railway, there is a need to do more investment in the Madinah region to attract more visitors to this unique site, however there is a lack of stakeholders collaboration because of the bureaucracy (Almadenh, 2014). For example, organizers of tourist exhibitions stated that bureaucratic government agencies delay many essential exhibitions (Al-qurny, 2014). Another issue is getting permission for non-Muslims to visit heritage sites which takes time because of the long processes between stakeholders (Maree, 2007; Thomas, 2007).

6. Marketing the Site

To get the most effective marketing strategies, a destination should identify its market segment (Huh, Uysal and McCleary, 2006). Understanding the groups of tourists would provide the heritage site with a great opportunity to develop the destination and attract more visitors to it by creating a special promotional campaign. This segmentation would provide planners and managers with the opportunity to create special promotional campaigns for their visitors. Dolnicar and Leisch (2008) note that in order to achieve the target market, a variety of tourist segments need to be considered. For each market segment, special strategies need to be created to attract tourists, such as special brochures (Burns et al., 2010). Cox and Wray (2011) stated that any destination must focus on the type of visitors to establish attractive promotion to increase their visits. In this study, the three motivation of tourist,

namely religious, educational, and authenticity, as well as the segmentation of international and local tourists are very important to be taken into account in the management of the site, including in the promotional management.

This study finds that there is no specific brochure to promote the Medina National Museum. In fact, according to personal communication to the manager of the site, it appears that there is a complete lack of marketing strategies (A. Karbosh, personal communication, August 9, 2017). Lack of marketing seems to be a problem in most of the heritage sites in the Madinah region (Thompson, 2005; Farahani & Henderson, 2010). This concern about the lack of advertising or marketing information on the heritage sites in the Madinah region has been expressed by many parties (Almadenh, 2016).

However, the manager of the site said that there is a CD player to promote this unique site in different languages which is usually given to the visitors during their trip to the Hejaz Railway (A. Karbosh, personal communication, August 9, 2017). The CD provides a brief introduction about the history of the Medina National Museum and the Hejaz Railway station. It also shows attractive pictures of the routes and trains. In addition, it explains the cultural, religious and historical values of the site. However, the CD has only been given to the tourists who are visiting the location. Thus it is not truly part of a marketing strategy because visitors should get the information about the site when they arrive in the Madinah region.

Cox and Wray (2011) emphasized that innovative promotional strategies are fundamental in attracting visitors to regional tourism destinations. They suggest that a tourism region should promote its iconic attractions to the consumer through media advertising campaigns. For example, Tasmania has been promoted as a holiday destination by using the tagline "Where history is just part of the story" (Cox & Wray, 2011, p. 536). Similarly, Morgan and Prichard (2005) assert that promoting a destination is the key to attracting consumers and for creating publicity about the regional destination. Huh, Uysal and McCleary (2006) argued that creative promotional strategies encourage tourists to visit a particular destination, and to keep it competitive in the travel trade. According to Burns et al. (2010), promotional activities include direct mail

campaigns, and advertising through television, radio, newspaper, social media and mobile technologies. In addition, creating a strong image brand about the destination will attract the visitors (Wray, 2011). Creating a promotional campaign through social media is another effective marketing strategy to target Muslims tourists locally and globally.

7. Conclusion

This study mainly focuses on the examination of best practices for marketing Medina National Museum in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It draws attention to the most efficient and effective use of heritage sites and how this increases visitor numbers, together with increased economic benefits of regional tourism destinations.

This study commenced by identifying the religious and socio-cultural values in the Medina National Museum and demonstrated that religious, educational and authentic are the most important motivating factors in attracting visitors. Firstly, tourists were motivated to visit the site for religious reasons; yearning to see the Islamic hall in the museum, the Prophet biography and to pray in Ambyria, which is a historic mosque inside the site. Secondly, tourists were motivated to expand their knowledge about Islamic history and civilization. Thirdly, tourists desired to have an authentic experience by riding an historical steam train and participating in the various cultural events, such as the festival of local handmade goods and enjoying the region's cuisine.

This study has also identified the related stakeholders in Saudi Arabia and Madinah region. It is apparent that bureaucracy prevents effective partnerships between the related stakeholders, including private and public sectors. Thus, it is suggested that SCTH should activate the adopted vision in the Madinah

region in order to ensure improvement of the heritage sites.

This study demonstrated that religious tourists seem to be the largest group of visitors to the Madinah city and it would be logical to identify this group to market the museum. As the local people are also willing to visit this site, creating appropriate promotional campaigns focussed on these two groups would not only enhance visitor numbers to the site but also provide best practice in the marketing strategies. Promotional campaigns through social media would be an appropriate marketing strategy to targeted Muslims tourists. Brochures in many different languages which address the historical and religious values of the site would, indeed, attract tourists and encourage visitors from a wide range of Islamic countries. Furthermore, the study found that improving social activities in and around the site and providing language interpretation would encourage both international and domestic tourists.

The Medina National Museum is a unique heritage attraction in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. However, little official information is available about the site. Thus, the SCTH needs to: 1). Provide research funding to educational institutions to encourage Saudi researchers to conduct more research about the heritage sites in the Madinah region; 2). Conduct research into tourist satisfaction levels at Hejaz in order to improve services offered and increase attendance levels; 3). Develop a strategic plan for future development of the site using all the research data. This research needs to be carried out in the near future to enable tourist management to take advantage of the data in order to focus their brochures towards the right population sector. This will also provide the museum management with useful data to enable them to focus their services on what the local and international visitors want to see.

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