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

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# ECONOMIC GROWTH THROUGH SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PROJECT

## B2-02-C – ASSESSMENT FOR AQABA TOURISM PRODUCT AND BRAND ANALYSIS

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## ACRONYMS

| | |
|---|---|
| ASEZA | Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority |
| CBO | Community-Based Organization |
| DOA | Department of Antiquities |
| JITOA | Jordan Inbound Tour Operators Association |
| JTB | Jordan Tourism Board |
| MOTA | Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities |
| NGO | Non-Governmental Organization |
| NTS | National Tourism Strategy |
| NTVS | National Tourism Visitors Survey |
| SSC | Strategy Steering Committee |
| TDC | Tourism Development Corporation |
| USAID | United States Agency for International Development |
| KHIA | King Hussein International Airport |

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Aqaba is a unique asset in Jordan's already enviable collection of world-class tourism product attractions. As the country's only seaside city conveniently located on the Red Sea, Aqaba offers a distinct experience from other destinations within Jordan as well as those of its Red Sea competitors like Taba, Sharm Al Shiekh and Eliat. Mainly, Aqaba is first a city with a real living Arab community and rich historical past versus other Red Sea destinations that were founded and developed strictly for the purpose of tourism.

The sense of authenticity of place, history and diversity of experiences found in Aqaba is a competitive advantage as travelers from the major outbound markets are increasingly looking for destinations that are unique and thriving communities where people not only holiday in, but also live. Moreover, the other Red Sea destinations aforementioned above are all firmly positioned within the budget segment of the market and therefore Aqaba would be better served by positioning itself for a mid to higher-end market looking for immersive experiences and authentic places. This market segment however is particularly sophisticated and influential over other travelers so Aqaba has to ensure that it is an experience it can ultimately deliver on and not just advertise.

In 2001, Aqaba was designated a free zone due its convenient location for investment in shipping infrastructure and tourism, and is now a developing urban center, guided by the General Plan for the Aqaba Special Economic Zone (ASEZ). Currently Aqaba is being developed into an international tourism destination with plans for a significant increase in hotel rooms in the next 5 years that will effectively double the total rooms available from 4000 to nearly 8000 (assuming all developments are completed as planned.)

This significant increase in hotel rooms will make the situation only more challenging for existing hoteliers who are currently reporting occupancy levels below 50% combined for all hotels. In addition, it is expected that the new hotels and resorts will require over 8000 new staff to operate and manage the new developments.

Travel and tourism is ultimately a service industry and therefore destination brands must amalgamate the tangible experiences 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. Product development and training will be fundamental to the success of Aqaba's tourism industry.

Therefore it is imperative that Aqaba assess its current brand and tourism products and their competitiveness and marketability in key source markets with the objective of quickly developing and/or refining its brand identity that will distinctly position Aqaba within the country, the region and internationally. 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 and consumption thereby making it only exponentially harder for a DMO to increase awareness and drive interest from travelers to their destinations.

The brand positioning of a country, city, region 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. Aqaba, like any other destination can only succeed at being itself. Fortunately, what Aqaba has to offer is extremely diverse and appealing based on the needs of the emerging experiential adventure traveler looking for a unique blend of culture, history, entertainment and outdoor activities combined with comfort and service.

Aqaba can offer a competitive product and experience in the marketplace, however it needs to tell a unique and unified story to the marketplace by all of its stakeholders. Destinations often weaken their brand positioning and messaging by sending mixed messages to the market thereby confusing and/or making less credible their brand promise versus other destinations.

In the case of Aqaba, the opportunity and challenge are the same – there is so much diversity of product and experiences in Aqaba that it would be easy to assume that it can be all things to all people. That however would be a failed approach in creating a compelling and inspiring destination brand – Aqaba must pinpoint its brand essence and identify target markets while improving products and services tailored to those markets if it hopes to achieve its potential in the future.

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

- Review current brand efforts for Aqaba
- Assess Aqaba 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

ASEZA originally developed an Aqaba brand identity in 2005 and packaged it in a comprehensive brand book. The brand book does a good job of defining the brand as well as outlining the guidelines of how and where to use the brand. In addition to the brand attractions and key experiences, the brand book outlines the *feelings* and *tone* the destination brand emotes and the guidelines for using the brand design elements of which primarily consists of a logo, tagline, slogan, color pallets and use of images.

The brand platform is defined as "an oasis town on the Red Sea. From here the visitor can experience the amazing desert landscapes of Petra and Wadi Rum. Unlike its Red Sea competitors, it is a city with a real living Arab community."

The 2005 brand book defines Aqaba's key attractions core to its brand as:

- Nature: Underwater Red Sea life, palms, mountains, Wadi Rum desert, camels, oryxes and birds
- History: Ancient Nabatean, Byzantine, Fatimid, Mamluk, the Great Arab Revolt and modern Jordan
- People & Culture: The hospitality of the Bedouin culture, the maritime culture of the Red Sea
- Progressive 'green' attitude: Ecological sustainability & technological modernity

Despite still being mostly relevant, Aqaba's current brand platform is nearly ten years old and does not incorporate the changes that have occurred in Aqaba since 2005 nor the significant changes expected to come with the development of the mega resorts and additional hotel rooms and vacation residences that come with them.

