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AQABA – THE 2011 CAPITAL OF ARAB TOURISM: A PROMOTIONAL PLAN

AQABA COMMUNITY and ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (ACED) PROGRAM

31st August 2010

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

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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.

ACED Program Frequently-Used Acronyms and abbreviations

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

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
AIIE	Aqaba International Industrial Estate
AMTD	ASEZA's Marketing and Tourism Directorate
ANREPCO	National Real Estate Projects Company
APC	Aqaba Ports Corporation
ASEZ	Aqaba Special Economic Zone
ASEZA	Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority
ASRI	Aqaba Skills Readiness Index
ASYCUDA	Automated System for Customs Data
ATASP	Aqaba Technical Assistance Support Program (USAID)
ATM	Arabian Travel Market
AUC	Aqaba University College
AZEM	Aqaba Zone Economic Mobilization Project (USAID)
AGDTF	Aqaba Garment Development Task Force
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
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
EG	Economic Growth
EGRA	Early Grade Reading Assessment
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
JUSBP	Jordan-United States Business Partnership
JUSFTA	Jordan-United States Free Trade Agreement
KOJ	Kingdom of Jordan (the country within its physical boundaries)
KSA	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
LCDD	Local Community Development Directorate (ASEZA)
LCL	Less than Container Load
LECP	Local Employee Compensation Plan
LOE	Level of Effort
LTTA	Long-Term Technical Assistance
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
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
RJ	Royal Jordanian Airlines
SABEQ	Sustainable Achievement of Business Expansion and Quality (USAID)
SEO	Search Engine Optimization
SIYAHA	The Tourism Project (USAID)
SFU	Satellite Factory Unit
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
TO	Task Order
TOT	Training of Trainers
TP	Technical Proposal
TRIDE	Trilateral Industrial Development
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
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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1. BACKGROUND

The Arab Ministerial Council for Tourism has chosen Aqaba to be the Arab Tourism Capital of 2011.

Aqaba 2011 will provide a platform for a programme of diverse events spread throughout the year to celebrate this important opportunity and to maximize it in terms of publicity and positioning for Aqaba as a tourism destination.

The high level objective is to leverage the topicality of Aqaba as Arab Tourism Capital 2011 in order to present Aqaba to the world and raise awareness of the great experiences that it can and will offer as a destination. Developing awareness of the destination of Aqaba through 2011 should be considered as an opportunity to promote Aqaba long into the future.

Stakeholders agree 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. But 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.

And the nomination as Arab City of Tourism does offer a clear opportunity to improve Aqaba's visibility in Regional markets. This is where the suggested marketing plan outlined below will focus. Coverage in other markets will be an integral part of overall promotional activities there; these activities are specified in the Marketing Action Plan for 2011 recently produced by the same authors.

2. INTRODUCTION

Aqaba is the new emerging destination on the Red Sea. Huge investments there are promising a state-of-the-art product that will bring much added value to the overall Jordanian tourism offer. So far, an impressive list of 5 star hotels is already functioning. Also an array of 4 star and other facilities adds diversity and variety.

However the city is still eagerly waiting for four mega projects to come on-stream. So far, only Tala Bay is functioning with hotels, residential apartments, shops and restaurants. Saraya which was supposed to be launched in 2011 is now delayed to 2012 and maybe later, while Ayla and Marsa Zayed are still in the pre construction phases.

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 Arab 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.

Whichever is the case; this paper will adopt a positive attitude and will present an aggressive marketing plan to raise awareness in Regional markets about Aqaba as a destination, along with the added value that can be offered by including Wadi Rum and Petra within the Aqaba trip. Thus as well as beach and sun on the Red Sea, Arab tourists are able to enjoy day trips and overnights in Petra and Wadi Rum. The Dead Sea can also be included as an option.

In the period 2011-2105 Aqaba will aim to increase Arab visitors by 8% and their length of stay by 0.3 nights per annum.

However there will be no specific objectives for additional business to be generated by the Events Program in 2011. Rather, as stressed above, this proposed plan should be considered as public relations (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.

Tourism from the Arab World to Aqaba has not been impressive, and as table 1 shows below, the total number of arrivals in 2009 was 26,299 visitors with an average length of stay of 1.7 nights. However, this is misleading as there are a number of nationalities that are predominantly transit passengers rather than tourists. In order to achieve a more accurate picture an exercise of identifying 5, 4 and 3 star bed nights was undertaken: the results of this are shown in table 2.

However, if we take the Lebanese figures as the most reliable and compare them with total Lebanese arrivals to Jordan in 2009 which were 45,422, then only 6.6 % visited Aqaba and spent an average of 1.7 nights there.

