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Aqaba Tourism Marketing Project: FINAL REPORT

AQABA COMMUNITY and ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
(ACED) PROGRAM

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This publication was produced for review by the United States Agency for International Development. It was prepared by Marwan Khoury and Tim Bartlett, ASEZA Tourism Marketing Advisors, AECOM International Development under the Aqaba Community and Economic Development (ACED) Program.

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DISCLAIMER

The author's views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Agency for International Development, AECOM International Development or the ACED Program.

USAID/ACED Program Frequently-Used Acronyms and Abbreviations

(Not all of the following will appear in every USAID/ACED Program document)

ABTA	Association of British Travel Agents
ACED Program	Aqaba Community and Economic Development Program (USAID)
ACT	Aqaba Container Terminal
ADC	Aqaba Development Corporation
ADS	Automated Directive Systems
AIDAR	USAID Acquisition Regulation
AIE	Aqaba International Industrial Estate
AMTD	Aqaba Marketing and Tourism Directorate
APC	Aqaba Ports Corporation
ASEZ	Aqaba Special Economic Zone
ASEZA	Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority
ASRI	Aqaba Skills Readiness Index
ATASP	Aqaba Technical Assistance Support Program (USAID)
ATM	Arabian Travel Market
ATMC	Aqaba Tourism Marketing Company
AUC	Aqaba University College
AZEM	Aqaba Zone Economic Mobilization Project (USAID)
BAFO	Best and Final Offer
BDC	Business Development Center
BDS	Business Development Services
CAI	Changi Airports International
CBO	Community-Based Organization
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CMT	Cut-Make-Trim
CO	Contracting/Contracts Officer
COB	Close of Business
COP	Chief of Party
CP	Cost Proposal
CRM	Customer Relationship Management
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
CTO	Cognizant Technical Officer
D&G	Democracy and Governance
DCA	Development Credit Authority
DMO	Destination Marketing Organization
EG	Economic Growth
EGRA	Early Grade Reading Assessment
EMC	Events Marketing Company
EO	Economic Opportunities
EOI	Expression of Interest
EPC	Executive Privatization Commission
ERfKE	Education Reform for a Knowledge Economy (USAID)
EU	European Union

ETF	European Training Foundation
FAR	Federal Acquisition Regulation
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FDR	Fixed Daily Rate
FHR	Fixed Hourly Rate
FTA	Free Trade Agreement
FTZ	Free Trade Zone
FZ	Free Zone
FZC	Free Zones Corporation
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GDA	Global Development Alliance
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEM	Gender Entrepreneurship Markets
GIS	Geographic Information System
GOJ	Government of Jordan (the central governing entity of Jordan)
GPS	Global Positioning System
HR	Human Resources
ICDL	International Computer Driving License
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
INJAZ	Economic Opportunities for Jordanian Youth Program
IPR	Intellectual Property Rights
IQC	Indefinite Quantity Contract
ISP	Internet Service Provider
IS-ASEZA	Institutional Support to ASEZA (EU funded project)
IT	Information Technology
JD	Jordanian Dinar
JITOA	Jordan Inbound Tour Operators Association
JIB	Jordan Investment Board
JNA	Jordan National Agenda
JNCW	Jordanian National Commission for Women
JSCED	Jordan Standard Classifications of Education
JTB	Jordan Tourism Board
JUSBP	Jordan-United States Business Partnership
JUSFTA	Jordan-United States Free Trade Agreement
KOJ	Kingdom of Jordan (the country within its physical boundaries)
KPI	Key Performance Indicators
KSA	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
LCC	Low Cost Carrier
LCDD	Local Community Development Directorate (ASEZA)
LECP	Local Employee Compensation Plan
LOE	Level of Effort
LTTA	Long-Term Technical Assistance
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MBR	Market Based Representative
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MFI	Microfinance Institution
MIS	Management Information System
MOF	Ministry of Finance
MOL	Ministry of Labor

MOPIC	Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation
MOTA	Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MSME	Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises
NCHRD	National Center for Human Resources Development
NDA	Neighborhood Development Activity
NDC	Neighborhood Development Committee
NET	Neighborhood Enhancement Team
NICRA	Negotiable Indirect Cost Rate
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NTS	National Tourism Strategy
PACE	Participatory Action for Community Enhancement
PMP	Performance Management Plan
PPP	Public Private Partnership
PR	Public Relations
PSD	Private Sector Development
R&D	Research and Development
QA	Quality Assurance
QC	Quality Control
RFP	Request for Proposal
RFQ	Request for Quotation
ROI	Return on Investment
SABEQ	Sustainable Achievement of Business Expansion and Quality (USAID)
SEO	Search Engine Optimization
SIYAHA	The Tourism Project (USAID)
SME	Small and Medium Enterprises
SOW	Scope of Work
STTA	Short-Term Technical Assistance
SWOT	Strength, Weakness, Opportunities and Threads
TA	Technical Assistance
TBD	To Be Determined
TIC	Tourist Information Center
TO	Task Order
TOR	Terms of Reference
TOT	Training of Trainers
TP	Technical Proposal
TRIDE	Trilateral Industrial Development
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UK	United Kingdom
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USD	United States Dollar
VTC	Vocational Training Center
WAEDAT	Women's Access to Entrepreneurial Development and Training
WEPIA	Water Education and Public Information for Action
WTO	World Trade Organization
WTTP	Workforce Technical Transformation Program

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I. BACKGROUND

Since the establishment of ASEZ in 2001, there has been strong emphasis on realizing Aqaba's international tourism potential. To facilitate this, 50% of planned investments have been geared towards tourism and much expert advice has been provided, including comprehensive tourism marketing strategies developed by the EU and updated by the USAID-funded Siyaha Program.

