

Introduction

Qatar, a tiny nation in the Middle East, will soon be on the global stage of tourism as it prepares for the 2022 FIFA World Cup. As the wealthiest country in the world with a gross domestic product (GDP) of \$124,930 per person,ⁱ and the lowest unemployment rate of any country at .1%,ⁱⁱ one may question their need of focusing on tourism, however their economic reliance on oil warrants such diversity. While the Qatar National Bank has stated that Qatar's gas reserves will last at least 150 years,ⁱⁱⁱ a shift toward sustainable tourism has been placed on the forefront of the country's future and outlined in their National Tourism Sector Strategy 2030, which states "Tourism is a major catalyst for socio-economic growth, whereby not only does it contribute to expanding the economy, attracting investments and creating jobs, but also can help enhance the nation's brand on the international stage, encourage intercultural dialogue and gradually shatter barriers between people around the world."^{iv}

Limits of Acceptable Change

With a population of only two and a half million people and a land area roughly the same size of Los Angeles County, of which has more than 10 million people, Qatar theoretically has opportunity for growth. However, as McCool and Lime (2001) state, "an area may have multiple capacities, depending upon what objective is articulated for the area."^v With Qatar only having 1.2 percent of arable land,^{vi} primarily due to its annual rainfall of just three inches,^{vii} limitations reside in growth, both in development and tourism options. Because of this, Al-Thani et. al. (2019) explain that "For city-states and small-sized countries such as Qatar, where there is a single major metropolis, sustainability and sustainable development are not much of a choice,"^{viii} rather a necessity for survival. Additionally, as Martin and Uysal (1990) theorize, a destination's carry

capacity can vary by lifecycle stage,^{ix} which in Qatar’s case would be the involvement stage of Butler’s (1980) tourism area cycle of evolution.^x

Country Sustainability

Sustainability within tourism development focuses on three pillars: Environment, Society and Economy. While economic retention may not currently be a need due to such a high GDP and low unemployment rate as previously stated, the social impact of tourism may be the greatest challenge with continued development, specifically with traditional cultural structures and behavioral patterns.^{xi} As a predominantly Muslim country,^{xii} Qatar currently retains its cultural heritage, but as tourism develops, the impact of such change will increase. For instance, “women should cover their shoulders and not wear anything too revealing,” explained [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Qatar Tourism Authority [REDACTED]^{xiii} However, with an average daily temperature ranging from 65 degrees to 99 degrees Fahrenheit, unknowingly tourists will inevitably push acceptable limits for personal comfort. Additionally, the importation of alcohol is illegal in Qatar, with only a few establishments serving alcohol, a common desire for leisure travelers, supplemented with a recent additional challenge of a 100 percent “sin tax” on alcohol effective January 1, 2019.^{xiv} Unfortunately, while the destination is maintaining its cultural integrity, this will also limit tourism growth. Specifically, with its upcoming largest tourism event ever, the 2022 World Cup, it’s been publicly shared that there will not be any alcohol served at the venues, with a plea from organizers to make an exception, but the country standing its ground on governmental policies.^{xv}

Environmental sustainability remains on the forefront of Qatar’s tourism development, especially with its investment in preparation for the 2022 World Cup. As Kim, K., Uysal, M. & Sirgy, M. (2013) share, “tourism helps create a greater awareness of the need to preserve the

environment by capturing its natural beauty for tourist purposes and increasing investments in the environmental infrastructure.”^{xvi} Qatar is focused on environmentally-friendly tourism outlined in their National Tourism Sector Strategy 2030 plan, which aligns with an eco-tourism model, defined by Ceballos-Lascurain (1996) as “environmentally responsible, enlightening travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas in order to enjoy and appreciate nature conservation, has low visitor impact, and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local population.”^{xvii} Specifically, Qatar Rail, has begun developing 88 miles of tracks with 37 stations linking the suburbs of Doha to the city central with future development planned to connect the entire country, possibly even neighboring countries^{xviii} in an effort to reduce traffic congestion. For the country’s upcoming showcase, the soccer stadiums will be built into ‘block-like’ materials and dismantled after the tournament, then reassembled to form smaller stadiums elsewhere, while also using 90 percent of the old stadiums recycled into the newly-built ones, all sites are on track to achieve 4-star Global Sustainability Assessment System (GSAS) certification.^{xix} Additional efforts shared by ██████ include cleaning up the desert and working with scientists on developing sustainable cooling techniques. As a sustainable mandate and outlined in the National Strategy, the goal is to have “greater ability to protect the country’s national resources” and “improved capacity to preserve fragile habitats and ecosystems,” with various programs intended to reduce the environmental impact.

