



# **The Significance of Camping in Promoting Nature Tourism**

**A field study on Riyadh tourists in line with Saudi Arabia's vision 2030**

أهمية التخييم في تعزيز السياحة الطبيعية - دراسة ميدانية على عينة من سياح مدينة الرياض  
وفق رؤية المملكة العربية السعودية ٢٠٣٠

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## **The Significance of Camping in Promoting Nature Tourism - A field study on Riyadh tourists in line with Saudi Arabia's vision 2030**

### **Abstract**

Saudi Arabia (SA) has been working on diversifying its economy, and banking on nature tourism is a practical approach deployed in this direction. Hence, the past few decades have seen exponential growth in international tourism. The government has identified tourism as a priority investment niche that can potentially replace oil dependence and dominance. This has, in turn, led to making the tourism field a multi-billion-dollar industry that SA would like to invest in and reap the rewards from. Currently, SA tourists enjoy various activities, but camping seems unexplored. This paper investigates the effect of camping in promoting nature tourism in Riyadh, the capital city, to increase the influx of tourists. Electronic data collection of 325 responses from Riyadh tourists was conducted through Formplus. The findings indicate that camping is becoming popular, and there is an upward trend in its market in Riyadh. Both the public and private sectors in the country have to invest a considerable amount in starting this type of tourism.

**Keywords:** Nature tourism, camping, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

### **مستخلص:**

تعمل المملكة العربية السعودية على تنويع اقتصادها عبر عدة طرق، منها تشجيع ودعم مشاريع السياحة الطبيعية. حالياً يستمتع سائحو المملكة بأنشطة مختلفة منها التخييم. إلا أن هذا المجال لم يتم التطرق له في الدراسات العلمية. لهذا، تبحث هذه الورقة عن قياس أثر التخييم في الترويج للسياحة الطبيعية وتدفق السياح في مدينة الرياض (عاصمة المملكة). قام الباحثين بجمع بيانات إلكترونية من ٣٢٥ مشارح من سائحي مدينة الرياض من خلال برنامج Formplus. وتشير النتائج إلى أن التخييم أصبح رائجاً وهناك اتجاه تصاعدي في سوقه في المدينة بشكل عام. لهذا، ينبغي على كل من القطاع العام والخاص في الدولة النظر في البدء في الاستثمار وتشجيع هذا النوع من السياحة

## Introduction

SA attributes 85% of its exports and 90% of fiscal revenue to oil, and it contributes 40% to the country's overall GDP (Al-Tamimi, 2017). Kabbani & Ben Mimoune (2021) stated that since the dependence on one economic activity is not advised, the government looked for alternatives to secure its future as a regional economic leader. The authors further pointed out that the hydrocarbons that SA and other Gulf countries rely on will soon be depleted; thus, the need to implement measures to diversify the economy and seek other options that can contribute significantly to their GDP. However, it is imperative to point out that the transition has been slow because most investors are adamant about continuing to invest in the oil industry. Nevertheless, the oil will keep the new industries running; thus, the investors are still convinced that the oil industry could be sustainable. Unfortunately, in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, the oil industry has been adversely affected, with crude oil prices reducing significantly, affecting the revenues generated. This presents a perfect ground where the government and relevant stakeholders can determine the new industries to venture into. One of the strategies used is encouraging investment, on an individual basis, to maintain the wealth status in SA, at a time when oil prices are dwindling.

Banking on nature tourism is a practical approach deployed in this direction. The past few decades have seen exponential growth in international tourism. This has, in turn, led to making the tourism field a multi-billion-dollar industry that SA would like to invest in and reap the rewards from (Sherbini et al., 2016).

The SA government has identified tourism as a priority investment niche that can potentially replace oil dependence and dominance. There is an increasing focus on attracting local and foreign tourists to visit the numerous tourism sites in the country. Based on the reports provided by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), the numbers of international tourists are on an upward trajectory, and Sherbini et al. (2016) affirm that nations and

individual investors have been keen to tap into this potential, and Saudi Arabia is not an exception. In the wake of hazardous climate change, tourists are keen and selective about the tourist destinations they visit.

Consequently, most of them emphasize visiting sites that have aspects of nature involved and are keen on keeping the toxic emissions at the minimum level. Therefore, banking on nature tourism will give SA an upper hand in its bargain to have tourists visit its tourist attractions. One area that SA should heavily invest in is camping tourism since it will allow tourists to have a one-on-one experience and interaction with nature, and are better placed in making their contributions towards the conservation of nature to mitigate the effects of climate change.

Therefore, this research aims to provide insights into how people camping can foster nature tourism. The sub-objectives that will be addressed in this research are:

- Examining the significance of the camping business in promoting tourism in Riyadh.
- Exploring how camping relates to nature tourism in Riyadh.
- Offering ideas on how camping activities can help local communities in Riyadh.

The main research question is: What is the impact of camping on promoting nature tourism? The question will guide the research trajectory to break down various aspects of camping that will interest different respondents who are potential tourists to Riyadh.