After Aqaba was designated the 2011 Arab Tourism Capital, ASEZA and USAID/ACED Program saw a timely opportunity to raise Aqaba's tourism profile, review its marketing strategy, and put in place a comprehensive promotional action plan aimed at placing Aqaba more prominently on the international tourism map.

Aqaba possesses the base ingredients for tourism success. In addition to its beautiful underwater environment and excellent climate, it has, unlike other Red Sea Resorts, its own history, heritage and character. Moreover, it benefits from proximity to a world famous attraction – Petra – and to the desert splendor of Wadi Rum.

However, Aqaba currently faces a difficult marketing environment. Worldwide economic problems have severely impacted the international tourism industry, and the relentless media coverage of recent events in Egypt has unfortunately created the impression internationally that the whole Middle Eastern region is unstable, despite the fact that Jordan has remained peaceful.

Competition, particularly from other Red Sea resorts and also from Syria and Turkey, has already put earnings under pressure, and is likely to intensify – Egypt in particular in an attempt to repair its damaged tourism industry is offering very low prices.

In the long term, the supply of hotel rooms in Aqaba is predicted to almost double. Most of the additional supply will be at the five-star level. This will clearly put pressure on occupancy and profitability unless strong and targeted marketing can deliver vigorous growth over the next five years.

Nevertheless, if Aqaba takes the necessary steps to improve its accessibility, enrich its product, strengthen its brand differentiation, and professionalize its marketing, then there is no reason why the spectacular success achieved in attracting resort investment cannot be matched in the future by the overall health of its incoming tourism industry.

II. OBJECTIVE

The project's stated objective was as follows: "To help ASEZA and tourism stakeholders in Aqaba to market Aqaba as a tourism destination and to prepare Aqaba to become the Arab Capital of Tourism in 2011." Key outputs were:

- An updated Marketing Strategy
- Detailed Promotional Action Plans
- An Events Plan for 2011

Aqaba faces two key challenges:

- To improve and diversify its product offer, especially in the historic city centre, visitors must be given good reasons to stay longer and spend more.
- To build demand.

This USAID-funded project dealt primarily with the second challenge: building demand by utilizing the promotional techniques of marketing. It tackled the immediate need to increase Aqaba's visibility by planning and implementing detailed actions aimed at maximizing the impact of Aqaba's nomination as the Arab Capital of Tourism in 2011 and at maintaining a strong promotional momentum for subsequent years.

However, with regard to the first challenge, although the previous version of the Marketing Strategy had not covered product development in much depth, the advisors involved in this project believe that promotion can only succeed in the long-term if it is accompanied by product development. Both are vital to successful marketing, which needs to embrace the full cycle from research and product development through to promotion, with research then feeding back into product development and modification. For this reason, an expanded section on product needs has been included in the updated five-year Marketing Strategy and in the Marketing Action Plan.

The international tourism marketing advisor's assignment, the duration of which was set at 150 working days (plus a two day extension subsequently agreed with USAID/ACED Program, AECOM), has now terminated. It has achieved all its mandatory objectives, despite the fact that the Jordanian tourism marketing advisor was not able to start work until the beginning of September, two months later than originally planned.

III. MANDATORY DELIVERABLES

<i>Deliverable *</i>	<i>Deadline 2010-2011</i>	<i>Date Delivered 2010-2011</i>	<i>Comments</i>
Workplan	July 20	July 19	
Five-Year Tourism Marketing Strategy	October 5	September 25 October 5	International advisor's final draft Final joint version with Jordanian advisor's input
Marketing and Promotion Action Plan	November 4	November 2	
Events Plan for 2011	December 5	November 18 February 16	Events Marketing Plan produced in August and final version in ACED format delivered November 18 Due to delays caused by ASEZA negotiating processes, it was agreed with USAID/ACED Program that delivery of the Events Program should be delayed until the shape of it became clearer.
RFPs/SOWs	Starting November 4 and continuing as necessary until project end.	Started ahead of schedule	12 RFPs produced
Three Trip Reports	September 9 December 23 March 1	September 9 December 11 February 22	Visits of the international tourism marketing advisor
Final Report	February 23	February 23	For international advisor. Jordanian advisor still operating.

* All these documents, except this Final Report and the RFPs, are available on a DVD delivered by the international advisor to USAID/ACED Program on February 22, 2011.

IV. METHODOLOGY

The overall methodology underlying the project:

- Started with knowledge of the existing product;
- Based on research to identify key target market segments;
- Driven by international best practices and by proven tourism return-on-investment (ROI) criteria;
- Emphasized partnership with the industry (PPP); and
- Focused on action: the final section of the project (weeks 27 to 33) concentrated almost exclusively on implementation of the Promotional and Events Plans, and on achieving concrete results.

V. ACTIVITIES

The project can be divided into three basic phases, although these overlapped at times.

a. Phase 1: Planning, Research and Consultation

Work Plan

This was produced and agreed on time. Flexibility was built in to allow for the fact that the Jordanian advisor was not able to work during the first two months of the project, and also to permit easy adaptation to evolving USAID/ACED Program and ASEZA priorities.

Research

Thorough desk and internet research was carried out in preparation for drafting the new Strategy and Action Plan. Careful analysis was made of the AMTD's statistical data, errors were rectified, and suggestions for improvement were made.

Gaps in data were identified, and an RFP was drafted to commission up-to-date consumer expenditure and satisfaction reports. This was distributed, and the international advisor was a member of the USAID/ACED Program panel, which undertook a rigorous selection process.

Assistance was given to the selected company in the preparation and testing of the questionnaire and interviews will commence shortly, but the results will only be available to guide strategic and action planning in one year's time.

