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# **B2-02-C ASSESSMENT FOR AJLOUN TOURISM PRODUCT AND BRAND ANALYSIS**

May 2014  
FINAL

Developed by  
USAID Economic Growth Through Sustainable Tourism Project

# ECONOMIC GROWTH THROUGH SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PROJECT

**B2-02-C – ASSESSMENT FOR AJLOUN TOURISM PRODUCT AND  
BRAND ANALYSIS**

**Contract No. EPP-I-00-06-00013-00,  
Task Order No. AID-278-TO-13-00002**

**This publication was produced by the USAID/ Economic Growth Through Sustainable Tourism Project, under the direction of Ibrahim Osta, Chief of Party.**

## Table of Contents

<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b> .....	1
<b>BACKGROUND &amp; CONTEXT</b> .....	2
<b>STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES</b> .....	3
<b>APPROACH</b> .....	3
<b>ANALYSIS &amp; RECOMMENDATIONS</b> .....	5
DELIVERABLE # 1 – ASSESS TOURISM PRODUCT’S COMPETITIVENESS AND MARKETABILITY.....	5
Background: .....	5
Recommendations: .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Product Development Recommendations: .....	7
DELIVERABLE #2 – RECOMMENDATIONS AND APPROACH FOR DEVELOPING, PROMOTING AND POSITIONING AJLOUN’S NEW BRAND AND MESSAGES. ....	8
General Recommendations:.....	8
<b>ANNEXES</b> .....	<b>12</b>
ANNEX 1.....	12
ANNEX 2:.....	13
ANNEX 3:.....	14
ANNEX 4:.....	16

## ACRONYMS

CBO	Community-Based Organization
DMC	Destination Management Company
DMO	Destination Management Organization
DOA	Department of Antiquities
JITOA	Jordan Inbound Tour Operators Association
JTB	Jordan Tourism Board
JTDII	USAID/Jordan Tourism Development Project II
MOTA	Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NTS	National Tourism Strategy
PRA	Participatory Rapid Assessment
RSCN	Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Ajloun is a unique asset in Jordan's already enviable collection of world-class tourism product attractions. The northernmost area of Jordan is blessed with exceptional Roman ruins, biblical sites, charming villages, local foods and exhilarating hikes for all types of adventurers. Despite the area's natural attractions, Ajloun and the rest of the north is relatively unknown and therefore left off of most traveler's itineraries.

The town of Ajloun is more of a backdrop to the historical and nature-based activities that the area excels at. The Qala'at ar-Rabad (Ajloun Castle) overlooking the town of Ajloun is arguably the real attraction. The castle was built atop Mt. Auf in 1184 by one of Saladin's generals. The castle provides spectacular views of the Jordan Valley and the three wadis leading into it. The castle was a counterpoint to the Crusader castle of Belvoir Fort on the Sea of Galilee (Lake Tiberias) located in the present day of West Bank.<sup>1</sup> The castle was one among many in hilltop positions that used pigeons to communicate and could transmit messages from Damascus to Cairo in one day.

The archaeological and biblical site of Mar Elias, believed to be the birthplace of the prophet Elijah is nearby and contains a church with impressive mosaics.

Further north from Ajloun lies the Ajloun Forest Reserve. Though small (13 sq. kilometers), the nature reserve is impressive for its size. Established by the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature (RSCN) in 1988 with the goal of protecting the native flora of oak, carob, pistachio and strawberry tree forests. The reserve also acts as a wildlife sanctuary and has developed a network of hiking trails for hikers of all fitness levels.

The RSCN is very active in the local community through its support of a number of community-based projects. The Soap House, House of Calligraphy and the Biscuit House all located just outside the reserve in the village of Orjan all provide travelers with an authentic experience and perspective on locally produced goods and food. All are run by local townspeople, particularly women.

Ajloun is conveniently located just a short journey from the ancient Roman city of Jerash, the most visited attraction north of Amman. The journey between Ajloun and Jerash is reached through pine forest and 2000-year-old olive groves and boasts a number of ancient sites, biblical importance, forts and villages, all in the beautiful hills and valleys of northern Jordan.

The sense of authenticity of place, history and nature based activities found in Ajloun is a competitive advantage as travelers from the major outbound markets are increasingly looking for destinations where they can engage with local communities and be active in the outdoors.

Building off of this trend in the marketplace combined with the natural assets found in Ajloun; the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MoTA) and the USAID/Jordan Tourism Development Project II (JTDII) conducted a Participatory Rapid Assessment (PRA) of the area with the objective of developing new tourism products and services that will attract more visitors to the north of Jordan. The PRA identified the potential for a tourism trail that will take visitors through three villages in Ajloun where they will have the opportunity to meet and stay with the local people who live there.

The PRA is a helpful tool in assessing and identifying the capabilities, needs and desires of a local community in developing their tourist product. As such, the PRA created a reliable platform for the type of products and services Ajloun and the surrounding areas could viably develop and deliver on.

Travel and tourism is ultimately a service industry and therefore destination brands must amalgamate the tangible products a destination possesses and ensure they are reinforced and made credible by the people that live there and most importantly work in the tourism cluster. Ongoing product development and training will be fundamental to the success of Ajloun tourism industry.

To build off of the work conducted in the PRA, it is important that Ajloun assess its current brand and tourism products and their competitiveness and marketability in key source markets. Today, nearly every destination worldwide has recognized the economic importance of travel and tourism and in turn is competing for a share of the global traveler's commercial activity thereby making it only exponentially harder for a destination to

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<sup>1</sup> Kennedy, Hugh (1994), *Crusader Castles*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

increase awareness and drive interest from travelers to their destinations.