It's important to note that the mega resorts of Saraya, Ayla and Al Maabar planned for opening in 2016-2018 will directly affect the experience of Aqaba and in turn impact the Aqaba brand by their size alone. In addition, Saraya and Ayla are sited within and among the city of Aqaba, contrary to many other resorts, which favor isolation and remoteness, these resorts are actually incorporating the concept of a "city within a city," to their architectural and development designs. It is therefore important to consider and plan for not just what the Aqaba brand is today but what it could be like in 10 years from now and how that brand can help guide and influence the future developments planned for Aqaba.

In 2002, Price Waterhouse Coopers prepared a Strategic Plan for Aqaba Tourism with assistance from USAID. While many of the objectives of this plan have been achieved, most notably the acquisition of significant foreign investment in Aqaba's tourism industry, there are however "red flags" that have been identified that must be resolved before Aqaba can fully recognize its potential as a successful international tourism destination.

Before looking ahead, it's important to take a look at where Aqaba is coming from. No destination exists in isolation and Aqaba like every other destination worldwide and in the Middle East has been impacted by the worldwide recession starting in 2008 followed by the events of the Arab Spring starting in early 2011. Between 2008 and 2012, Aqaba saw a 10% increase in tourism arrivals from 435,838 to 481,365 while bed nights increased nearly 24% over the same period.

**Table 1: Tourism KPIs for Aqaba 2008-2012**

| Description | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Rooms | 411,931 | 466,620 | 508,092 | 487,674 | 507,233 |
| Arrivals | 435,838 | 473,419 | 597,111 | 464,167 | 481,365 |
| Bed Nights | 812,801 | 896,677 | 1,014,218 | 985,416 | 1,010,451 |

***Source: ASEZA***

Of note, Aqaba performed better in terms of arrivals and bed nights when compared to Jordan as a whole with arrivals to Jordan in 2012 decreasing compared to 2008 and bed nights in Aqaba in 2012 compared to 2008 having increased by a greater percentage than nights in Jordan over the same period. Much of this has been attributed to the growth in domestic tourism to Aqaba supported by some success in opening up new international source markets directly to Aqaba.

**Table 2: Tourism KPIs for Jordan 2008-2012**

| Description | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Arrivals | 2,382,709 | 2,070,500 | 2,423,470 | 2,047,241 | 2,180,793 |
| Bed Nights | 4,798,314 | 3,942,551 | 4,524,520 | 3,937,217 | 4,815,042 |

***Source: MOTA***

The primary concern for the Aqaba tourism industry is the critically low hotel occupancy rates. Low occupancies are of particular concern because they can negatively compound across the entire tourism vertical. For example, low occupancies have been proven to place downward pressure on pricing, salaries and employment in direct and indirect tourism related businesses. In addition, low hotel occupancies can damage the perceived image of a tourism destination making it look like a "white elephant," a potential perception poison to travelers who are looking for places that they perceive are popular and in demand by other travelers. Simply, travelers want to be around other like-minded travelers.

**Table 3: Hotel Occupancy Rates in Aqaba 2008-2012**

| Description | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5/4/3 star | 46% | 34% | 48% | 47% | 48% |
| 2/1 star | 45% | 44% | 33% | 35% | 38% |

***Source: ASEZA***

One of the objectives outlined in the Aqaba 2002 strategy was to position Aqaba as a link between Jordan and its Red Sea neighbors. In reality, it is the Red Sea neighbor destinations, primarily Israel and Egypt that have benefitted most through promoting one day visits to Petra and Wadi Rum to sell their own destinations. While this has increased visitor numbers and entrance fees, these types of tours are typically one day with no overnights and generate low tourist expenditures in Aqaba or Jordan. The silver lining is that it proves that Aqaba's tourism products are highly sought after and generate demand and interest from regional and international tourists. For Aqaba to succeed however, Aqaba must establish itself as a destination and not simply an add-on in combination with other country's itineraries.

## 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 Aqaba as an international tourism destination. As aforementioned above, an Aqaba brand was originally developed in 2005 and in many ways is still relevant to the promise of the types of experiences Aqaba delivers today. However, the objective of this consultancy is to ensure the brand is not only relevant for today but also encompasses what Aqaba will be like in the future and this will require a renewed assessment and refresh of the existing brand.

Moreover, the *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.

Aqaba's success as a tourism destination is challenged by the brand's lack of understanding by, limited use of and unsynchronized support from the stakeholders in Aqaba's tourism industry. 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 rather than just referred to as a logo or a tagline.

Specifically, the project will focus on the following objectives:

- Review current brand efforts for Aqaba through a mixture of research, consultation and analysis. Information will be gathered from the key stakeholders in Aqaba tourism as well as Jordan tourism, including MOTA, JTB, JITOA, and outbound operators, airlines, hoteliers and CBOs.
- Assess Aqaba 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 Aqaba, this consultancy would argue that there is very low risk of complacency or lack of commitment on the part of the Aqaba tourism cluster. The stakeholders in Aqaba 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 of the importance for a compelling and authentic destination brand, up to date there has been insufficient collaborative and cooperative workshops and dialogue within the tourism cluster. This is most likely due to a lack of understanding for how to maintain a cohesive destination brand than it is for lack of interest.