Detailed Return on Investment (ROI) calculations were done to support the Strategy, but the figures cannot be finalized until meaningful results from the consumer expenditure research start coming through.

Consultation

Meetings were carried out with individual stakeholders and with the Executive Committee, and an interactive presentation was made to a group of around 70 stakeholders, in order to gather input for the Strategy and Action Plan.

During the consultation process, it became clear that more detailed product development recommendations would need to be included in the new Strategy, and the advisors undertook various study visits to key areas of the city and surroundings (including Wadi Rum and Petra).

b. Phase 2: Creation of Mandatory Deliverables:

Tourism Strategy, Events Plans, and Marketing Action Plan

Tourism Marketing Strategy:

The new Tourism Marketing Strategy for 2011-2015 follows a review in April 2009 of Aqaba's tourism performance, and detailed research and stakeholder consultation undertaken in July/August 2010 (see above), both under the auspices of USAID. It was delivered to USAID/ACED Program on 5th October 2010 and approved by the Chief Commissioner of ASEZA on November 2.

Major revisions of ASEZA's statistics were necessary in order to finalize the Strategy. A shortened version of the strategy designed for publication was also produced by the international advisor and delivered to USAID/ACED Program on 2nd December.

The new Tourism Marketing Strategy for Aqaba 2011-2015 is divided into four sections:

1. The first section analyzes Aqaba's recent tourism results in the context of world trends and of tourism to Jordan overall. Aqaba's results underline the current importance in terms of length of stay of the Russian market and of Western and Northern Europe, especially Scandinavia, UK, Belgium, Italy and France.
2. The second section analyzes Aqaba's performance against previous tourism strategies. It demonstrates Aqaba's success in repositioning itself as an international destination, in raising its profile with the travel trade, particularly in Europe, and in attracting cruise traffic.

However, it also identifies targeted areas where performance has been less impressive, for example improving co-operation with the Jordan Tourism Board (JTB), increasing visitor length of stay in Aqaba, and fully capitalizing on the popularity of Petra.

It concludes that resources were utilized most effectively when working through the travel industry, especially tour operators, but that the efficacy of the consumer TV campaign "Breathe Aqaba" was debatable. It recommends reverting to the original brand guidelines with their emphasis on links to Wadi Rum and Petra, and, through an evaluation of lessons learned, it concludes that future tourism promotion strategies for Aqaba should concentrate on four key challenges:

- Visibility;
 - Accessibility;
 - Seasonality;
 - Partnership.
3. The third section emphasizes that an essential part of marketing is product development, and that the promotional efforts recommended in the previous section will not succeed unless the product is continuously improved to ensure visitor satisfaction. While important new and presumably high quality products (for example the convention center, cruise terminal, golf courses, water park, and aquarium) are anticipated as part of the mega-projects which Aqaba has been so successful in attracting, there is a serious danger that the city centre of Aqaba will be left behind in a contrasting unattractive limbo. There is particular urgency to improve: the castle/flag area; interpretation/presentation at heritage sites; the duty free shopping experience; the main shopping street (to emulate a traditional souk); the nightlife; and transportation in general.

This section closes with a detailed SWOT analysis created in consultation with the key tourism stakeholders in Aqaba.

4. The fourth section takes the five challenges identified in sections two and three, and develops them into a Marketing Strategy with very detailed objectives and KPIs. It defines the promotable segments on which Aqaba should focus. It recommends that the resort continues to be positioned as a unique and historic city on the Red Sea, and as a convenient base from which to visit Petra and Wadi Rum. It also recommends that resources be prioritized to working in a highly targeted way through intermediaries,

primarily charter operators, specialist tour operators, and the travel and consumer media. Cooperation with JTB at every level should be stepped up, and, in markets where JTB's activities to promote Aqaba need to be supplemented, Aqaba should contract JTB's existing Market Based Representatives (MBRs) to achieve carefully specified KPIs on Aqaba's behalf. If this proves impractical, Aqaba should then consider setting up its own separate MBRs.

One of the most important targets in the strategy is to create as quickly as possible a Public Private Partnership (PPP) to handle the marketing of Aqaba. This will significantly improve the prospects of successful implementation of the Strategy and Action Plan. The new PPP would become responsible for drafting detailed annual Marketing Plans in the future, for managing marketing activities, and for building on the minimum budget recommended in the Strategy.

Broad strategic guidelines underlying the Strategy can be summarized as follows:

- Upgrade the city centre product to keep pace with the new mega-projects;
- Focus on the primary markets identified;
- Market increasingly in partnership with the private sector (set up a PPP), and progressively increase their contribution to costs;
- Make more effective use of JTB resources, agreeing with them a detailed MOU with performance measured against specific KPIs, and set up dedicated Aqaba MBRs when necessary to facilitate activities in key source markets;
- Limit direct consumer activity to domestic and regional markets;
- Retain current charters and encourage new ones, but, as brand penetration improves, shift emphasis progressively towards encouraging more stable scheduled direct flights.

In the short term, Aqaba's marketing approach should be to fill its growing room supply by concentrating on what works. It must return to a focus on retaining and building charter traffic to Aqaba. It must work with JTB on the basis of a detailed service level agreement with KPIs or, if this does not work well in some markets, it should set up its own MBRs as described above. Aqaba must also work strongly with tour operators to maximize the inclusion of Aqaba in existing traffic to Jordan.

In the medium to longer term, brand values and the development of new products will allow increasing emphasis to be placed on a more diverse and higher quality-value tourism, with direct air access on scheduled services, and a distinct identity for Aqaba as a destination in its own right.