The brand positioning of a country, city or community has a direct and measurable impact on a destination's ability to inform and inspire today's global traveler of visiting their destination over another. However, positioning is not what you do to a destination's product but what you do to the mind of the target prospect. Ajloun, like any other destination can only succeed at being itself. Fortunately, what Ajloun has to offer is appealing based on the needs of the emerging experiential adventure traveler looking for a unique blend of culture, history and outdoor activities. It only needs to do a better job of finding those target markets and telling them their story more effectively.

Ajloun can offer a competitive product and experience in the marketplace, particularly with the increased interest by travelers in authentic, active, rural based experiences. However its tourism-based businesses are small and therefore have limited resources to both attract as well as reward travelers who do come to Ajloun. Ajloun's tourism cluster need to work together to do a better job of defining and painting a picture of what a 2/3/4 day trip to the area looks and feels like for a traveler. When a destination is relatively unknown and constituted by SMEs it has to do a better job of positioning and storytelling before a traveler will even consider it.

In the case of Ajloun, the opportunity and challenge are one and the same – its small, rural and the experiences to be had (accommodations, food, attractions) are authentically local and provided by SMEs. Yet these benefits are also what make it challenging. For Ajloun to achieve its potential it needs to do a better job of promoting itself as well as delivering a reliable and consistent product to guests when they are there.

One of the key factors to the success of Ajloun as a tourism destination relies on the creation of a local Destination Marketing Organization (DMO). A DMO, would help galvanize the earlier work of the PRA as well as the work of this consultancy herein by providing support for members of the community and specifically the tourism cluster in tourism management, promotion, intelligence, lead generation, product development, sustainability efforts as well as developing and ultimately managing and guarding the Ajloun brand and subsequent messaging and communications.

It is the opinion of this consultancy that a DMO be created as a prerequisite to developing the Ajloun brand. In fact, one of the very best reasons to form the DMO and engage the local stakeholders is the opportunity to be a part of the development of the brand. Ultimately, the products and experiences of the Ajloun tourism cluster can be improved and refined as a result of the DMO's involvement in creating the brand.

The objectives of this project, which is connected, with USAID Economic Growth Through Sustainable Tourism Project are the following:

- Review current brand efforts for Ajloun
- Assess Ajloun tourism assets competitiveness and marketability internationally
- Develop recommendations and approach for developing, promoting and positioning the new and updated destination's brand and brand messages

## **BACKGROUND & CONTEXT**

Traveler's interest in Ajloun is currently very low and when expressed is typically focused solely on the castle and even then, only as a "stop-over" or a "side-trip," on their way to somewhere else. The challenge has been how to make Ajloun more than just a one-hour stopover for travelers.

The USAID Siyaha program through the National Tourism Strategy in collaboration with MoTa and the JTB has been working to enhance product development and competitiveness of Jordan's tourism assets. This report herein focuses on the tourism cluster of Ajloun and specifically attempts to provide actionable recommendations that can be implemented in the near term.

This report begins with a general introduction of the Strategic Objectives of the consultancy as agreed on by the consultant and Siyaha. After objectives, the report will give a brief overview of the Approach taken, with the PRA as a first step in an ongoing process required for properly branding Ajloun and more importantly making sure that brand is effectively used and distributed to the marketplace.

In the section, Analysis and Recommendations, a deeper assessment of Ajloun’s tourism products is conducted. A SWOT Analysis is provided in addition to a deeper analysis on some of the “red flags” identified from the PRA and some recommended solutions to these challenges. Products are given a professional yet entirely subjective grade on their current condition and marketability. These grades are not intended to reflect the potential of these products, merely the current condition they are in. These “red flags” are followed by a list of suggested solutions that have the potential to elevate each product’s market competitiveness, with a focus on near term implementation.

The following section – Recommendations and Approach for Developing, Promoting and Positioning Ajloun’s New Brand and Messages outlines a detailed process for developing a destination brand and how to ensure that brand is used effectively in messaging and promotions by all the stakeholders in the tourism cluster of Ajloun.

The annexes of the report contain information on brand development processes, references, persons interviewed and meetings held.

The workflow for this report was as follows. The field trip to Jordan took place January 12-26, 2014. Prior to travel to Jordan the consultant reviewed published materials including guidebooks, Jordan Tourist Board materials [CD, print and website], past tourism sector studies by USAID, the World Bank, as well as recently produced materials by Siyaha and outputs of the marketing and product development working groups supporting implementation of the National Tourism Strategy. During the fieldwork he interviewed sources from the travel industry and public sector in Jordan. He also conducted site inspections and held a focus group with the tourism stakeholders of Ajloun.

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

The intent of this project is to set the foundation and methodological framework for the assessment of and continued development of a brand identity for Ajloun as a domestic and international tourism destination.

The Ajloun *brand* will only be as good as the *branding* that supports it. To explain, the brand is a promise of what’s to come and what one can expect to experience, see and feel from a destination. A destination’s brand helps travelers position it in their minds before they even get there. The branding, are the messages, communications and creative campaigns and promotions that a destination uses to convey that promise and inform and inspire travelers to consider coming to their destination.

A brand is an adjective while branding is a verb.

The destination’s limited resources and the tourism cluster’s lack of understanding on how to work together to create a unified and consistent brand promise challenges Ajloun’s success as a tourism destination. Therefore, it is this consultancy’s objective that this project serve as a road map for how to develop a brand that is deployed and leveraged by the industry through the creation of a DMO rather than just referred to as a logo or a tagline.

Specifically, the project will focus on the following objectives:

- Assess Ajloun tourism assets competitiveness and marketability internationally through a series of site visits, traveler perception surveys and in-depth discussions with both tourists as well as trade.
- Develop recommendations and approach for developing, promoting and positioning the new and updated destination’s brand and brand messages.

