

AN OVERVIEW OF THE TOURISM MARKETING STRATEGY IN YEMEN

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Abstract

Tourism industry in Yemen is identified as a priority area for government income. Yemen is rich with tourism products which are categorized into cultural, seaside, and desert. Thus, the government, represented by the Tourism Industry and Yemen Tourism Promotion Board has developed the tourism marketing strategy for the country. However, the tourism marketing strategy has showed little successes as several problematic issues are raised. Issues such as lack of specific targets, disagreement between public and private sectors, and lack of infrastructure development have been found to be the main issues that hinder the success of such strategy. Yet, different tourism parties should take into consideration the different issues in order to develop the tourism industry of Yemen.

Keywords: Tourism Marketing Strategy, Tourism Industry, Promotion, Destination Marketing, Yemen Tourism

INTRODUCTION

Yemen is an Arab country situated in Western Asia. It stretches from the south western to the southern end of the Arabian Peninsula. Yemen being the second largest country in the Arabian Peninsula occupies 527,970 km. Sana'a is the capital of Yemen and Arabic is the official language which is widely spoken in the Peninsula. The total population of Yemen is 26.83 million in 2015, the GDP is \$35, 95 billion in 2013 (World Bank, 2016).

Yemen is still known as the 'hidden secret of Arabia' with an incomparable leisure travel and tourism product to offer. Historically, Yemen has distinguished itself with three UNESCO World Heritage sites and one UNESCO Natural Heritage site (the very unique Socotra Island). Socotra Island has been labelled as the most alien-looking place on earth, which offers a wealth of fauna and flora which cannot be found elsewhere. Hopefully, when safety and security is assured in the country, Yemen could be the next leader in travel and tourism destination in the Middle East. Therefore, to achieve this, guaranteed safety is absolutely vital in order to lure back the hundreds of thousands of leisure tourists to the country.

CATEGORIES OF TOURISM INDUSTRY IN YEMEN

According to the Yemen Tourism Promotion Board (2008), Yemen is a destination with much to offer in terms of historical and cultural sites and different landscapes. The tourism product of Yemen includes:

Cultural Tourism

Archaeological sites, intangible heritage and historic cities registered under the UNICCO heritage sites. Sana'a, the capital of Yemen situated in a mountain valley at an altitude of 2,200 ft. Sana'a has been in existence for more than 2500 years but during the 7th and 8th centuries, Sana'a was a city centre used for the spreading of Islam. The religious and political heritage of the city is reflected in the 103 mosques, 14 hammams and more than 6000 houses all constructed before the 11th century. The multi-storey tower houses in Sana'a were built of rammed earth which adds beauty to the city's skyline and is a popular tourist destination among foreign tourists. The old city of Sana'a is a permanent feature of Yemen tours, and little wonder since it's one of the most beautiful cities on earth. Meandering through the city is certainly the best way to absorb its unique charm, enjoying the "skyscrapers" that are said to be the world's first and stopping in ancient buildings for a delicious, strong coffee.

Shubam, also known as the Old Walled City was built in the 16th century. The city is surrounded by secured walls and is a classic example of urban planning based on the principle of vertical construction. Shubam has also been accorded a nickname which is 'the Manhattan of the Desert' due to its very impressive tower-like structures protruding out of the cliff.

Another historic town in Yemen is Zabid, a town known for its military architecture and urban planning. Zabid was an outstanding township due to its archaeological and historical sites. From the 13th to 15th century, Zabid was the capital of Yemen and have made immense contributions to the Arab and Muslim world for many centuries because of its Islamic university.

The outer regions of this city have been inhabited for centuries upon centuries, and the city itself is -mind-bogglingly old too (AD 819 is said to be the date it was built).

Seaside Tourism

Yemen has many lovely beaches which can be marketed to international tourists as seaside tourism products. Such exotic islands and cities that attracted local and international tourism include Socotra, Kamaran, Aden, Al-Hodeidah.

Socotra Island is located in the northwest Indian Ocean not far from the Gulf of Aden stretching 250 km long. The Socotra Archipelago is made up of 4 islands and 2 rocky islets which is an extension of the Horn of Asia. This island is universally well known due to its biodiversity and its rich and distinctive flora and fauna. Socotra offers an unusual range of plant species, reptile species, bird species and snail species that are unheard of and unavailable in other parts of the world. In addition, Socotra also offers a diverse marine life as it has 253 species of reef building corals, 730 species of coastal fish and 300 species of crab, lobster and shrimp. Socotra is another of the world's gems, and this island is said to hold the secret of eternal life on its shores. Debatable? Maybe. But there's no doubting that the arresting views and unique flora and fauna will make an indelible mark on you for the rest of your life. This truly is one of the most remarkable areas on earth, and feels like a doorway into another world.