The international advisor also researched the cruise market for inclusion in the strategy. He visited the Arrival Quay, and produced an additional briefing paper (copy also on DVD) which stresses current lost opportunities for Aqaba in this important segment.

A marketing strategy for Wadi Rum was produced separately and attached to the Aqaba Strategy as an Appendix. This calls for a strengthening of the environmental and educational profile of the attraction, and a move away from products which do not maximize local contribution and which damage the environment.

Marketing Action Plan

The original TORs needed some clarification with regard to the Marketing Action Plan. From discussions with the Chief Commissioner, it soon became clear that he was looking for a short-term action-oriented plan, which is simple, flexible, targeted and realistically costed, to complement the new five-year strategy. Destination Marketing Organizations

seldom produce Action Plans for more than one year, because of rapidly changing external circumstances.

It was therefore agreed to do a very detailed Marketing and Promotion Action Plan for 2011, plus outlines of an Action Plan for 2012 and 2013. A Plan along these lines was created by the advisors and approved by the Chief Commissioner on November 2. The advisors also mentored staff on how to produce annual action plans and how to keep them updated in response to changing circumstances.

The Marketing Action Plan develops the Strategy's key objectives – visibility, accessibility, seasonality, partnership – in more detail, specifying the concrete marketing actions which need to be taken in each of the identified priority markets, and developing careful monitoring and evaluation via a range of challenging KPIs.

It includes comprehensive sections on product development, market research and segmentation, branding, e-marketing, training, events, and quality control. These sections also list specific actions and are costed.

Key recommendations from the Action Plan include:

- Representations started in the UK, Germany, France and Sweden during 2011, and will expand to Italy and Spain during 2012 and to Russia during 2013.
- Trade fairs will follow suit, as representatives are appointed, so does attendance to trade fairs in those source markets. So, in the first year, it is WTM in London and Top Resa in France, and second year it is FITUR in Madrid, BIT in Milan, TTG Incontri in Rimini and TUR in Sweden. Year three it is Moscow and specialized (niche) shows.
- Trade incentives will continue on the same momentum, attracting six new operations in year 2 and another six in year 3.
- The Marketing campaign will mainly cover the region in year 1; however, later on it will include focused campaigns in the region and the rest will go to co-op advertising with tour operators in Europe.
- During 2011, events are directly connected to the main event of Aqaba being the capital of Arab Tourism. Later on, the role will develop into support for local events to become sustainable and a magnet for tourism attraction.
- Market research will grow steadily to support the market segmentation approach both on the local scene through visitors' satisfaction surveys; and internationally through qualitative research.
- Films and photo production is an essential branding activity. It includes producing 30-second commercials during the first year and, after that, a six minute promotional film about Aqaba plus advertising materials.
- E-marketing activities will grow in intensity throughout year 2 and 3 to include most primary markets.
- Airline support is basically an activity to attract regular airline services to Aqaba and will include regular airlines and low cost carriers as 2013 approaches.

The Marketing Action Plan also gives a detailed analysis of the type of PPP implementation mechanism which will be required to deliver the actions recommended, describing the shareholder model (Aqaba Tourism Marketing Company – ATMC) which had previously been endorsed by stakeholders during a previous USAID-financed consultation.

Brief budgeted Action Plans for 2012 and 2013 are also included.

Events Plan for Arab City of Culture 2011

Due to the urgency to start preparing events marketing plans for this important year and because of the slow processes involved in organizing the events themselves, it was agreed with USAID/ACED Program and ASEZA to divide this task into two:

- Events Marketing Plan
- Events Program

Events Marketing Plan

The first version of this was produced very early on during the project, but the Plan evolved during the consultation phase and was finalized on November 18.

It soon became clear that stakeholders believe that the 2011 events program in itself is unlikely to generate many additional visitors. Visitors from key European source markets for example will continue to respond above all to attractive overall package offers. The events program will add to the quality of experience of all visitors and will hopefully generate positive word-of-mouth, social media comment, and PR. This will help raise Aqaba's profile and contribute to future increases in visitor numbers.

In the context of the above, many believe that declaring Aqaba as the 2011 Arab Capital of Tourism was a premature decision since Aqaba still has serious accessibility issues and its product is not yet ready (construction sites do not appeal to tourists). However, others believe that the nomination could be a good stimulus for tourism planners in Aqaba to start promoting the city regionally as a destination, and also to initiate partnership between the public and the private sectors.

The advisors believe that Aqaba's nomination as Arab Capital of Tourism does offer a clear opportunity to improve Aqaba's visibility specifically in regional markets. This is where the Events Marketing Plan is focused, presenting an aggressive program to raise awareness in regional markets about Aqaba as a destination, along with the added value that can be offered by including Wadi Rum, Petra and maybe even the Dead Sea within the Aqaba trip. Coverage in other markets will be an integral part of overall promotional activities there; these activities are specified in the Marketing Action Plan described above.

The Events Marketing plan is designed above all as a PR campaign. Such a campaign is designed to raise awareness in the medium-term about Aqaba's present and future attractions and to initiate steps towards suitable positioning of its product offer in the Region.

Detailed action recommendations include:

- Reserve a location and prepare a presence with commercial partners at the Arabian Travel Market (ATM) in Dubai (May 2-5, 2011). This provides an important opportunity to use the biggest and most important Arabic trade fair in order to promote Aqaba as the Arabian Tourism Capital of the year.
- Contract a photographer to start a stock library of new images; use these creatively on the Dubai stand and hand them out to journalists.
- Create a brochure or visitors' guide about Aqaba, past, present and future, to address specifically the Arab target audience.
- Send out RFPs and contract PR and advertising companies to maximize media coverage and create a regional advertising campaign.