## APPROACH

Destination branding is a rigorous process that requires a multidisciplinary approach and collaborative effort among all stakeholders, both public and private in order to be successful. Too often, destinations fail to identify their core brand personality as a result of commercial interests, lack of public sector commitment or even just lack of time. Failing to do so risks commoditizing a destination and leaving it vulnerable to a recession or downturn. It’s imperative that all stakeholders understand the role of a destination brand as a competitive identity and a single-minded proposition based on the destination’s greatest assets and strengths.



In the case of Ajloun, this consultancy would argue that there is low risk of complacency or lack of commitment on the part of the Ajloun tourism cluster. The stakeholders in Ajloun tourism, both public and private were all highly engaged and deeply committed to ensuring that the tourism cluster succeeds as a whole and not just independently or among a few operators and hoteliers.

Despite the collective enthusiasm from the tourism industry in Ajloun, the majority of tour operators in Amman do not sell Ajloun and if they do, only as a stopover to/from Jerash. Despite, the tour operators' current lack of enthusiasm for the Ajloun product, it is imperative that the brand be developed with involvement from the tour operators who are an important stakeholder and potential sales channel.

The process of destination branding contains the following key steps:



This project herein undertook the just the first step of *Destination Audit* within the larger Destination Branding process while laying the foundation for continued work. During the first phase of the project, research and information gathering was conducted remotely (desk side research). The focus was taken from a relatively wide lens in order to provide a more realistic perspective of what a traveler considering Ajloun and Jordan might encounter. In addition to reviewing consumer websites, the consultancy audited trade information; tour operator collateral and strategic plans as well.

Google estimates that the average traveler visits 22 websites before deciding on a holiday destination.<sup>2</sup> With regard to this project, nearly 50 consumer facing websites on Ajloun and Jordan were reviewed. The following sources were reviewed and analyzed during this introductory phase:

- Internal brand books
- Jordan tourism strategy
- RSCN tourism websites
- Ajloun hotel websites
- JTB website
- National Tourism strategy
- Trip Advisor
- North American Jordan Tourism Board Marketing Director Malia Asfour
- Outbound tour operators selling Jordan

The second phase of the project was based in Ajloun Jordan and the northern areas of Jerash, Rasoun and Arjan. A tourist perception survey was developed based on the analysis and research conducted during Phase One

Sales and marketing collateral was collected from JTB (public) as well as from the hotels, tour operators and resorts (private) to assess how both private and public stakeholders are interpreting the Ajloun brand. The second phase included approximately 10 in-person interviews with both public and private stakeholders of Ajloun tourism. A full list of the interviews is provided in the appendix.

In addition to tourist perception surveys, the consultancy undertook a Rapid Tourism Assessment of Ajloun and its tourism products, amenities, attractions, accommodations, tours, transportation, pricing, accessibility and services. A deeper assessment and analysis of these products are provided within the following section.

The second phase culminated with a focus group held in Amman where approximately 75 participants consisting of both public and private stakeholders in Ajloun tourism attended to express their opinions, visions and experiences regarding the Ajloun brand, its target markets and to discuss the challenges and needs of the market in order to achieve the destination's full potential.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.thinkwithgoogle.com>

The third phase of this project is intended to set the foundation and methodological framework for the assessment of and continued development of a brand identity for Ajloun as an international tourism destination.

## ANALYSIS & RECOMMENDATIONS

### DELIVERABLE # 1 – ASSESS TOURISM PRODUCT’S COMPETITIVENESS AND MARKETABILITY

#### Background:

In today’s hyper-connected and ultra-transparent world of social media and ‘always-on’ travelers, destination marketing is only as good as the products and experiences the destination can deliver on. The new adage of effective branding and marketing is that the “*doing* is the *telling*”. Marketing begins and ends with the product and experience, and if the product and experience fails to meet expectations, no marketing strategy or promotion can overcome it. Therefore, the only way to succeed is take an integrated approach to product/experience development, training and branding.

As aforementioned above, the process of destination branding requires that Ajloun segment the market then prioritize its key markets and tie its tourism assets back into those key markets. Products must be matched to target markets and new products must be developed or improved upon should new markets be identified.

Today, Ajloun is primarily sold as a one-hour stopover as part of the ‘classic’ Jordan tour, which typically contains Amman (2 nights), Petra (2 nights), Dead Sea (2 nights) and Wadi Rum (1 night).

Breaking up this classic tour will not be easy as the elements contain three of the most iconic tourist destinations on the planet. Therefore, it’s important for Ajloun to identify new and niche markets and potentially returning visitors rather than competing against the classic Jordan tour.

There is no question that Ajloun possesses a wealth of natural and developed products that make it an attractive tourist destination. However, it’s important to keep in mind that Jordan is a long-haul destination for many markets like Europe and the USA and that those markets have their own alpine and agritourism landscapes making it even more difficult for Ajloun to position itself on nature and culinary tourism alone. Therefore, products must be tied to target markets in order for them to be effectively leveraged, for example the Gulf region traveler is more receptive to cool climates and pine forests than the Scandinavian who prefers warm weather and the beach.

#### Brand Assessment Notes and Rating:

**Ajloun village** – The town of Ajloun is and apparently has been for some time, a loud and chaotic construction zone that seemingly offers no benefits or interests to the visitor. The 600 year old mosque is under renovation which when completed might offer some reason to linger longer in Ajloun. Unfortunately, for now the town is nothing more than a namesake for the more nature based and rural experiences to be had outside of town.

#### Competitiveness and Marketability- Poor-

**Events** – From all accounts there is a collective agreement on the part of the tourism cluster that Ajloun would be served well by having an event that supports and makes credible its brand promise. As this brand is being developed, it is highly recommended that an event be considered as an eventual marketing strategy and budget planning.