Another famous island is Kamaran which lies at the southern end of the Red Sea which offers an unusual view of the moon. Travellers coming to this island will be fascinated to watch the reflection of the moon in the water on either side of them.

Aden City Attracts locals and the majority of the foreigners living in Yemen because of the city's beaches. Within the city itself and heading to the Gold Mohur district one can find the best serene and tranquil beaches such as the Lover's Bay Beach, the Elephant Beach and the Gold Beach. In addition, there are 2 private beaches in the Sheraton Gold Mohur and the Elephant Bay Beach Resort. On the other hand, Al-Hodeidah City: Is a port in Yemen, well known for the export of coffee beans. The unique and distinctive architectural design and character of Al-Hodeidah city are very similar to the coastal towns of the Red Sea viz; Jeddah and Aqaba.

Desert Tourism

Moving away from the coast, the centre of Arabia is a large huge area of gravel plain partially covered in sand dunes. The main desert, the Rub al Khali (the Empty Quarter) situated in the eastern part of the peninsula has a rather smaller arm known as the Ramlat as Sabatayn. It is 100km wide and 15km long. Some of the dune ridges can be as high as 50m and several

kilometres long. Travellers crossing the desert have a strange phenomenon that they are able to see seashells in the sand.

The internal desert lakes dried up eventually due to the climatic regime between 3000 and 4000 BC leaving the unfortunate residents to suffer high and dry. Nevertheless, there are a whole lot of activities that can be organized viz; touring and bedouin camping safaris, spending the night in bedouin tents, horse riding camel races and visits to some of the historical and archaeological sites.

GOVERNMENT EFFORTS IN DEVELOPING THE TOURISM INDUSTRY

Yemen displays a potential for successful international tourism development, through exploiting the beautiful landscapes and tangible cultural heritage and traditions. It is important to set these potential strengths into customer oriented value for the long term benefit of tourism development. This needs to be done through implementing a carefully thought out marketing and distribution strategy.

In 2006, the government of Yemen established the Ministry of Tourism. This ministry was formed to offer better support for the legal and policy framework and strategic development for the industry through the implementation of tourism marketing activities. To achieve the mission of making Yemen a world tourist destination, effort and active participation from the government, non-government institutions, and the private sector have been successfully engaged.

Tourism has emerged as an important instrument for government sustainable development including international understanding and promoting social integration. It was accorded a high development priority. To support the government's efforts, the Yemen Tourism Promotion Board (YTPB) was established to be responsible for the international marketing of Yemen as a tourism destination in both international and local markets.

The Ministry of Tourism and the YTPB have started a new strategic planning initiative to improve strategic destination marketing planning (Strategic Tourism Marketing Plan). This initiative plays a central role in Yemen's current and future tourism promotion, and shall allow for measuring the effectiveness and efficiency of tourism marketing. The stakeholders in both the public and private sectors have held meetings to analyze the ideas and develop a target oriented tourism marketing plan.

This pragmatic approach takes into account the tourism situation in Yemen, risk management measures and emerging trends in international tourism markets. Results from the various analysis have revealed some major tourism themes which are meant to provide Yemen with a unique selling proposition and position among European, Asian or Arab destinations. In

addition, implementation measures are being formulated for promoting tourism projects and marketing activities. The overall objective of the strategic marketing plan is to develop Yemen as a competitive tourism destination in the international market with a definite position (Yemen Tourism Promotion Plan, 2008).

YEMEN TOURISM MARKETING STRATEGY

The tourism marketing Strategy of Yemen has been developed to drive all tourism marketing activities. It insures that marketing activities are in line with strategic plan, and that budgeting and resources matches marketing objectives. The strategy includes many objectives (Yemen Tourism Promotion Plan, 2008), among the most important ones:

- To strengthen the tourism position of Yemen and to increase the volume of tourism and tourist exports markets.
- To improve the marketing, branding, and image of Yemen to become a tourism competitive destination in the intentional market.
- Maximize the contribution of tourism industry in the country's economy.
- Promote the rich natural habitat, historical, and cultural heritage.
- Improve the ability to identify market products and segmentation to meet the identified customer segment opportunities.