Events Program

The international advisor worked with the Executive Committee to draw up events suggestions and consider proposed logos, and with Siyaha on the planning/marketing process. He also assisted with drafting of the RFP to be sent to specialized Events

Companies. Following up the earlier work with Events Companies, both advisors participated in meetings with the Chief Commissioner to interview and select candidates. Proposals submitted by seven interested companies were evaluated.

Eleven Jordanian EMCs were then called to a meeting with the Chief Commissioner. At this meeting it became apparent that many of them had excellent ideas, which could complement each other in a final program. For this reason, the Chief Commissioner took a decision to work through several companies rather than one. Although this risked slowing the process down, it allowed a more attractive program to be brainstormed by a variety of EMCs, rather than developed by just one. ASEZA was thus able to select the best from a wider range of proposals.

Work continued on the development of events appealing to a wide range of customers and involving the local community as much as possible. A paper entitled "Rediscovering Aqaba – An Events Program for 2011" containing the most up-to-date list of proposed events was delivered to USAID/ACED Program on February 15, 2011.

Most of the events proposed have good prospects of sustainability. This is particularly true of those rooted in local culture and tradition – Feter Fest, Adha Fest, Ramadan Nights, and of course the camel races, which have potential international appeal and which are already attracting visitors from the region.

The showcases for local handicrafts – Souq by the Sea and Souq Ramaq in Wadi Rum – also have good long-term potential, as do some of the sporting competitions – rallies, desert marathons, fishing and swimming with fins.

There are three "major" events, but two of these have been created specifically for Arab Capital of Tourism 2011, and are unlikely to be sustainable for financial reasons (in normal years a smaller proportion of the budget will be allocated to events). These are the Independence Day Celebrations (designed as the high-profile launch for Arab Capital of Tourism) and the final fireworks extravaganza, the Red Sea Fire Cup.

The other "major" event – the Balloon Festival in Wadi Rum – does have a deeper link with Aqaba's (desert) brand values, and is a good candidate for the long-term. However, a similar event has been held in the past, creating strong international impact, yet it was not repeated.

The most promising candidates to develop into a symbolic annual event for Aqaba are:

- Heritage: the Great Arab Revolt/Lawrence of Arabia
- Sand: the Sand Festival and Largest Sand Bottle.

The latter is particularly interesting, especially if the idea (still being considered) of a giant sand-timer proves feasible. This would be ceremonially turned over to mark each New Year, and could become a memorable icon for Aqaba, attracting a large amount of media attention. A camel mascot would add to the impact. Sand neatly unites the Red Sea and Wadi Rum elements of the brand.

c. Phase 3: Implementation

Aqaba Tourism Marketing Company (ATMC)

Back in 2009, a USAID-funded study was conducted to assess the potential for setting up an industry-led body to undertake the future marketing of Aqaba as a tourist destination. A private shareholding company model was agreed as the best option, but unfortunately the formation of this company was put on hold due to political changes.

As a result of the advisors' discussions with stakeholders in summer 2010, the idea was resurrected and the establishment of an Aqaba Tourism Marketing Company (ATMC) was included in the strategy as a key target, essential for the successful delivery of the Action Plan. A presentation was made with USAID/ACED Program to the Chief Commissioner and to the CEO of ADC, and a decision was made to press ahead with the ATMC plan, incubating the company within ADC.

A presentation was then made to key stakeholders in the presence of the Chief Commissioner, and as a result a Founding Committee under the Chairmanship of Saraya was formed. This immediately held one meeting, and progress is encouraging. The original proposal has been modified by the private sector representatives, and was successfully presented to a wider group of stakeholders at the end of the international advisor's assignment. Shareholder agreements have been drafted and the company, which will be incubated within the ADC, could be operational by April. The key to success will be the recruitment of a top quality CEO.

The proposed model for the ATMC is as follows:

ASEZA/ADC and the proposed marketing company (ATMC) will enter into a five year agreement to brand, position and promote Aqaba internationally. The chosen model proposes the formation of a shareholding company that is based on equity and service agreements to execute such an agreement. The start-up capital of the company will be around JD 1.5m and will be paid up fully during the first year of operation. Around JD 17.5m in firm commitments will be paid throughout years 1 – 5 in the form of revenue through service agreements. Net profit should remain nil as a result of expenditures. The service agreements are general in nature and are proposed to cover the core program of the company; however if existing shareholders or any other stakeholder wish to enter into a specific service agreement with the ATMC, they can do so under a separate contract and for additional fees.

The shareholders are categorized against their equity participation in the company. Shareholders, depending on their equity, can enjoy promotional benefits, seats on the Board and the Chairmanship of the company.

All other stakeholders in Aqaba can be involved in this model through the establishment of three working committees that are private sector led. Those committees will assist in the fields of marketing, product development, and quality control/human resources, and will report to the Board of Directors. A Higher Performance Assessment Council will also be formed to act as a Board of Trustees and will meet quarterly to assess and advice.

The objectives of the company will be to:

- Attract visitors by building a successful Aqaba tourism brand: Aqaba to be marketed as a must-visit, must-return destination for business and leisure travel domestically and internationally through a research based, multimedia, fully integrated marketing program.
- Engage and work in partnership with the tourism industry: the proposed Aqaba Tourism Marketing Company (ATMC) will engage and work with tourism businesses through a new system of account

management, supported by a customer relationship management system which offers a range of new customer focused products and services.

- Enhance the visitor experience: the Company's work add value to the visitor's experience through the operation and development of quality assurance schemes and by providing a multi channel, information service.
- Provide strategic direction for the industry: ATMC will influence the strategic direction of Aqaba's tourism industry by helping to shape and communicate its vision and strategy, and clearly defining detailed contributions to achieving the objectives.
- Assist in proper product development: ATMC will advise the industry on product enhancement and new product development to strengthen Aqaba's position as a destination.