Table 1: (Arab arrivals and bed nights in hotels in Aqaba (2007 – 2009)

Years/ Markets	Beds / Arrivals	2007	2008	2009
Algeria	Beds	589	88	143
	Arrivals	321	70	99
Bahrain	Beds	744	355	417
	Arrivals	385	251	214
Egypt	Beds	8250	5306	3541
	Arrivals	3412	2381	1709
Iraq	Beds	1865	6227	5896
	Arrivals	1235	3801	2809
Kuwait	Beds	599	1264	1214
	Arrivals	362	809	689
Lebanon	Beds	2961	4291	4805
	Arrivals	2113	2784	3002
Libya	Beds	451	187	376
	Arrivals	231	154	263
Morocco	Beds	532	234	161
	Arrivals	205	119	87
Oman	Beds	324	2024	311
	Arrivals	176	277	167
Other Arab	Beds	2142	2084	3015
	Arrivals	1253	701	1002

Palestine	Beds	10321	7311	6810
	Arrivals	5966	4328	2936
Qatar	Beds	523	401	291
	Arrivals	277	309	227
Saudi Arabia	Beds	12411	10827	12733
	Arrivals	6952	8204	9858
Sudan	Beds	311	339	551
	Arrivals	165	117	192
Syria	Beds	2314	2284	2911
	Arrivals	1299	1212	1907
Tunisia	Beds	187	511	418
	Arrivals	121	264	261
UAE	Beds	532	1389	936
	Arrivals	265	461	612
Yemen	Beds	509	341	389
	Arrivals	189	239	265
Total Arab	Beds	45465	45463	44918
	Arrivals	24936	26481	26299

Source: ASEZA

Table 2: Arrivals and Bed nights from selected Arab Countries in 5, 4 and 3 star hotels (2009)

Years / Markets	Beds / Arrivals	Numbers
Egypt	Beds	1452
	Arrivals	668
Iraq	Beds	3914
	Arrivals	1842
Lebanon	Beds	4217
	Arrivals	2497
Arab 48	Beds	1871
	Arrivals	973
Saudi Arabia	Beds	5929
	Arrivals	4027
Syria	Beds	1885
	Arrivals	1113

Source: ASEZA

It is actually those figures in Table 2 that are of most interest to ASEZA for marketing and planning purposes. These are the people that stayed in relatively large numbers in 5, 4 and 3 star hotels and are thus our target audience. The average length of stay, however, was low and as follows:

Egypt:	2.17 nights
Iraq:	2.12
Lebanon:	1.7
Arab 48:	1.9
Saudi Arabia:	1.5
Syria:	1.7

3. THE PLAN

a. *The Trade Fair*

The first thing to accomplish instantly is to start procedures to reserve a location and prepare presence at the Arabian Travel Market (ATM) in Dubai (2 – 5 May, 2011). This could prove a huge opportunity to use the biggest and most important Arabic trade fair to promote the Arabian Tourism Capital of the year. The steps that should be pursued are as follows:

1. To begin with, ASEZA should contact the private sector and find out who will participate in such a fare. Participation fees will be determined in due course.
2. Contract a reputable photographer to start the stock library and to use images creatively in the Dubai stands and to hand out to journalists.
3. Work towards finalizing a brochure or a visitors' guide about Aqaba, past, present and future that will be addressing the Arab target audience.
4. Contact the ATM to reserve a place for the Aqaba stand (this could be a little late as most participants have already taken the best places); however, the story of the Arab Capital could be of help. The price for renting grounds only, is \$ 544 per square meter, and if 100 meters is needed (Mega projects + hotels + others + ASEZA), then \$54,400 is needed for renting only. The contact details as follows:

Ms. Nadege Noblet
Regional Account Manager, Middle East and North Africa
Tel: +971 4 364 2814
Fax: +971 4 369 7560

5. Get in touch with stand designers to present their vision of how the Aqaba stand should look like together with the price. Here is a list of Dubai based designers:
 - I. Elevations Exhibition & Design Ltd
Tel: +44 20 8487 1127
Email: info@elevations.co.uk
 - II. Beauty Sky
Dubai Investment Park, Emirates Road
Email: info@beautisky.com
 - III. Online Exhibition Stand Fixing, LLC
P.O. Box 294342, Ras Al Khore, Al Aweer Industrial Area, Dubai,
E-mail: info@onlinestand.ae
Email: ali@onlinestand.ae
 - IV. PICO INTERNATIONAL (BAHRAIN) WLL
Po Box 13990, Manama, Bahrain
Email: picobah@batelco.com.bh
 - V. CITYNEON (MIDDLE EAST) W.L.L.
No. 3/124 Road 503
Muqabah 505 (Budaiya)
P.O. Box 2490 Manama, Bahrain
Mr. Daniel Lee
Email: info@cityneon.com.sg