The following sub-questions will be in support to make a more comprehensive and informative approach:

1. Does the nature part of camping help promote tourism?
2. Does the social interaction element in camping promote nature tourism?
3. Can the convenience element in camping practices promote nature tourism?
4. How can camping be improved to boost the influx of tourists in

Riyadh?

### Previous Studies

Michael, Reisinger, and Hayes (2019) show that the diversification of the economy through deploying tourism potential was approached previously in the United Arab Emirates. The authors collected a sample of 218 visitors from different countries. The results highlighted the importance of prioritizing high-quality infrastructure and support services, environmental sustainability, and sufficient investment in destination resources to attract tourists. The authors obtained responses from various business tourists who visited the UAE. These factors, especially environmental sustainability, and sufficient investment in tourist destinations, resonate with the current research because they are central aspects necessary to steer camping tourism to new levels in SA. Having reliable infrastructure and support services is instrumental because it will make it seamless to access camping sites in remote areas. In contrast, support services will come in handy; primarily through guides who will make the tourism experience worth it. Since SA seeks to diversify its economy, its investment in tourism is supposed to be conducted comprehensively to help tap into the available market.

Another study by Silva et al. (2021) sought to identify the ideal factors that would make an area favorable for outdoor tourism activities. A systematic study focused on drawing the relationships between various attributes and how they worked to promote outdoor tourism. The first step involved deploying a matrix as a tool that would be used to audit the respondent's feedback concerning outdoor tourism. This phase also involved identifying and including in the inventory the list of independent or sets of attributes that could be cited when examining the ability to participate in outdoor tourism. The second phase is about reviewing past literature related to the factors in the above inventory. The next step consisted of analyzing international strategic documents broadly from sustainable tourism, then narrowing them down to aspects like recommending the ideal

context for every tourism activity. The subsequent step involved conducting 15 semi-structured interviews on the main stakeholders that worked in outdoor tourism to identify the conditions that would be excellent for this kind of tourism and the most viable areas to set them up. The last step involved examining geo-referencing tools for the identification of relevant attributes. Data from the above steps were compiled into nine matrices for easy identification of similarities to establish relationships. The results obtained compiled a list of favorable characteristics for each outdoor tourism activity.

Lee (2020) determined the key factors that make camping tourism attractive. The systematic study analyzed 33 main attributes that many tourists prefer when camping over other activities. The elements were classified into accessibility, attractions, supplementary services, and amenities. The classification helped group similar attributes together and drew relationships on how individual characteristics contribute to making camping a desirable choice. The results indicated a need to improve infrastructure, integrate natural elements in campsites, and invest in more features to boost social interaction. It is undeniable that some of the available camping sites are in areas with less or no natural elements; hence, the Saudi Arabia government and tourist investors must work together to ensure that such camping sites are furnished with natural attributes. Some of the efforts could include artificially growing vegetation that will make the sites more attractive to tourists. As noted earlier, most tourists are now obsessed with destinations that positively impact the environment and will not settle for less. Moreover, since outdoor tourism is booming, the camping sites should have facilities that allow tourist groups and families to have joint moments for social interaction. Therefore, the current and new camping sites should have such features because these new trends and features are slowly evolved in the industry. As technology keeps distracting people from real interactions, the tourists consider the visits as ideal getaways to have genuine interactions,

which calls for tourist destinations to be equipped to meet such requirements.

Eremic (2021) added a study about the new trends in camping with a particular emphasis on glamping, which refers to camping and nature tourism done in luxurious settings. The author examined past literature on camping and glamping to understand various challenges that investors had gone through. The study methodology is formed of analysis and synthesis methods, compilation approach, and statistical method. The results indicate that glamping and family campsites are the key observable trends that investors, in camping tourism, should capitalize on. It is vital to point out that succeeding in any industry requires a timely understanding of changes and trends to ensure that one aligns their products to match such changes. This is not an exception, especially in the tourism industry, where many clients are choosy and expect the tourist destinations to exceed their expectations. Therefore, SA investors should be ahead of their competitors in understanding tourists' new demands and ensuring that the necessary changes are made in the catalog of the services they will offer. For camping, mastering glamping will go a long way in ensuring that the SA tourism industry can keep its clients. Thus, the camping sites should also ensure they have a touch of luxury because some clients want to enjoy nature tourism while maintaining their luxurious lifestyles. Overall, the players in camping tourism should remain flexible and capable of customizing their services to ensure they meet their client demands.