#### Competitiveness and Marketability- Poor-

**Hospitality & Accommodations Sector** – Ajloun has a latent and underdeveloped accommodations sector. The majority of inventory exists within the B&B/Homestay level with approximately 9 places available that fit this level. Expectedly, these establishments cater more towards budget and student travelers either from the US and Europe and even the Gulf countries, which come to Ajloun for the colder climates and different landscape. Distribution is a major challenge for these operators, which all lack any online marketing (websites) and in turn are often hard to make a booking with. For that reason, and concerns with the service levels - several of the tour operators interviewed in Amman expressed their opposition to booking with these

establishments.

There are a handful of hotels in Ajloun but the best ones are the RSCN cabins located on their private reserve and the Olive Branch Hotel located between Jerash and Ajloun. The RSCN recently completed some higher end cabins in addition to the 13 mid-level cabins and 10 four person tented bungalows. The Olive Branch hotel offers 60 rooms that are moderately priced and provide a nice family style service.

#### **Competitiveness and Marketability - Fair-**

**Food & Beverage** - Given the inherent opportunity for Ajloun to position itself as the culinary tourism hub for Jordan, it is disappointing to see such a lack of dining options in the area. A new tourism restaurant is opening at the castle visitor center that should provide a nice location for lunch with views of the castle and food prepared and served by an organic agricultural cooperative. There is an enormous opportunity to combine the hiking trails with farm to table meals at the local farms along these trails. This product has been extremely successful in tourism markets in Europe, the USA and even S.E Asia.

#### **Competitiveness and Marketability- Good-**

**Activities & Attractions** – The activities and attractions in Ajloun are in many cases underdeveloped and in nearly all cases under promoted. The Ajloun castle is the main attraction to the site and while it offers some spectacular views and is relatively well preserved, it does not justify an extended stay to Ajloun by itself. Moreover, the Castle can do a better job of providing interpretive signs and audio tours as long sections of the castle contain no signage and therefore represent a lost opportunity to inform and inspire the visitors.

There is an extensive trail network in and around Ajloun that is well maintained but suffers from a lack of directional and interpretive signs make hiking alone almost impossible. Consultation with tour operators from Amman indicated that local guides were available but difficult to find and book and often not properly trained.

The Ajloun Academy, a guide training facility located on the RSCN has the potential to be another attraction with the planned opening of the Wild Jordan Café, the one in Amman is extremely well done and popular with both Jordanians as well as foreigners. Ideally, the Academy will offer travelers to Ajloun more guided climbing and cave exploring opportunities which are outstanding in the surrounding areas however require a high degree of knowledge, gear and support.

The only establishments that provide a way for visitors to buy something are the few gift shops at the castle entrance and at the RSCN gift shops at the Soap House, Calligraphy House, and Biscuit House.

In short, most travelers visiting Ajloun will find limited attractions and this could prevent them from deciding to visit the area at all. However, there are enough attractions available to accommodate the needs of most visitors looking for what Ajloun has to offer but these amenities need to be better promoted and connected together to make it easier for visitors to find and experience these attractions.

#### **Competitiveness and Marketability- Good-**

**Tour guides and operators** – A deeper analysis needs to be conducted on the local tourism cluster with respect to local guides and inbound tour operators. Consultations with several operators were undertaken and the general consensus is that the local tour operators do not possess the skills to cater to the foreign visitor while the national tour guides are not as familiar with the product because they rarely visit anywhere outside of the Ajloun castle.

**Accessibility & Transportation**– One of the main assets of Ajloun, as a tourist destination is its relative size and proximity to Amman compared to other destinations within Jordan. It is located a short drive (1-2 hours) from Amman the gateway to Jordan and the most populated city of the country. Even though Ajloun is close, the lack of public transportation options or tourist shuttles means that travelers would need to take their own car, rent-a-car, hire a driver, or go on an organized tour. Due to the proximity of Ajloun to Amman the associated costs for hiring a car/driver or going on a tour are reasonable.

The diversity in climate and landscape that Ajloun offers in such close proximity to Amman is an enormous asset for the domestic market and large foreign diaspora that lives in Amman. In order to fully leverage Ajloun's full range of assets, local transportation needs to be improved and service must be up to par.

#### **Competitiveness and Marketability- Very Good -**

**Price** - Pricing is an important aspect of the destination's competition with other destinations. Price factors relate to the cost of transport to and from the destination as well as the cost on the ground of accommodation, attractions, food, and tour services. A tourist's decision may also be based on other economic features such as currency exchange.

Prices have been steadily rising in Ajloun over the last five years due to the increase in visitation. However, compared to similar destinations, Ajloun still offers reasonably priced options for both budget and upscale travelers.

**Competitiveness and Marketability- Excellent -**

**Human Resources** – The tourism industry is a service industry and for that reason, its quality depends entirely on the workforce's ability to deliver an authentic yet acceptable standard of service. At the same time, adventure and experiential tourism relies on interaction with local communities as an important aspect of the tourism experience. A well-trained tourism workforce and citizens who are equipped and aware of the benefits and responsibilities associated with tourism growth are indispensable elements of tourism destination delivery and need to be managed in accordance with the destination strategy.

The limited tourism development of Ajloun is reflected in the lack of a skilled labor force at the destination. This lack of quality human resources creates a barrier for investors and prevents the local population from benefiting economically from the area's tourism growth.

The Ajloun Academy should be considered as a place for professional training and recruitment beyond just the guide training and certification.