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 Aqaba and Jordan might encounter. In addition to reviewing consumer websites, the consultancy audited trade information; ASEZA collateral and strategic plans as well.

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

- Internal brand books
- Aqaba tourism strategy
- Aqaba tourism websites
- Aqaba destination website
- Wadi Rum destination website
- Petra destination website
- ASEZA website
- Aqaba hotel websites
- Jordan tourism 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 Aqaba Jordan and the Golden Triangle of Petra and Wadi Rum. A tourist perception survey was developed based on the analysis and research conducted during Phase One and with approval from ASEZA was distributed at visitor centers in Aqaba, Petra and Wadi Rum.

Sales and marketing collateral was collected from ASEZA (public) as well as from the hotels, tour operators and resorts (private) to assess how both private and public stakeholders are using the Aqaba brand. The second phase included approximately 24 in-person interviews with both public and private stakeholders of Aqaba 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 Aqaba 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 Aqaba where approximately 65 participants consisting of both public and private stakeholders in Aqaba tourism attended to express their opinions, visions and experiences regarding the Aqaba brand, its target markets and to discuss the challenges and needs of the market in order to achieve the destination's full potential.

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 Aqaba as an international tourism destination.

# ANALYSIS & RECOMMENDATIONS

## DELIVERABLE # 1 – REVIEW CURRENT BRAND EFFORTS FOR AQABA

**Background:**
Aqaba has an established tourism cluster with the public sector being led by ASEZA, which has declared tourism an important industry for the region's economic development and improvement. The private sector is robust and active with approximately 4000 available hotel rooms, several inbound tour operators, transportation companies, a number of dive operators and watersports and a mixture of private and public beach clubs and facilities.

In addition the local tourism cluster within Aqaba, the JTB, MOTA, JITOA and a number of outbound tour operators from the source markets are all contributing to the brand efforts of promoting and selling Aqaba.

For the scope of work herein, the aforementioned stakeholders' brand efforts were all audited and assessed. Fortunately, the brand values and identity all appear to be generally understood and employed by both the public and private stakeholders. Nearly all operators employ some version of the brand guidelines reinforcing Aqaba as a diverse destination conveniently located on the Red Sea and encompassing Wadi Rum and Petra.

The only brand attraction that arguably falls short within the branding efforts is the component of a 'Green destination.' Hardly anyone in the private sector included this component within sales and marketing collateral. In addition, the tourist perception surveys taken in Aqaba reflected a negative impression by some of the tourists on the amount of trash on the streets, beaches and at Wadi Rum and Petra. This gap between product and brand must be bridged if Aqaba wishes to deliver on its brand promise as a sustainable destination.

**Recommendations:**
The following table outlines the core challenges for brand Aqaba and provides specific solutions to those problems.

**Table 4: Brand Impact – Problems and Solutions**

| Problem | Solution | Priority |
|---|---|---|
| The way in which the brand is reflected in marketing is not powerful or attention grabbing | This requires a creative marketing solution, not a brand solution. It requires either a better understanding of the brand and/or better tactical executing of the brand within specific marketing efforts. | Low |
| Consumer tastes have changed | If the destination can no longer offer what consumers want, it should cut and run and identify new segments. If there is a chance that the destination might still appeal to changed tastes, then research is required to identify their core motivation.<br>Could require a refresh or a radical rebranding. | Medium |
| New Market segments have emerged and the brand fails to inspire them. | Same as for consumer tastes above. | Medium |
| Increased competition in the marketplace from new destinations or refocused brands | Refreshment of the brand | High |
| The brand and its promise have become tired. | The brand needs to be refreshed. | High |
| The values need to match the segments the destination is targeting | DMO needs to know which markets to target. Then decide if the destination can appeal to those segments, if they're still of importance then a review of brand values is required. | High |

Key Recommended Branding & Marketing Actions:

- Develop and schedule a series of brand workshops coordinated by ASEZA in collaboration with the private sector, JTB, MOTA and JITOA with the objective of increasing stakeholder engagement and understanding of the brand identity.