Contact two or three Marketing and PR firms that are based in Dubai and choose one that is capable to assist as follows:

1. Prepare for Aqaba's presence in Dubai by issuing several press releases and by sending journalists to prepare articles that would be published during ATM in May 2011.
2. Arrange for the media and the trade (from all the Middle East) to visit the stand at all time during the fare to meet with ASEZA representatives and the participating private sector.
3. Follow up with the media to ensure proper coverage of Aqaba during ATM.
4. Arrange for a large press conference with the Chief Commissioner.
5. Arrange a small, but well prepared, reception at the stand, or, if resources are available, arrange a large reception at one of the 5-star hotels in Dubai.
6. Provide ASEZA with a list of names, addresses and contact persons of all those invited.
7. Provide ASEZA with a final report including list of attendees and clips of media about Aqaba and their ad – equivalent ratio.
8. Suggest and Recommend further activities during and after the trade fare.

b. The Advertisement Campaign

Contact three PR and advertising firms that are familiar with the tourism industry and choose one that is capable of producing the following:

1. Establish a "Destination Image" that can lead to "Branding" at a suitable stage during strategic implementation.
2. Recommend an appropriate logo and a theme line that can be universally used.
3. Produce a thirty - second and a ten - second commercials that can be used for the Aqaba 2011 event and beyond.
4. Produce focused and targeted advertisements about Aqaba's diversity and attractiveness using high definition images.
5. Use the website to initiate e marketing campaigns.
6. Arrange for the private sector in Aqaba to sponsor such campaigns and really enter into a partnership with the public sector.
7. Recommend a television and media placement campaign during 2011, and once approved effect such a placement across the Arab World.
8. Suggest other marketing activities, that are cost effective and that are able to extend the reach of the Aqaba message.

c. The Media Campaign

Either the PR/Advertising firm or the Marketing/PR firm in Dubai, if any, can do the job of creating an earned media campaign all around the Arab World during 2011. The chosen company can achieve the following:

1. Invite suitable journalists from the following regions to visit Aqaba and publish appropriate stories in their newspapers/journals:
 - I. Lebanon, Syria, 48 Arabs in Israel, and Iraq
 - II. The Arabian Gulf
 - III. North Africa and Egypt

2. The above activity could prove to be a difficult option as Aqaba does not have direct accessibility from the air. So instead of leaving those journalists' endless hours at the airport waiting for the RJ flight to Aqaba, a land program should be arranged for them to travel comfortably to Aqaba. They can start by an overnight at the Dead Sea and then proceed to Aqaba.
3. Arrange for press conferences inside and outside Jordan/Aqaba in order for the public and private sectors to meet with the press.
4. Arrange for continuous press releases about developments and activities in Aqaba.

d. The Events

It should be noted that Aqaba 2011 should not be about events only as presented earlier. Rather, events should constitute a part of other activities that are much needed to position Aqaba in the regional markets. What is really needed is one big flag ship event that will leave an impact, and a few other events that can slowly develop in the future into international occasions. So, it is recommended to seek out the assistance of Jordanian event organizers and/or contact Jordan Festival and find out if they are interested in organizing a big event in Aqaba during 2011.

Another event that can leave an impact in the professional world is for the World Tourism Organization to hold one of its regional meetings in 2011 in Aqaba. Dr. Taleb Rifai, the Secretary General, should be contacted in order to seek his advice and assistance.

The other events should be local in nature, however, should possess the features of becoming international in the years to come. As an example:

1. Sand Sculpturing and sand bottling could be the right event if properly organized. Research should be carried out to find an NGO or other local organizations that have the ability and willingness to initiate such an event.
2. A flea market, similar to Jarra in Amman, can be organized once a week in Aqaba. Local talents from Aqaba and the region can rent tables and display their work or even exhibit old artifacts from previous times.
3. A desert concert in Aqaba or in Wadi Rum can attract the right audience if properly organized. The private sector should take the lead here, while the public sector will assist in providing the premises, in logistics and in sponsorship.
4. An annual camel racing event in Wadi Rum has a huge potential, and can become a first class regional event if properly organized. This annual event can also include an exhibition about the origin and characteristics of the camel.
5. An international water skiing event. This can start locally and then gradually grow to become a major event in the Middle East. The Federation of Water Sports can be contacted to pursue this idea further.

e. Next Steps

There is an urgent need for the proper expertise to execute the above plan. As such, it is still recommended to establish a public private sector partnership to undertake such an effort.

In the meantime, ASEZA will start executing the above and allocate the right budget for this 2011 event and other international marketing activities.