**Competitiveness and Marketability- Good-**

**Table 1: SWOT Analysis of Ajloun's Tourism Industry**

INTERNAL TO DESTINATION	
STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• History of Saladin and the Crusaders era</li> <li>• Arab military architecture and fine condition of the Ajloun castle</li> <li>• Proximity to Amman</li> <li>• Incredible mountain scenery and wooded areas</li> <li>• Extensive trail network</li> <li>• Fresh and locally grown and produced foods and products (oil, soap etc.)</li> <li>• Biblical sights</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor waste management and trash collection</li> <li>• Underdeveloped urban activities like entertainment, events and restaurants</li> <li>• Mono-product focus on Ajloun castle</li> <li>• Lack of interpretive signage and information for visitors around historical sites</li> <li>• Town of Ajloun (traffic, construction)</li> <li>• Lack of family oriented attractions</li> <li>• Low quality of hotels and accommodations</li> <li>• Lack of any collective and/or collaboration within the tourism cluster</li> </ul>
EXTERNAL TO DESTINATION	
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visitor center restaurant for visitors and inspiration for other entrepreneurs (if successful)</li> <li>• Farm to table products and experiences is a growing demand</li> <li>• Ajloun Academy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of PPPs to elevate tourism cluster</li> <li>• Lack of proper planning</li> <li>• Ongoing and/or worsening environmental loss and lack of management</li> <li>• Lack of action and execution</li> </ul>

**Product Development Recommendations:**

Target markets must be defined before any final product development work is undertaken. However, it's clear that Ajloun needs to diversify its existing product offering beyond just the Ajloun castle and provide more compelling attractions and reasons to spend time in Ajloun. If more activities can be developed, there will be more need and demand for accommodations in the area, thereby generating benefits for all segments of the tourism cluster. The following products are simply recommendations:

- Develop partnerships with rural farms along the trail networks where individuals and/or groups can eat,

rest and experience rural Jordanian life. Brand the trails based on the different foods and farms visitors will visit.

- Look at creating a mountain biking or road cycling trail and make outreach to cycling clubs across Europe and the US to develop events, tours and packages.
- Brand the olive oil from the region and work with Jordan trade and economic development groups to increase market linkages. Heritage olive oil is extremely popular in the major developed markets.
- Incorporate the olive oil theme into the trail system, dishes and even branding.
- Create a themed event that celebrates the brand promise of Ajloun (annual or even seasonal weekends)
- Target nearby urban dwelling market segments in Amman like the foreign diplomats, consultants and business people.
- Create an Ajloun drink (non-alcoholic that can be mixed with alcohol) made from local ingredients – make partnerships with bars and nightclubs in Amman to provide the ingredients in exchange for promotion.

## **DELIVERABLE #2 – RECOMMENDATIONS AND APPROACH FOR DEVELOPING, PROMOTING AND POSITIONING AJLOUN’S NEW BRAND AND MESSAGES.**

### **General Recommendations:**

Per the results of the tourism cluster consultations and tourism product assessment analysis, including the tourist perception surveys – it is this consultant’s recommendation that the Ajloun brand be developed, as outlined below in conjunction with the setting up of a DMO in Ajloun.

A Destination Audit has been undertaken as a part of this consultancy and is pending only to be prioritized with the target market segments.

Generally speaking, the Ajloun brand development process as described below should take approximately 4 -6 months.

### **Ajloun Brand Refresh Process:**

#### **1. Destination Audit – 3 weeks**

- a. Prioritize Ajloun’s products in terms of those that appeal to the main market segments.
- b. Comparative analysis of Ajloun’s assets against other regional and global destinations.
- c. How accessible are the products to the target markets?
- d. Identify and order the products in terms of priority to each of the target markets.

#### **2. Segmentation Analysis – 2 -4 weeks**

- a. Identify no more than 3-5 key market segments
- b. Prioritize these markets based on demographics, psychographics, propensity to spend, accessibility and trade relations

#### **3. SWOT Analysis- 1 week**

- a. Undertake a SWOT analysis for each key market segment
- b. A master SWOT analysis should be developed for the destination

#### **4. Stakeholder Engagement – 4-8 weeks (group should be retained for ongoing workshops)**

- a. Identify key stakeholders within the tourism cluster
- b. Develop a core group of stakeholders representing a diverse representation of the cluster
- c. Inform, educate and inspire the stakeholders on the purpose and importance of the destination brand and their roles as brand advocates within the larger cluster
- d. Choose stakeholders that are pragmatic yet visionary, you want them to be realists yet not get sidetracked by the negative issues and obstacles all destinations face
- e. Ensure that this is a qualitative process, not a quantitative one
- f. Develop a toolkit for stakeholders to support their actions
- g. Make sure the brand is not just a symbol but something that can be delivered by the destination and the people

- h. Develop a resident profile survey to determine their opinions on tourism and visions for the future
- i. Consider a local campaign and/or contest to drive resident engagement with the brand and choose a winner/winning submission from the local town

**5. Consumer Perception Research – 4 – 6 weeks**

- a. Need to develop and implement a larger and more statistically acceptable sample size of tourist perception surveys
- b. Focus on only key target segments at this time, survey past visitors as well as new ones
- c. Interview both consumers as well as outbound operators in those markets – tour operators are not a proxy for consumer behavior so be aware of gaps in opinions and beliefs
- d. Develop better understanding of market trends and current and potential customers' requirements and develop a comprehensive strategy and common cluster actions for attracting them. Ensure that the necessary supporting factors support marketing to niche markets

**6. Competitor Analysis – 1 – 2 weeks**

- a. Identify the key motivators for travel among key target segments
- b. Plot how Ajloun stacks up on these motivators versus competition
- c. Look at third party arrivals information for your target markets into other destinations. Determine potential size of markets based on accessibility

**7. Initiate Brand Building Models – 4- 8 weeks**

- a. There are a number of models for developing a brand, however the good ones answer the following questions:
  - i. What are the main things travelers like about this destination?
  - ii. What sort of place is it?
  - iii. How does it make me feel?
  - iv. How would I describe it in one sentence?
  - v. What makes it different from all other destinations?
- b. Two of the most common and arguably effective brand building models are the Brand Pyramid, developed by global marketing research firm Millward Brown and the Brand Wheel. Some of the differences/advantages of each model are:
  - i. The Brand Pyramid allows the whole story to be viewed at one glance.
  - ii. Both models consider the destination as a whole; therefore these models are not intended to replace the need to match up the destination's products with the values and motivations of each key market segment.