- Develop a marketing budget that outlines objectives, KPIs and quantitative measurement and monitoring against those objectives. The budget and the performance should be transparent for the entire industry.
- Ensure a unified destination brand across all segments and product lines. Specifically, there should not be an Aqaba brand for real estate and another for tourism. There can only be one Aqaba brand and with the significant amount of real estate entering the market in addition to hotel rooms it is important to ensure both products share and support one brand Aqaba.
- There needs to be a greater emphasis on joint marketing programs with international tour operators in conjunction with the JTB who has the expertise and relations with the international market and trade shows.
- Digital and online marketing by the Aqaba tourism cluster is inadequate for today's connected traveler. Content (images, language and copy) are typically unprofessional and uninspiring. ASEZA and the private sector need to develop a content marketing strategy and database of images, copy and guidelines to support a cohesive branding and positioning strategy throughout the tourism cluster.
- Tactical sales oriented plans need to be drawn up for focused niche markets like cruise, dive, family, MICE and domestic and regional that support the brand strategy while providing focused and tactical information catered to these market segments.
- Aqaba needs to elevate awareness for the convenience and practicality of KHIA and find ways to integrate it into the Aqaba brand.
- Continue to develop partnerships and collaborations with operators selling Egypt and Israel to promote and sell overnight stays in Aqaba.
- Promote and support Turkish Airlines flights through co-operative marketing campaigns and joint promotions. Ensure Turkish Airline's success and more airlines will follow.
- Stronger market linkages with both Wadi Rum and Petra as neither destination alone constitute a reason to visit for an entire vacation. Therefore Aqaba, Wadi Rum and Petra are better off together than they are individually.
- Form the PPP - Destination Aqaba (concept has already been studied under a separate consultancy) to ensure an effective marketing effort is undertaken.

## DELIVERABLE # 2 – 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 Aqaba 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, Aqaba is primarily sold as a sun and sand component as part of the 'classic' Jordan tour. Increasingly however, there is an increase in the number of travelers from European and Scandinavian countries who are escaping the winter months and using Aqaba as a convenient seaside hub for a diverse vacation within the Golden Triangle. Identifying more of these markets and developing effective messaging, positioning and products for each market segment will be required for continued growth and success in the future.

There is no question that Aqaba possesses a wealth of natural and developed products that add to its potential as a world-class destination. The following products are generally well aligned with the Aqaba brand positioning. However, Aqaba's brand promise as a real living Arab community city is potentially the most precarious with the pending mega resorts and the current lack of sufficient nightlife and restaurants served by pedestrian walkways throughout the city. This brand promise will need to be supported by product development and training for this brand asset to be made credible.

**Brand Assessment Notes and Rating:**
***Red Sea*** – The Red Sea is arguably Aqaba's primary asset and deservedly so. It is a magnificent ecosystem of biological, geographical and historical importance. The water is incredibly clear and possesses a unique coral system enclosed by the narrow straights of the Red Sea. Diving and snorkeling are world class and are affordably priced compared to other diving destinations as well as being family friendly. Most importantly, tourists of all types, ages, markets, and income and activity levels appreciate a nice beach either for a couple of days at the end of a trip or for the entire duration of their holiday. Aqaba must do a better job of providing better beach access particularly for guests staying at non-beach hotels by providing transportation to/from the beaches and beach clubs located on the South Coast. Trash collection, fishing regulations and coral reef protection must become a high priority if Aqaba wants to achieve its objectives.

**Competitiveness and Marketability- Excellent**

***Aqaba city* –** The city is spectacularly set upon the northern part of the Red Sea surrounded by rose red mountains cut by a valley that runs north from the Red to the Dead Sea. Aqaba maintains the slow yet steady pace of a typical seaside resort one might find in Europe or Latin America with a vibrant mixture of pedestrians and horse drawn carriages. Restaurants are plentiful in certain areas, particularly around the fish market however the dining opportunities outside of the resorts are poor and not up to the levels expected by tourists. Sadly, for a destination that prides itself on its culinary expertise, Aqaba falls short of creating thematic and experiential dining memories. Other traditional urban activities like shopping and attractions are also lacking and are not sufficient to generate interest from multi-day tourists in Aqaba or even one-day cruise passengers coming/going from Wadi Rum and Petra. Aqaba needs to develop a tourism cluster downtown with a diverse set of restaurants, stores and nightlife that can be shared by locals as well as visitors in order to be called a real living Arab community that travelers can experience for themselves.
**Competitiveness and Marketability- Very Good**

***Petra* –** What can be said about Petra that hasn't already been said? A seven wonder of the world. A UNESCO World Heritage site. The most visited place in all of Jordan. Petra is amazing. Any country in the world would love to have a national treasure like Petra in Jordan. However, iconic places can also be a challenge for destinations. Like Machu Pichu in Peru, an iconic site on the scale of a Machu Pichu, or Petra can create a myopic bucket list perception of the entire country; resulting in the belief that once it has been seen there remains very little reason to see anything else. Moreover, places like Petra are being threatened by their very own popularity and so it is imperative that for the long-term survival of Petra that other destinations and experiences be developed and promoted in conjunction with Petra to reduce the pressure on the site and increase the time-in-country and expenditures. The consultancy herein collected and conducted a number of tourist perceptions surveys in Petra and more than half of all respondents were group tourists visiting Petra for a half or whole day then departing Jordan without visiting anywhere else. For Aqaba and other destinations to succeed, Petra needs to be seen as an all-important visit as part of a larger Jordan experience.
**Competitiveness and Marketability- Excellent**