The ATMC's performance will be assessed against a number of key performance indicators. These include:

- Increased number of visitors to Aqaba (over-night visitors)
- Increased tourism receipts
- Increased average duration of stay in Aqaba
- Tangible and increased presence of the Aqaba brand in the international tourism distribution system:
 - Number of tour operators in selective countries that include Aqaba as a tourism destination in their portfolios
 - Number of tour operators that are trained and equipped to market Aqaba
- Increased frequency of flights serving Aqaba
- Increased brand equity measured through ad-equivalent ratios
- Increased online presence and search-engine ranking, website traffic, and average duration of site-visits

These KPIs and additional elements that will be identified by the Board and management team will be assessed regularly and serve as a baseline. Subsequent quarterly assessments will provide the company with measurement of the impacts of its activities, and critical feedback to adjust and amend the KPIs periodically as needed.

Staff Empowerment

However, setting up the ATMC will take some months, and realistically it will only become fully involved in the implementation of Aqaba's tourism marketing plans in 2012. In the meantime, it has been agreed that the staff of the Tourism Marketing Directorate at ASEZA will continue to implement all marketing activities. A very successful "Empowerment Meeting" was held involving the Chief Commissioner, all ASEZA Tourism Directorate staff, and the international advisor. At the meeting staff presented their parts of the Action Plan in their own words and style, thus taking ownership of the Plan.

Implementation Support for ASEZA Tourism Directorate:

Market Based Representatives in Priority Markets

The necessary RFPs for implementation were produced, covering MBRs for UK, France, Germany, Scandinavia and the Middle East. Research was undertaken to identify potential candidates in the selected markets, and further information was supplied to interested parties.

A total of 11 bids were received (four from UK, three from Germany, two from France and two from the region). Follow-up questions from these parties were handled. The bids are now on hold awaiting progress on the ATMC (see above).

Trade Shows

An RFP for Stand Design and Construction to promote Aqaba as the Arab Capital of Tourism 2011 at the ATM in Dubai was written and distributed. In response, five proposals were received. Recommendations on which to choose have been sent to the Chief Commissioner. The stand has already been reserved and paid.

The international advisor also assisted with a press release, presentation and meetings program for World Travel Market in London, and with a press release and meetings program for ITB in Berlin, including a plan for ROI measurement and prizes.

Aviation Support

This is a major component of the Strategy and Action Plan under the Accessibility objective.

There are two key areas for support:

- Scheduled Airlines
- Tour Operators/Charters

Scheduled Airlines

The scheduled flight support scheme, developed by Siyaha, was launched at the 2010 World Routes Forum in Vancouver, which was attended by the Chief Commissioner, representatives from the airport, and ADC. This scheme is designed as a basis for negotiations, and is suitable for Low Cost Carriers (LCCs) as well as scheduled carriers. The international advisor also gave advice regarding marketing strategies for future airline routes shows.

Tour Operators/Charters

Considerable assistance was given to Siyaha's Aviation Consultant, Graham Henderson, to adapt and simplify his proposed incentive scheme for charter flights in order to accord better with Aqaba's new strategic priorities and current budgetary situation. Charter support to date was analyzed in detail and potential costs under the new scheme were assessed.

A final version of the charter flight support scheme was presented to the Chief Commissioner on November 2 and approved by him in writing. A press release was drafted and the scheme was launched.

The aim of the scheme is to make a contribution to the marketing costs which are needed to open new tourism markets and to support existing ones. The new scheme replaces the incentive that was offered in earlier years, putting more emphasis on increasing length of stay and on carrying out joint promotions with tour operators in key source markets.

The prioritized markets are Western Europe, Scandinavia and Russia. The scheme from these areas operates year round. To encourage off-season visits, a separate scheme will be offered to Eastern European markets during the summer months (May-September).

In the prioritized markets the maximum ASEZA contribution per flight in the first year of operation will be US\$2,500, its contribution to co-operative marketing will be \$10,000, and it will also pay a bonus of \$2 per passenger per additional night (in excess of 3). The equivalent figures for Eastern Europe in the summer months are \$2,000, \$5,000 and \$2. Over the subsequent three years the contribution to flight costs will diminish progressively while the contribution to co-operative marketing will increase.

Three proposals from tour operators are now awaiting the Chief Commissioner's approval.

Website

The international advisor participated in a series of meetings aimed at producing a new tourism website for Aqaba. He was interviewed in detail about the new Tourism Strategy, and attended a website focus group meeting with the industry. He also made comments on the preliminary text. Comments from ASEZA staff were incorporated, and the site was presented in early February 2011 to the Chief Commissioner, who was very supportive. A final version should be ready shortly, and will be presented once more to the Chief Commissioner at his request before being launched

Brand

During the consultation process for the Strategy, it emerged clearly that the original brand, developed under an EU-financed project several years ago, was preferred to the "Breathe Aqaba" branding, which was suddenly introduced without adequate consumer research.

Since consistency is a key element of branding, the Strategy recommended that Aqaba should stick with and reinforce the original brand. The international advisor assisted with the writing of an RFP to update and adjust the original guidelines, but respecting their essential values, and a company was contracted to do this. Work is currently well advanced, and the international advisor has been periodically involved in the process.

He also helped resolve a problem involving competing brands produced by other departments of ASEZA/ADC. It was established with the Chief Commissioner that USAID/ACED Program's ongoing brand update work would be definitive and applied by all.

Publications

The international advisor assisted the Head of Information in planning print needs and drafted an RFP for USAID/ACED Program covering the creation of four proposed new publications and the modification of four existing ones.