Evaluation of Sustainable Tourism Initiatives

Tourism development in the Middle East is relatively new when compared to other destinations such as Europe or Asia, thereby allowing for a better understanding of the impact tourism can have in a destination. However, the growth strategy for different destinations varies depending on their ultimate goals. While Qatar has established a precedent on little environmental

impact, the resulting impact on the community remains in question due to the strict Islamic culture within its borders. Other countries within the region place little focus on economic retention of tourism investment, due to their supporting revenue from oil production including Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Oman. However, their resulting impact on environmental and community impact have varied. As outlined in Figure 1., the positioning map provides an overview into the impact tourism development can have on the environment and community as growth continues. Dr. Heba Abdel Aziz with the Ministry of Tourism in the Sultanate of Oman has stated, “development of the responsible tourism sector is one of the guaranteed ways of achieving sustainable development for the Sultanate of Oman.”^{xx} While much of Oman’s ability to retain its cultural integrity is a result of relatively low tourism arrivals with an expected three and a half million visitors in 2023,^{xxi} there appears to be a greater focus on retaining low negative impact.^{xxii} Abu Dhabi, a city in the United Arab Emirates received over 10 million tourists in 2018,^{xxiii} however the retention of its culture has been a priority and outlined in a research study by Saeid, A. G., Arifin, Z., & Hasim, M. S., (2012).^{xxiv} Also, located in the U.A.E., Dubai has been the leader in tourism development for the past 25 years, establishing itself as a tourism hub, welcoming nearly 16 million passengers in 2018.^{xxv} Unfortunately this growth has labeled the destination a “concrete jungle,” with much of its culture remaining void in the extravagance of luxury.^{xxvi} Environmental sustainability is only a recent focus with an announcement made by the Dubai Tourism Board on May 2, 2019 with 19 new rules hotels must adhere to by 2021,^{xxvii} however the damage from extremely quick development over the past 25 years with little oversight may be too late.

Marketing Sustainable Tourism

As Qatar continues to develop its tourism, a diverse marketing mix strategy will further aid growth. A sustainable tourism marketing mix (STMM)^{xxviii} defined by Pomeroy, A., Noble, G.

and Johnson, L. (2011) combines three previous element groupings including product, price, promotion and place^{xxxix} (McCarthy, 1960); participants, process and physical evidence^{xxx} (Booms & Bitner, 1981); and packaging and programming^{xxxi} (Morrison, 2009). DeMirici has shared there is a need for diversification of *product* with little tourism products available outside of the newer Islamic Museum of Art, Katara Cultural Village, Souq Waqif and the Pearl shopping development. As a business-focused destination, Qatar is focusing on expanding its leisure options and reducing *price* of accommodations with much development in the three-star market, specifically outlined as a strategy in the Qatar National Tourism Strategy 2030.^{xxxii} Recently, Qatar Tourism Authority has hired MMGY, a global firm to handle the *promotion* of its brand,^{xxxiii} a necessary component in the marketing mix. Qatar continues to develop its marketing channels, known as *place*, with participation in organizations such as the United States Tour Operators Association and Virtuoso. The development of the National Tourism Strategy relied on input from various *participants* or stakeholders, allocating an entire section on the needs and suggestion from this sector, with *physical evidence* in the form of an extensive strategy outlined in the tourism plan with obtainable long-term goals. *Process* remains a focus and in being a new destination, Qatar is able to develop sustainable methods, such as the aforementioned public transit as well as moving toward a solar power grid.^{xxxiv} In conjunction with its national carrier, Qatar Airways, *packaging* is supported with such initiatives as a complimentary tour and visa-free entry while on a layover.^{xxxv} *Programming* aids in the expansion of tourism into the hotter summer months with the creation of festivals designed for the Indian market who is undeterred by the temperature, a strategy shared by ██████████ With global reach through Qatar Airways, Qatar Tourism Authority is working with other long-haul destinations such as South Africa as a *partnership* to educate the travel trade

collectively host travel professionals to experience and learn about the destination, a strategy shared by ██████████ for South African Tourism.^{xxxvi}