**8. Identifying the Brand Architecture – The Relationship with Sub-National (Ajloun) and National (Jordan) Brands**

- a. Brand Ajloun has to ensure that it shares the same DNA as the Jordan brand by reflecting some of the national brand values in its own brand identity
- b. Understand and leverage these national brand values by dialing them up or down depending on the target source markets
- c. Ajloun brand must be distinctive from Jordan brand but still feel like they are part of the same family
- d. Heed the rule of the closer proximity the source market is to the destination (Gulf), the more robust and distinct the Ajloun brand can be and the further way the source market is (Europe/USA) the more Ajloun should rely on the national brand as a way into that market
- e. Collaborate with the national brand managers at JTB and MoTA to ensure cohesive marketing and messaging strategies and an amplified affect

**9. Integrating the Brand into Marketing Activities**

- a. Hire and empower an effective brand manager at the DMO
- b. Create a Steering Committee (could be the DMO) with the mandate to
  - i. Support the brand manager
  - ii. Encourage membership and participation

- iii. Manage funding, budgets and governance
- c. Focus on both external and internal marketing with the objective of gaining buy-in from local residents on the importance of the Ajloun brand
- d. Work with training institutions to incorporate updated and diverse curriculum offerings, especially in the area of marketing, sales and service delivery. Upgrade management-training programs to modernize skills. Assist in the penetration of information technology training and usage.
- e. Identify and empower Brand Champions who are influential residents that can advocate for the brand and gather and disseminate resident sentiment back to the committee
- f. Develop and maintain an ongoing series of Brand Seminars that include a brand toolkit and guidelines to ensure continued dialogue on salient topics
- g. Amplify the brand values and identity across all customer touch points
  - i. Critical customer touch points should be identified by plotting the customer journey from searching for a vacation destination from home to the airport arrival to the departure. This should be done for each main market segment. Common customer touch points are:
    1. DMO websites
    2. OTAs
    3. Airline websites
    4. Guide books (online and print)
    5. Airport Arrival (design, signage, management)
    6. Transfers from airports, bus stops and marinas
    7. Accommodations (lobby, concierge, F&B, amenities)
    8. Guides
    9. Inbound operators
    10. Infrastructure (roads, internet access, waste management)
    11. Restaurants and bars
    12. Contacts with residents and locals

## **10. Measuring Brand Impact**

- a. There are a number of different indicators Ajloun can employ to measure the impact its brand is generating in the key market segments. However, some of these indicators can be costly and time consuming, therefore for the sake of efficiency and cost savings, the three indicators are recommended at this time:
  - ii. Brand differentiation
  - iii. Brand esteem
  - iv. Changes in Unaided Awareness (this should be done in conjunction with JTB)

### **Ajloun Brand Foundation**

As aforementioned above, Ajloun cannot compete with the iconic bucket destinations of Petra, Dead Sea, Wadi Rum and Red Sea, particularly for the long haul markets. However, Ajloun can leverage its uniqueness compared to the rest of the country by leveraging its diversity of activities, experiences and unique climate compared to the rest of the country.

A destination brand is in many ways pre-determined by the natural and cultural artifacts or assets it already possesses. In the case of Ajloun, its assets are diverse yet can still be grouped into three core themes:

1. Historical and Biblical Significance
2. Agritourism and Culinary Tourism
3. Adventure and Nature Based Activities

As seen below, the Ajoun brand promise needs to be developed in conjunction with the products and services that Ajloun determines it can best deliver and compete on. The brand foundation as outlined below is the responsibility of the DMO to lead in developing and ultimately managing the brand.



### **Who creates the brand?**

Recruiting external consultants who are experts in bringing these different factions and factors together is advisable. This also allows for an impartial and objective view untainted by political or commercial interests.

The consultations and assessments have identified a human resources and capacity gap within Ajloun.. It is therefore critical that a long term consultant be contracted throughout the destination branding process outlined above and throughout the implementation and measurement phases to ensure long term viability, success and capacity building.

A list of potential consultants for the brand refresh is provided in the Annex.



## ANNEXES

### ANNEX 1

#### REPORTS AND RESOURCES USED

- National Tourism Strategy 2011 - 2015; [www.visitjordan.com](http://www.visitjordan.com)
- Summary Report on the Assessment of Tourism Situation in Ajloun Cluster (USAID Tourism Project PRA report, 2005); Annex I
- Jabal Ajloun Area Development Plan Summary; [www.jdz.jo/en/cms/uploads/AjlounPresentation.pdf](http://www.jdz.jo/en/cms/uploads/AjlounPresentation.pdf)
- RSCN activities in general, and Ajloun in specific: <http://www.rscn.org.jo/>
- Jordan official website: [www.visitjordan.com](http://www.visitjordan.com)
- Jordan official website: About Ajloun: [www.visitjordan.com](http://www.visitjordan.com)
- Jordan official website: About Jerash: [www.visitjordan.com](http://www.visitjordan.com)
- Destination Market Association International (DMAI) – [www.destinationmarketing.org](http://www.destinationmarketing.org)
- Office of Travel & Tourism Industries (OTTI) US