***Wadi Rum* –** Wadi Rum, like Petra is a must see destination for millions of travelers worldwide. Its storied history of inhabitation since prehistoric times to the legend of TE Lawrence provides travelers with a diverse blend of experiences. About 30,000 inscriptions in all are still visible in the sandstone cliffs. The Wadi Rum is inhabited by about 5000 Bedouin that live in and around the Wadi Rum in surrounding towns and villages. Intrepid travelers looking to stay a night in the Wadi Rum are gifted with arguably some of the best stargazing anywhere in the world. Accommodations in the Wadi Rum are authentically Bedouin, ranging from a goat hair blanket on the floor to a soft mattress in a luxury-tented camp. Wadi Rum receives around 100,000 visitors per year, nearly one-sixth the visitors Petra receives and like Petra suffers from a lack of night stays and expenditures. The new Hijaz Railway experience will improve the diversity of experiences at Wadi Rum. Wadi Rum is however a perfect combination with Aqaba and the Red Sea as the two are only 45 minutes away from one another.
**Competitiveness and Marketability- Excellent**

***Ancient City of Ayla* –** Located along the Corniche in Aqaba next to the Movenpick hotel and the marina sits Ayla, where the ancient port of Aqaba was once located. Fortunately, the site has been saved and preserved

despite being located in some prime real estate in front of the beach and in the middle of town. Sadly however, the site is in desperate need of repair and attention. The site is dirty with trash laying about and also contained a number of camels apparently kept there by some locals. Ayla in its current state is unsuitable to the expectations of the modern traveler and despite its enormous historical and anthropological potential is a wasted opportunity by Aqaba to elevate its brand promise as a historical yet modern real living Arab city.
**Competitiveness and Marketability- Good**

***Sherif Hussein Bin Ali's House / The Aqaba Archaeological Museum –*** The archaeological museum is located in the former house of Sherif Bin Ali next to the Aqaba castle. The museum is centrally located along the waterfront. The museum houses some important antiquities from the site of Ayla however it fails to engage with visitors on a deeper level the historical significance of the house or the history behind the collections and antiquities found there. Doing a better job of telling the story behind the curated collections would increase interest by visitors.
**Competitiveness and Marketability- Good**

***The Plaza –*** Through consultations in Aqaba, a handful of people within the tourism industry mentioned plans to renovate the area surrounding the Plaza with restaurants, shops, music, stalls and events. The site, located at the foot of the Great Arab Revolt Flag could help substantiate Aqaba's historical importance while informing and educating travelers on the history of the Arab revolt. Currently, the site feels empty with very little interpretive signage to inform travelers of where they are and why it's important. Again, the Plaza is another centrally located place like Ayla and the Church, which could make credible Aqaba's promise as a living Arab city of historical importance.
**Competitiveness and Marketability- Good**

***Aqaba Castle/Fort –*** Located near the Plaza and the Arab Revolt flag, the castle was built between 1510 and 1517 and used as an inn for pilgrims on their way to Mecca. The Ottomans occupied the fort until 1917 when the British Royal Navy shelled it at the start of the Great Arab Revolt. It's currently closed for renovations.
**Competitiveness and Marketability- Good**

***The Church –*** Aqaba is home to what is considered by many to be the oldest church in the world. The site is centrally located right behind the Movenpick hotel, convenient for most foreign tourists to walk to from downtown or their hotels. While the potential for a memorable experience exists, the experience at the site is extremely poor. There is hardly any interpretive signage yet most frustrating is that the site is being used as a dump where trash is thrown and burned. The site could easily be covered and protected and doing so would elevate the experience tremendously.
**Competitiveness and Marketability- Poor**

***Events –*** From all accounts there is a collective agreement on the part of the tourism industry that Aqaba needs more events of all sizes and themes to attract more tourists. Events are a great way to draw in new visitors to a destination and get past visitors to come back again and again. Based on Aqaba's brand foundation in people, nature, culture and history there would be no limit to the amount of events Aqaba could deliver on.
**Competitiveness and Marketability- Good**

***South Coast and Bedouin Garden Village –*** Although only 27km of coastline exists in Jordan, it is some of the most beautiful and biologically rich with regard to marine and coral life. The South Coast starts right after the ports of Aqaba and contains the Red Sea Marine Peace Park. The South Coast's rugged terrain and wide-open views across the Red Sea provide a nice counterpoint to the town of Aqaba where the mega resorts that line the beach often obstruct beach access and views. The Bedouin Garden Village offers mid level hostels and hotels that cater to divers, backpackers and active oriented travelers looking for a little adventure. The beach club Bernice is a well-designed seaside club that caters to visitors not staying in beachfront hotels and for those travelers and Jordanians looking for a more relaxing staging point for diving, snorkeling and other watersports.
**Competitiveness and Marketability- Very Good**

***Hospitality & Accommodations Sector –*** Aqaba has a robust hospitality and vacation residence supply. Currently, out of 3900 rooms in Aqaba, around 40% are 5 star properties and another 15% are 4 star hotels resulting in around 55% of all hotel room capacity being within the four and five star

categories. There is a consensus locally that more hotels are needed outside of the five and four-star category to cater to the mid to lower level price points. However, when looking at hotel occupancy rates, the 5/4/3 star properties have traditionally fared better than the 2/1 star properties with occupancy rates hovering around 48% for the higher end properties versus 38% occupancy respectively for the lower end properties (2010-2012). Hotel prices are comparatively higher to the rest of the Red Sea destinations and though they are not exorbitant compared to other international seaside destinations, the lack of outside activities like nightlife and restaurants do raise a concern of value for money.
**Competitiveness and Marketability- Very 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 the following operators were undertaken and incorporated into the findings of this report however a deeper analysis and assessment as part of a follow up is recommended.