Table 1: New Publications

<i>Publication Working Title</i>	<i>Outline Content</i>	<i>Marketing/ Visitor Servicing Function</i>	<i>Languages</i>	<i>Suggested Size and Weight</i>
1. Aqaba Visitor's Guide	Comprehensive and very high quality publication providing evocative descriptions and photographs of Aqaba in accordance with the brand values and feelings defined. The publication is aimed at Aqaba visitors, both potential and actual, and at tourism itinerary planners. Sample itineraries, key selling points, port and airport data, map of region	V&M	Arabic, English French, German Spanish, Italian Swedish, Russian	A4 perfect bound, vertical, full color print, two sided. 80 grams

	showing Aqaba's location are to be included (suggested structure to be provided by ASEZA)			
2. Ayla archaeological site brochure	Informative site brochure giving descriptions, photographs, directions for the archaeological site	V	Arabic, English French, German Spanish, Italian Swedish, Russian	33cmX46cm folding to 16.5cmX23cm full color print, two sided. 80 grams
3. 4th century Roman church	Informative site brochure giving descriptions, photographs, directions for the archaeological site	V	Arabic, English French, German Spanish, Italian Swedish, Russian	33cmX46cm folding to 16.5cmX23cm full color print, two sided. 80 grams
4. Al Sharif Hussein Bin Ali House and Aqaba castle	Informative site brochure giving descriptions, photographs, directions for the archaeological site	V	Arabic, English French, German Spanish, Italian Swedish, Russian	33cmX46cm folding to 16.5cmX23cm full color print, two sided. 80 grams

Table 2: Already Available Publications*

<i>Publication Working Title</i>	<i>Languages Available</i>	<i>Publication Specifications</i>	<i>Provided by ASEZA</i>
1. 101 things to do in and around Aqaba	English, Arabic, French, German, Italian, Swedish, Spanish, Russian	Size A5 Final designs should be delivered to ASEZA in PDF and AI files	1. Current brochures in PDF files and the content as Microsoft word document 2. High resolution photos 3. Aqaba Brand guidelines manual
2. Aqaba Mini Guide	English, Arabic, French, German, Italian, Swedish, Spanish, Russian	Size A5 Final designs should be delivered to ASEZA in PDF and AI files	1. Current brochures in PDF files and the content as Microsoft word document 2. High resolution photos 3. Aqaba Brand guidelines manual
3. Experience Wadi Rum	English, Arabic, French, German, Italian, Swedish, Spanish	Size A5 Final designs should be delivered to ASEZA in PDF and AI files	1. Current brochures in PDF files and the content as Microsoft word document 2. High resolution photos 3. Aqaba Brand guidelines manual
4. Diving in Aqaba	English, Arabic, French, German, Italian, Swedish, Spanish	Size A5 Final designs should be delivered to ASEZA in PDF and AI files	1. Current brochures in PDF files and the content as Microsoft word document 2. High resolution photos 3. Aqaba Brand guidelines manual

*The publications listed in Table 2 are already available and have been well received by consumers. They will be now be redesigned in accordance with Aqaba brand delivery guidelines.

Other publications will be produced with the industry, including one financed by local tourism suppliers (a new edition has just appeared), and some on a joint scheme basis with tour operators (usually as part of the charter incentive scheme) or on an opportunity basis with tourism organizations (like the very successful magazines produced in recent years with the Association of British Travel Agents – ABTA).

TIC

When the international advisor arrived, Siyaha were already working on the design for an improved and larger Tourist Information Center (TIC) in the downtown area (close to the current one, which is now too small). He attended a meeting organized by Siyaha with the Chief Commissioner to discuss this, and made input into the design process.

The TIC project was then handed over to USAID/ACED Program. The international advisor assisted the Head of Information with the RFP covering construction. He also gave advice on future training and study visits for TIC staff.

Other Implementation Support for ASEZA:

The international advisor gave advice, mentoring and help in a wide range of areas, for example with:

- Requests for assistance from tour operators, including meetings with a Russian group organizer at the airport, with Voyages Jules Verne, with Classic Collection Holidays, and with Sports Tours International.
- Negotiation with Voyages Jules Verne for inclusion of Aqaba advertorial in their distribution of one million brochures to potential clients in the UK, and assistance with design and content
- Quality assurance
- Advice re: photography requirements
- A speech for the Chief Commissioner
- A press release for a charity event
- Future advertising strategy
- Advice re: cooperation with Aqaba Hotel and Diving Associations

A detailed list of meetings and other activities is attached as Appendix 1.

Support for AHA

The international advisor also gave technical assistance to the new CEO of the Aqaba Hotels Association, an organization recently set up by the USAID/ACED Program. He attended the inauguration ceremony and helped to finalize the RFP for the AHA website. He also held three meetings with the new CEO, assisting her with administrative matters, strategy, and the creation of her Work Plan.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FOLLOW-UP

Product Development

Throughout the process of creating the Marketing Strategy and Action Plan, both advisors involved have stressed the necessity of improving the city centre and heritage sites in tandem with increased promotion. The danger is that, if customers are disappointed with the product, then there will be little repeat business, which is normally considered an important element in any destination's long-term success. Moreover, when the mega-projects start to come on stream, if the city itself is not improved, then customers will be tempted to stay behind the walls of their smart modern enclaves and the businesses of central Aqaba will not benefit.

A product development section was included in both the Marketing Strategy and Action Plan, but there is a need for expert advice to create a detailed tourism product development plan covering the next three years.

Capacity Building ATMC and restructure ASEZA Tourism staff

If the ATMC is successfully established, as seems likely now, there will be a need to ensure that it is staffed with high caliber personnel, especially the CEO. USAID/ACED Program should consider providing an expert tourism marketing advisor with tourist board and PPP experience to assist ATMC staff in the first few months of operation.