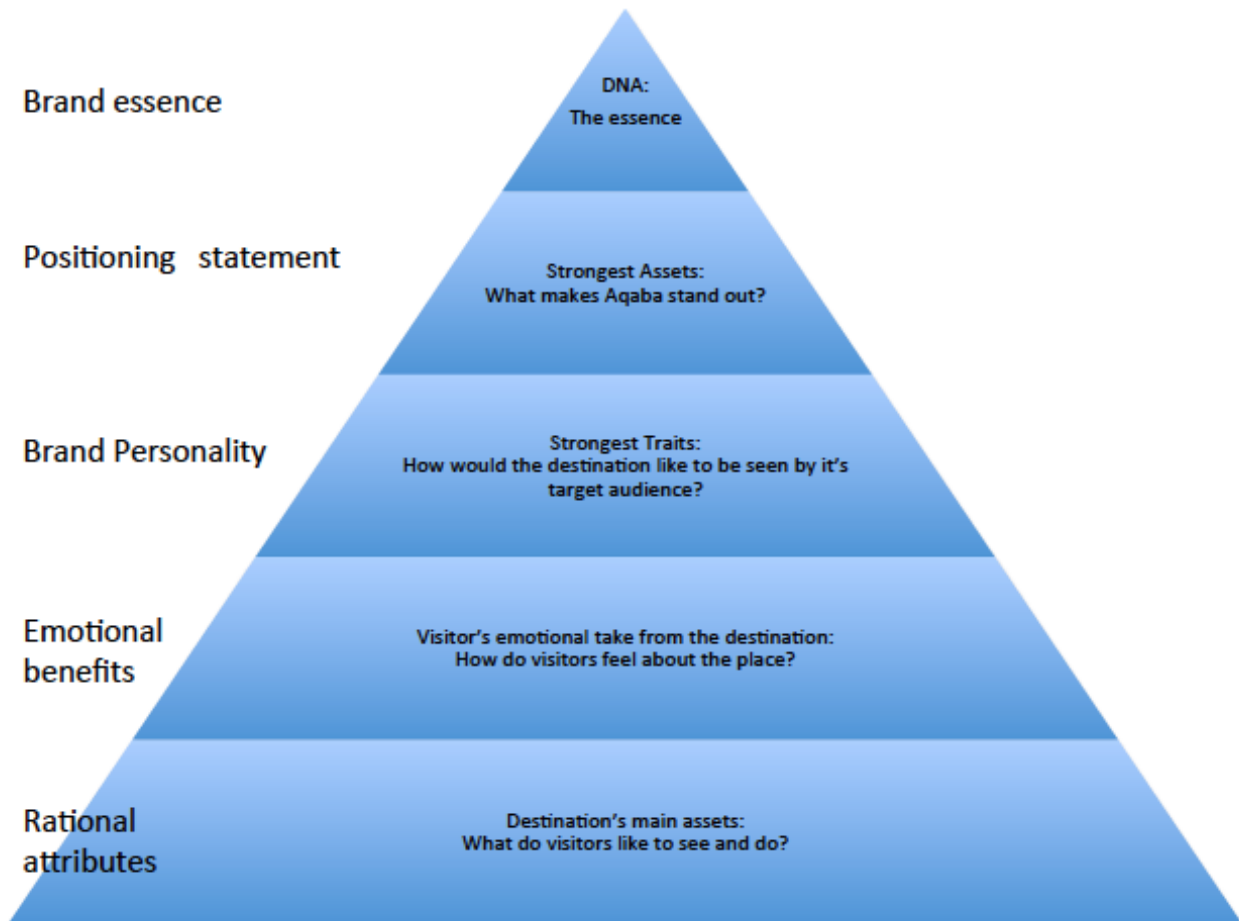
## ANNEX 2:

### INTERVIEWS & CONSULTATIONS

- H.E. Issa Gammoh, Secretary General, Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities Antiquities
- H.E. Dr. Abd Al Razzaq Arabiyat, Managing Director of JTB;
- Mr. Ibrahim Osta, USAID Jordan Economic Growth Through Sustainable Tourism Project Chief of Party;
- USAID Economic Growth Through Sustainable Tourism Component Leaders
- H.E. Mr. Munir Nassar, United Travel Agency
- Mr. Bilal Abuzeid, Jordan Inbound Tour Operators Association
- Mr. Zuher Share, Rasoun Tourist Camp
- Mr. Daniel Robards, Engaging Cultures Tour Operator
- Ms. Nusaiba Momani, Al-Yasmin Organic Group, Ajloun
- Mr. Abdel – Naser Kayyali, Tour Guide
- Mr. Amer Kheiry, Olive Branch Hotel
- Ms. Haia Kheiry, Olive Branch Hotel
- Mr. Nasr Al-Tamimi, Royal Society for Conservation of Nature
- Mr. Bassam Yassin, Royal Society for Conservation of Nature
- Ms. Tohama F. Nablusi, Jordan Tourism Board
- Ms. Yasmine Hasan, Abercrombie & Kent
- Mr. Osama Cori, Ajloun Forest Reserve