- Petra Tours
- Pan East Tours
- Tania Tours
- Jordan Select
- UTA
- JITOA

***The Aqabawis –*** It is always hard to distinguish between good hosts and great hosts and nearly every country in the world touts their citizens as the most gracious on the planet. However, Jordanians and Aqabawis are incredibly warm and friendly people. It is nearly impossible to not be offered tea; coffee and other treats by strangers and even to be gifted items that a shopkeeper believes you are fond of. The hospitality of the people is a huge asset that brand Aqaba must continue to foster, support and promote.
**Competitiveness and Marketability- Excellent**

***King Hussein International Airport –*** Airports are not always considered a tourism product, not until they become a hindrance or deterrent to your target market. Most often, airports damage destinations due to lack of airlift, high prices and or bad service and infrastructure. Aqaba's KHIA currently operates at a fraction of what it could with only Royal Jordanian and Turkish Airlines offering scheduled flights and a number of seasonal charter flights operating into KHIA.  The launch of Turkish Airlines is a significant opportunity as it opens up Aqaba to a number of worldwide markets. The airport is conveniently located, well designed, easy to use and perhaps most importantly does not charge for tourist visas, effectively saving tourists JD 20.
**Competitiveness and Marketability- Excellent**

***Ground Transportation (Shuttles, Car-Rentals and Taxis) –*** One of the main assets of Aqaba, as a tourist destination is its relative size compared to its diversity and quantity of tourism products and experiences. Within 2.5 to 3 hours all of the tourism products aforementioned above can be reached from downtown Aqaba and in fact the only destination further than an hour is Petra. This diversity in such close proximity is an enormous asset for long-haul markets that crave variety in their holiday destinations but often don't want to travel far once they have arrived in country. Aqaba and all of Jordan, for that matter with the exception of Amman is relatively easy to self-drive with decent signage (except Wadi Rum) and highways and roads in good condition. One potential negative to self-drive is the lack of proper and designated parking areas throughout Aqaba. However, not all tourists are willing do self-drive. Consultation showed a nearly ubiquitous consensus of concern with the unfair pricing and poor service provided by the local shuttles and taxis in Aqaba. In order to fully leverage Aqaba's full range of assets, local transportation needs to improved and service must be up to par.
**Competitiveness and Marketability- Very Good**

**Table 4:SWOT Analysis of Aqaba's Tourism Industry**

| INTERNAL TO DESTINATION | |
|---|---|
| STRENGTHS | WEAKNESSES |
| • World class sites in Red Sea, Petra and Wadi Rum<br>• International airport conveniently located<br>• Proximity to all the attractions are all within 2.5 hours or less of Aqaba<br>• High level and capacity of higher end hotels and resorts | • Poor waste management and trash collection<br>• Underdeveloped urban activities like nightlife and restaurant<br>• Lack of events and other entertainment<br>• Museums, Ayla and the Church are all neglected and underperforming<br>• Airlift is insufficient and underperforming<br>• Poor target marketing to specific segments |
| EXTERNAL TO DESTINATION | |
| OPPORTUNITIES | THREATS |
| • New flights and cooperative marketing with Turkish Airlines<br>• New markets opened up by charter flights<br>• Mega resorts enthusiasm for supporting a marketing org. in Destination Aqaba | • Regional political instability<br>• Lack of proper planning<br>• Ongoing and/or worsening environmental loss and lack of management<br>• Lack of action and execution |

## DELIVERABLE #3 – RECOMMENDATIONS AND APPROACH FOR DEVELOPING, PROMOTING AND POSITIONING AQABA'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 Aqaba brand be 'refreshed.' not completely updated or changed. The process to refresh the brand is identical to developing a new brand however it is often much easier and quicker than having to start anew.

A Destination Audit has already been undertaken and is pending only to be prioritized with the target market segments. Generally speaking, the Aqaba brand refresh process as described below should take approximately 3 -5 months.

**Aqaba Brand Refresh Process:**

1. **Destination Audit – 1 week**
    a. Prioritize Aqaba's products in terms of those that appeal to the main market segments.
    b. Comparative analysis of Aqaba'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 -3 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 – 3-6 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

5. **Consumer Perception Research – 3 – 4 weeks**
   a. Need to develop and implement and 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 Aqaba 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 – 2- 4 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 (Aqaba) and National (Jordan) Brands**
   a. Brand Aqabas 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. Aqaba 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 (Europe), the more robust and distinct the Aqaba brand can be and the further way the source market is (USA) the more Aqaba 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 ASEZA and/or Destination Aqaba
   b. Create a Steering Committee (could be Destination Aqaba) 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 Aqaba 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 Aqaba 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