Clearly ASEZA tourism staff will also need assistance with adapting to the new set-up, while the ADC will need some expert support during the incubation period.

Capacity Building TIC

USAID/ACED Program is supporting the establishment of a new Tourist Information Center (TIC), which will provide booking facilities and which will retail locally produced handicrafts. To ensure the success of this, it would be helpful to recruit an expert TIC manager from overseas to give short-term technical assistance and to arrange study tours for ASEZA's information staff to a state-of-the-art TIC in an English-speaking destination.

Capacity Building AHA

There are many challenges ahead for this new body, not least of which are the threat from the JHA to set up a rival branch in Aqaba and the difficulties in persuading the five-star branded hotels to join. The CEO will need a medium-term advisor who is familiar with the requirements of international funding organizations like USAID and who has experience of hotels, tourist boards and of running an association.

Wadi Rum

This is a site of extraordinary potential, but at present the overall impression is one of disorganization and under-utilization. A comprehensive Master Plan is urgently needed.

Crisis Management Plan

Recent events in the region have shown how important it is to have in place a crisis management plan designed by experts.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

Aqaba is currently at an important tourism crossroads where marketing needs to be stepped up to prepare for a much more dynamic future.

This project has given ASEZA all the tools it needs – Strategy, Action Plan, Events Plan, Cruise Marketing Plan – to respond to the challenges ahead. However implementation of similar plans has been patchy in the past, and ASEZA’s Marketing and Tourism Directorate, which has been without a Director since July 2010, does not in the advisors’ opinion have the capacity at present to deliver such a detailed and high-profile program effectively.

However if creation of the ATMC can be achieved within the next few months, then the situation will be much more positive, and the results of this project should be of great practical benefit to the private sector led Board as it takes over the role of marketing Aqaba as a tourist destination which can compete successfully on the international stage.

APPENDIX 1: MEETINGS AND OTHER ACTIVITIES

Meetings attended:

1. Seven meetings with the Chief Commissioner to discuss project progress, including the following: the Aviation Incentive Programs, Strategy, Action Plan, Events Program, PPP/ATMC, and the new tourism website.
2. One meeting with the Chief Commissioner and ASEZA Tourism Team to discuss the Events Program.
3. One meeting with the Chief Commissioner and the ASEZA Tourism Team to hand over ownership of the Action Plan.
4. Four meetings with the Chief Commissioner and Siyaha to discuss:
 - 2011 Events Program
 - Tour Operator Incentive
 - Castle and Center redevelopment
 - Tourist Information Center
 - Beach Ranger Uniforms
5. A meeting was held with the Chief Commissioner and with representatives of 11 Events and Advertising companies to discuss the program for Aqaba 2011
6. A meeting was held with the Ex Manager of the ASEZA Tourism Directorate to discuss recent operational progress and issues
7. Meetings were held in early September with the Jordanian tourism marketing advisor to the project, Marwan Khoury, to discuss future roles and responsibilities regarding the Workplan
8. One update meeting and one wrap-up meeting with Siyaha in Amman
9. Two website content meetings
10. Regular progress meetings were held with ASEZA Tourism Staff, ACED, and fellow advisor Marwan Khoury
11. Three meetings were held with the Executive Committee to discuss:
12. Events Program 2011
13. Events logo
14. New Strategy
15. Individual consultation meetings to discuss the new Strategy were held with:
 - Radisson Tala Bay
 - Moevenpick Tala Bay
 - Moevenpick Centre
 - Sindbad
 - Intercontinental
 - Kempinski
 - Days Inn
 - Saraya
 - Nyazi Tours
16. In Amman:
 - JTB
 - Siyaha
 - Marsa Zayed
 - Qawar
 - JTOA
17. Other meetings:
 - Airport Director and Russian Tour Operator regarding Incentive Program
 - Aqaba Sky regarding Incentive Program

- Red Sea Cine Arts regarding 2011 Events Program
- Aqaba Bird Sanctuary Director (two meetings) re: product development
- Deloitte
- Sports Tours International (UK)
- Matrix
- Red Sea Institute of Cinematic Arts
- L&R, Lebanon
- Netherlands Embassy
- Katholische University, Germany
- Voyages Jules Verne
- Classic Collections Holidays
- Pro 4
- Behind the Scenes
- Jordan
- The Commissioner for Petra Park
- Taybet Zaman Hotel Petra
- Al Sanabel International
- United World Colleges (Educational Tourism)
- Austrian Hotels Association
- Kempinski Hotel
- Intercontinental Hotels
- Moevenpick Tala Bay
- Saraya
- Ayla
- Aqaba Hotels Association (x3)
- Flashback Adventures

Other activities:

1. Delivered presentations to large groups of stakeholders on the Marketing Strategy and on the ATMC concept
2. Accompanied Martin Brackenbury, ex Chairman of the International Federation of Tour Operators and Director of Classic Collections Holidays UK, on a study tour of Aqaba visiting Tala Bay, the center, the Kempinski and Intercontinental Hotels, Saraya and Ayla.
3. Undertook a study visit to Petra hosted by the Park Commissioner.
4. Distributed information on a fake security device sometimes utilized by hotels to tourism stakeholders in Aqaba
5. Provide input for the USAID/ACED Program Quarterly Report.
6. Attended the following events
 - The Inauguration of the Aqaba Hotels Association
 - A military concert in the main square
 - A USAID E-Marketing Conference in Tala Bay
 - A Tourism Awareness prize-giving
 - A presentation to stakeholders by the ATMC Founding Committee