## ANNEX 3:

### THE FIVE-STAGE BRAND PYRAMID



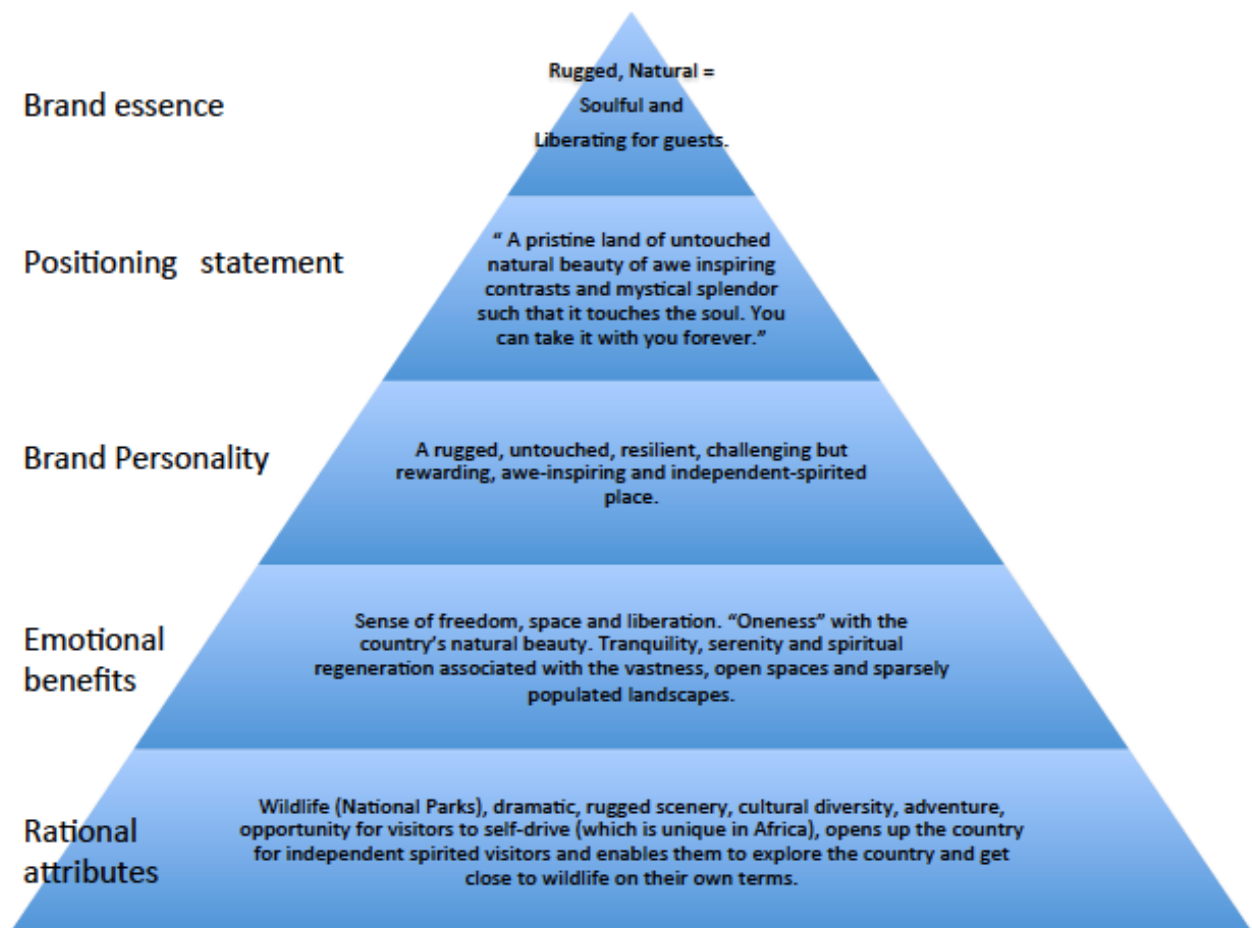
Starting from the bottom and ascending through each of these five stages towards the top:

- **Rational attributes:** The brand pyramid starts by identifying rational attributes, which are the country's main tourist assets – the things that people like to see and do in the country. These would be identified in a SWOT analysis.
- **Emotional benefits:** The brand is then built up by exploring visitors' emotional reaction to a place – or the impact it has on them. This is established through qualitative consumer research, which explores consumer perceptions of the destination and their motivation for travel. These would be identified through psychographics and Consumer Perception Surveys.
- **Brand personality:** The destination's brand personality is then established following a competitor analysis, to identify what is truly unique about the destination. This represents a succinct summation of the destination's defining characteristics and reflects how the destination would like to be seen by its key audience.
- **Positioning statement:** A summary of the destination's strongest competitive features comprises the positioning statement. This functions as the basis that should guide all the marketing tactics and planning – whether by a DMO, the marketing agencies or the private sector. This should summarize the destination's strongest attractions.  
The positioning statement is not public facing. It is a tool used by marketing and brand managers that serves as a single minded proposition of what the key elements of the brand are which in turn help create more inspiring and compelling messages.
- **Brand essence:** Finally, the brand essence includes 3-4 core values that are enduring and

which in combination comprise the destination's DNA. These define the core essence of the destination. These are generally single word descriptors (invigorating, tranquil, passionate, sensual, etc.). They should be as visual as possible and reflected in all destination marketing communications, particularly in tone and visual imagery used.

The brand essence is the most important component, in that it is a distillation of all the various components that create the brand. The brand essence is created by looking at the values that shape a brand's personality, and translating those often human characteristics, into a word or words that describe quite succinctly how a place feels and communicates it.

**Brand Pyramid example illustrating the Namibian tourism brand:**



#### **ANNEX 4:**

#### **LIST OF DESTINATION BRANDING CONSULTANTS**

While there are a number of creative branding agencies and independent consultants with experience in destination branding, Ajloun should engage only those with proven expertise in working with the target markets that Ajloun has defined. Since those target markets are in flux and may need redefining, a consultancy that can perform or at the minimum oversee and project manage a consumer research study is highly advisable.

The following consultancies all match the criteria as stated above.

- [Dr. Dimitris Koutoulas](#), President of Koutoulas Consulting.
- [Jan-Bjarni Bjarnason](#), Center for Coastal Tourism
- Mr. [Neil Rogers](#)
- Mr. [Randy Durband](#)
- [Mr. Scott Wayne](#), President of SW Associates
- [Solimar International](#)
- [MercuryCSC](#)