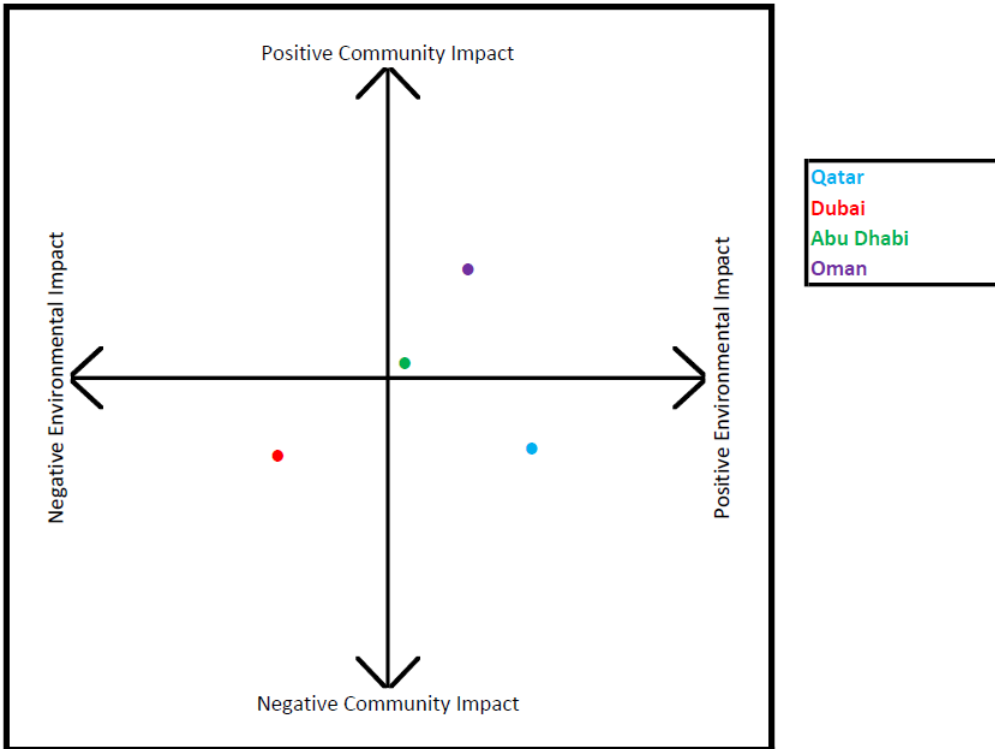
Indicators & Achievements

While tourism is still relatively new within Qatar, it is important to identify there is great opportunity for future research. Musinguzi specifically identifies this in his research noting, “Most research articles on tourism in Qatar have not been published in any of the top 30-40 tourism and hospitality journals” with only 28 academic articles including Qatar suggesting there is potential for future research moving to the “next level of methodological sophistication.”^{xxxvii} However, Al-Thani et. al, have examined the concept of sustainability and livability in Doha, where 80% of the population reside and the location of the country’s only airport and primary tourism hub suggesting the “ongoing practice of zoning in Qatar ignores designing to the human scale,” a result of exponential spread of neighborhoods. With regard to sustainable tourism, in September 2017, the Secretary-General of the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) Taleb Raifai congratulated Qatar on its recent measures to develop a sustainable tourism sector,^{xxxviii} an acknowledgement that validates the country’s efforts in its tourism planning.

Conclusion

With various issues impacting Qatar’s tourism growth, from accusations of supporting terrorist organizations, result in air space ban over neighboring countries^{xxxix} to bribery scandals of winning the 2022 World Cup bid,^{xl} hopefully Qatar recognizes that “continuous tourism planning must be integrated with all other planning for social and economic development” as described by Gunn (1988).^{xli} There is great hope for this country with regard to its tourism, especially with the Qatar Tourism Authority’s Vision Statement, “To lead the sustainable development of Qatar into a world class hub with deep cultural roots.”

Figure 1.



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