The government has also launched a verity of activities (Yemen Tourism Promotion Plan, 2008), such as:

- Production and distribution of promotional material (Yemen e-Book, Booking Yemen Guide, Yemen Tourism Magazine, Brochures, UNESCO world heritage sites, Film Promotion Package, Posters, Flyers, Gifts, and Maps of Yemen).
- Advertising (TV's Channels, Newspapers and Magazine, Online Magazines, and Radios).
- Participating in the international tourism Trade fairs, trade sales visits and workshops.
- Organizing in-destination familiarization travel trade visits (Tour Operators).
- Organizing Media familiarization programs (Journalist).
- Promoting Events and local festivals.
- Campaigns in international markets.

- Public Relations and Communication (PR companies, crisis management, Evaluation of Media Coverage, Call Centre, Tool kit for promotional material).
- Visitor information services and facilities.
- E-Marketing and Internet Promotion (Internet extranet, B2C direct Mailings, E-Newsletter, Pictures Database and updating information Sources).

ISSUES RELATED TO YEMEN TOURISM MARKETING STRATEGY

Although the tourism marketing strategy of Yemen seems promising, the objectives do not specify targets for tourism volume to be achieved. In addition, the strategy has failed to increase the number of tourists as the statistics issued by the Ministry of Tourism for 2010-2012 show that a larger number of tourist arrivals are Yemeni expatriates traveling back to Yemen after visiting relatives and friends in their home country. Table 1 shows a lower number of tourist arrivals from Europe despite YTPB marketing activities which have been targeting this market. The established markets in Europe are France, Germany, and Italy (Yemen Tourism Promotion Board, 2008).

Table 1. International Tourists Arrival by Region (2010-2012)

Reign	2010	2011	2012
Middle East	376982	301631	348939
Europe	32057	13380	16354
Asia	64292	38068	46365
Americas	28006	18275	27894
Africa	33387	15719	19210
Australia	1296	425	567
VR Yemeni Expatriates	488742	441692	714646

Source: Ministry of Tourism (2012)

Another issue is the disagreement between the government and private sectors in relation to the achievements and implementation of the strategy. Interviews with three managers of the main tour agencies from the private sector and one official manager from Tourism Ministry have been conducted to determine the perception of the managers on the achievement and implementation of the strategy. The result shows that a huge disagreement between the different parties. Table 2 summarizes the result and shows the agreement and disagreement points.

Table 2. Stakeholders Statements

Statements	Government	Private		
	Planning Manager in the Ministry of Tourism	General Manager of ATG Group	General Manager of Universal for Tourism	General Manager of Al- Jamallah for Tourism
Lack of coordination between the private and public sector	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Only part of marketing tourism has been implemented	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Lack of promotional material and no interest to produce new ones	No	Yes	No	No
No Involvement in future marketing plans.	No	Yes	No	No
Participation in international tourism trade fairs without proper plan or public relation	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
The planned strategy objective is not well achieved	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Lack of improvement in branding and image of Yemen	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Limited local events (Sana'a Summer Festival)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Lack of advertisement in media	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

The lack of tourism infrastructure is one of the key bottlenecks for implementing the tourism marketing strategy in Yemen, yet, hinder the development of the tourism sector. For instance, there are only few hotels in Yemen, most of the 5, 4 and 3 star hotels are located in the capital Sana'a and the rest are distributed between the other cities. There are major efforts by the government to improve the infrastructure and services in different tourist sites throughout the country and to try and attract local and foreign investment by providing different incentives in order to carry out projects in the tourism sector especially construction of hotels. Yemen's tourism industry is hindered by limited infrastructure as well as security issues. The country's hospitality industry is way below international standards and road transportation is far from adequate (UN Development Assistance Framework, 2011).

CONCLUSION

An insight of the tourism industry of Yemen and its current situation has been given in this paper. Yemen is a country with a lot of potentials, specifically in regard to tourism. However, the current situation of the tourism industry is less than expected. In addition, the government strategies, plans, and effort should be more comprehensive, as well as, reviewed based on real achievements and statistical records. Furthermore, the different parties that formulate the tourism industry, such as public and private sectors, should work together in order to have better understanding. Other issues should be recognized in order to achieve the targeted objectives.

The deficiencies related to tourism marketing strategy led to that Yemen received the lowest tourist arrivals comparing to other regional countries. The overall objective of the strategic marketing plan is to develop Yemen as a competitive tourism destination in the international market with a definite position (Yemen Tourism Promotion Plan, 2008). Selected destinations with a strong focus on cultural tourism similar to the product that Yemen has to offer like Oman, Syria, and Jordan, within the Middle East attracted most of the international tourist arrivals. Finally there are further potential research areas need to be done. For example, conducting similar researches specifically on tourist perception, expectations and satisfaction. Conducting qualitative study and where possible to contribute good inputs on tourism marketing strategy for policy makers in future. Future studies may include Yemen tourism industry and discussions on competitor and comparison in the region.

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