**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 ASEZA. Several members of the Aqaba tourism cluster from the private sector expressed a concern that there was no “designated attaché” within ASEZA for the private sector to work with. 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; http://bit.ly/GFD9nZ
- Jabal Ajloun Area Development Plan Summary; www.jdz.jo/en/cms/uploads/AjlounPresentation.pdf
- RSCN activities in general, and Ajloun in specific: http://goo.gl/4BkiYd
- Jordan official website: www.visitjordan.com
- Jordan official website: About Ajloun: http://goo.gl/wCNDph
- Aqaba Official Website: www.aqaba.jo
- Destination Market Association International (DMAI) – www.destinationmarketing.org
- Aqaba Destination Marketing Strategy 2010 -2015
- Update of Aqaba Marketing Strategy (Draft) 2013 -2015
- Aqaba Brand Strategy
- Office of Travel & Tourism Industries (OTTI) US

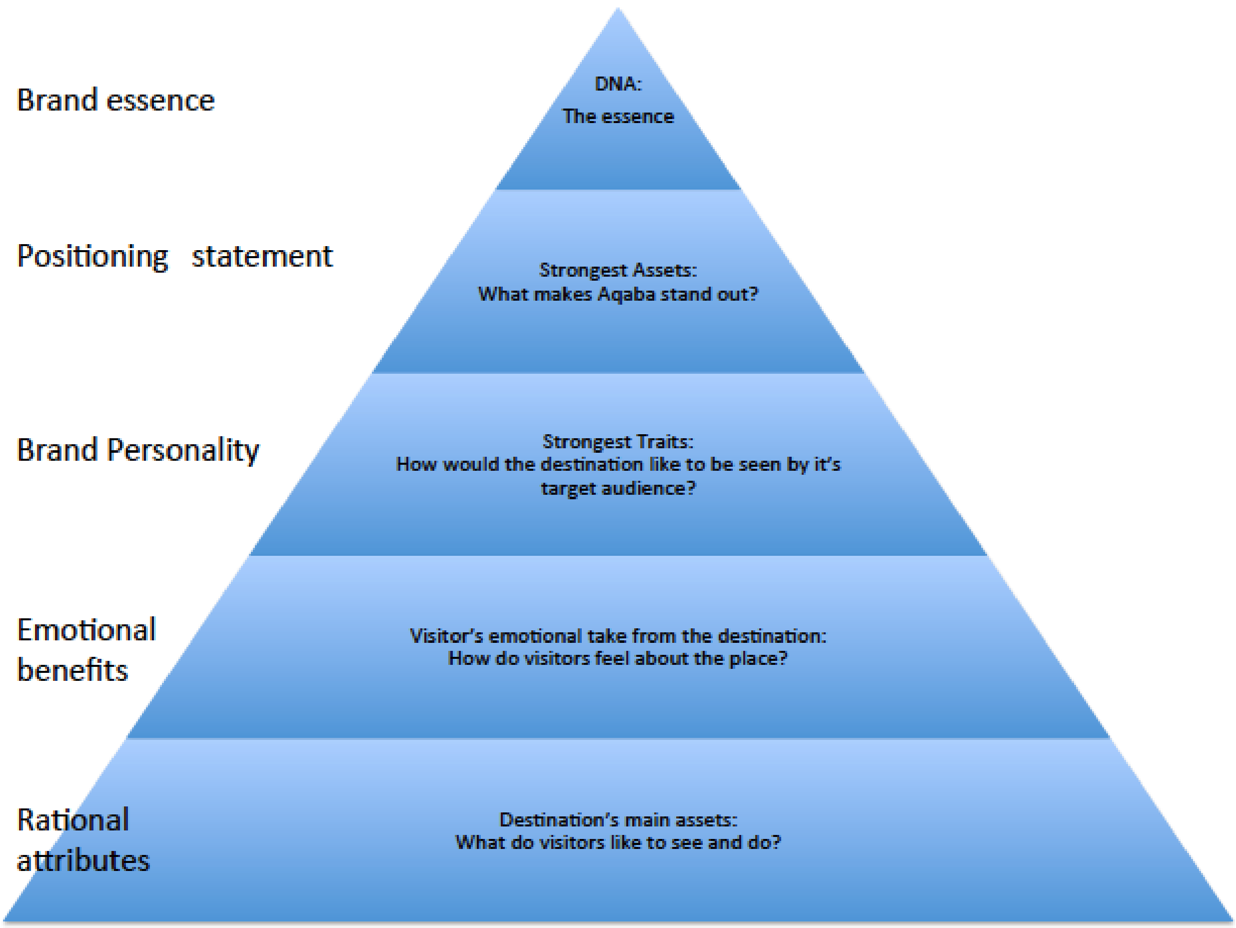
## ANNEX 2:

**INTERVIEWS & CONSULTATIONS**

- H.E. Issa Gammoh, Secretary General, Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities
  Antiquities
- H.E. Eng. Kamel Mahadeen, Chief Commissioner, ASEZA;
- H.E. Mr. Sharhabeel Madi, Commissioner for Economic Development & Investment Affairs, ASEZA;
- H.E. Dr. Raed Adwan, Local Development Units Governor and EU-funded grants program team
- Mr. Feras Ajlouni, Director of Tourism, ASEZA
- 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
- Mr. Rami Odeh, Tala Bay
- Ms. Hala Lukasha, Al Maabar
- Mr. Sedat Orman, Turkish Airlines
- Mr. Mahmoud S. Helalat, MoTA Aqaba
- Mr. Thaer M. Darwish. Bernice Beach Club
- Mr. Mazen Kawar, Petra Travel & Tourism Co.
- Mr. Hiba F. Hamdan, Saraya
- Mr. Sahl Dudin, Ayla Oasis
- H.E. Mr. Munir Nassar, United Travel Agency
- Mr. Bilal Abuzeid, Jordan Inbound Tour Operators Association
- Mr. Mohammed H. Katib, Bait Ali Tours
- Ms. Yasmine Hasan, Abercrombie & Kent
- Dr. Mohammad Ahmad Washa, Marine Science Station
- Mr. Dara Odeh, Rahayeb Camp

## ANNEX 3:

**THE FIVE-STAGE BRAND PYRAMID**

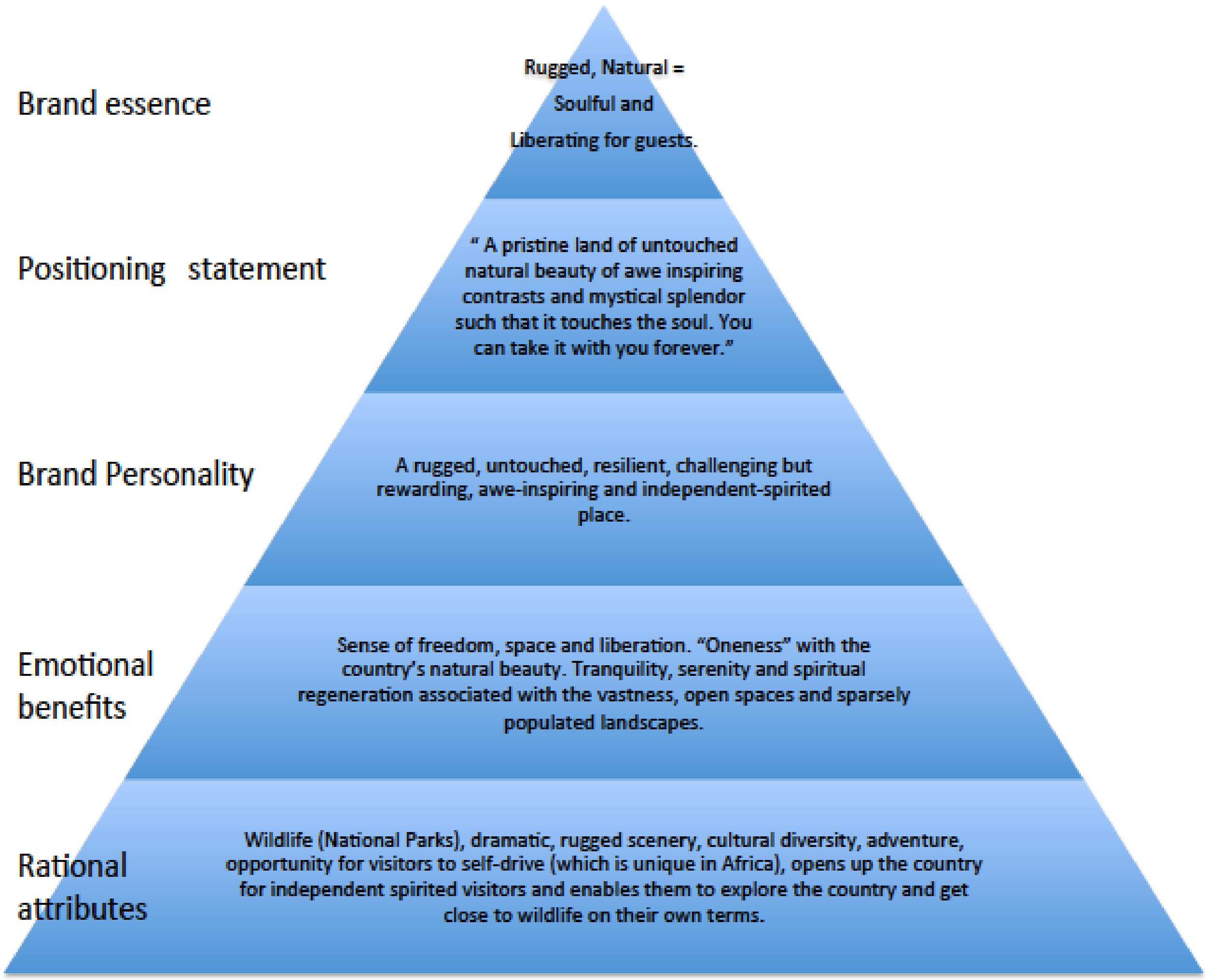



Starting from the bottom and ascending through each of these five stages towards the top:

- **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, Aqaba should engage only those with proven expertise in working with the target markets that Aqaba 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