The above previous research sheds important light on the various facets that the SA government and investors should heavily capitalize on as they venture into the camping industry. Although SA has been in the industry in the previous years, a lot is changing, and given that it intends to rely on it significantly. A lot of research work needs to be put in to understand the consumer preferences and combine it with previous research findings to develop a sustainable framework that will ensure that camping and nature tourism peaks

immediately and breaks even in a short timeline. Therefore, the current research will gather essential insights on how both local and international tourists find camping tourism in SA, and the feedback obtained can be compared against previous research to help make critical policy decisions regarding the future of tourism in SA. Tourism in Riyadh

Most of the activities that take place in Riyadh are of an economic and business nature (Jaffrey, 2019). Leisure was previously limited, but now clubs, cinemas, and shops are open. While locals are getting used to the new lifestyle, many foreigners are still not aware of the activities offered in the region.

There is a common misunderstanding that SA is dunes in a harsh desert with no vegetation. According to Amin and Seif (2019), such information may get to potential tourists from other nations and reduce their chances of visiting the country.

Investors in the tourism industry in SA must work with their marketing teams to ensure that as many tourist attraction sites as possible are visible to the rest of the world to open the nation to mass international tourism. Thus, those teams must rely on the new technological innovations that have connected the world and reduced it into a small global village.

For instance, marketing managers must identify the main social media platforms that are frequently used by the target customers to ensure that the adverts meet the right population. Additionally, they should deploy algorithms to understand the evolving needs of tourists. With such information, they will be better placed to customize the tourist destinations to match the needs.

With millions moving in and out of the city each year, a stay at one of the camps would offer relaxation and introduce foreigners to the Arabic culture. A weekend is enough to partake in leisure, especially for most business travelers who typically stay for a short period (Jaffrey, 2019).

The proximity to the city and social amenities will also be attractive to those apprehensive about going into the interior regions where a "mobile network is also a challenge and does not work in the desert" (Jaffrey, 2019). Thus, setting up camping sites close to Riyadh will present an excellent opportunity for tourists that prefer having tourism experiences while enjoying the proximity to urban areas. This is a crucial aspect that marketing teams must understand because each tourist has their preferences. It is irrefutable that granting visitors customized experiences is more satisfying and highly likely to guarantee return clients; hence, a booming tourism business.

Camping is expected to promote tourism in SA since the promotion of camps, and natural tourist sites will pique many travelers' curiosity. Lee (2020) stated that several factors determined the attractiveness of camping, including the capacity to accord campers comfort in outdoor spaces, guarantee safety, and allow campers to interact with nature. A matrix combination of such aspects is essential to have to every player intending to invest in camping tourism because their combination will determine the success or failure of such a venture.

SA camping industry players can borrow a leaf from the already established tourism destinations. This will help eliminate the possibility of committing the avoidable costly mistakes that make most tourism destinations susceptible to bad reviews and a general avoidance by the target population. Proper marketing in camps will grow the foreign interest. SA would see tourism numbers soar, especially if the services rendered are of high quality with affordable price points.

The industry players and their marketing teams should understand the latest trends in camping worldwide to ensure their implementation. This, according to Eremic (2021), is likely to have a significant impact in promoting the influx of tourists in camps.

Theoretical Framework

According to research, nations have previously taken a proactive approach to promoting camping tourism, such as the United Arab Emirates. UAE remains a highly ranked and famous business and tourist destination, and the country can pull in big numbers as desired (Michael, Reisinger & Hayes, 2019). The Country attributes its success to "different price points for different customers, large capacity rooms, and easy travel for both business and leisure, and has been ranked the seventh out of the ten most-visited world destinations for tourism" (Rizvi, 2019).

Therefore, the Saudi industry players need to analyze what they can do to make the country as appealing as possible for tourists. SA should include a study in this rollout plan regarding tourism and learn from Dubai how it can promote and maintain tourism in the market. Currently, due to extreme weather conditions, most people prefer indoor leisure activities in Riyadh. This has led to having a whole aspect of nature tourism that has not been explored yet (Saudi Gazette, 2021). Such a notion makes SA an ideal and distinguished destination for tourists to discover nature.

Camping is expected to improve the influx of tourists in Riyadh if the financial and marketing plans are correctly implemented. Marketing is a tool that should be used wisely to ensure that the financiers acquire a return on their capital. All the industry players, including investors, business owners, and the government, should play their part and ensure a smooth transitional and business process.

### **Research Methodology**

This study aimed to determine how tourists feel about SA and if they would be interested in visiting the kingdom, specifically the camps near the Riyadh region. They were also asked about any negative or positive connotations and any concerns about visiting the region.

The first section of the survey was structured to form personal questions, such as gender, age, income, education, and nationality. The following section looked to collect data on camping and tourism

promotion variables. The respondents were required to express their responses on a scale of 1 to 4.

The group selected showed interest in the subject at hand, had knowledge of different tourist destinations and the different forms of leisure they offered, and gave a brief description of the facilities provided in Saudi Arabian campsites.

The survey was conducted on the Formplus website and utilized a brief questionnaire targeted towards people interested in travel. The questions are short and open to acquiring as much information as can be from the volunteers. It targets people who have an active interest in foreign tourism and nature activities.

## Data Analysis

### a. Reliability Measurements

A reliability test for 17 items measuring climbing and nature tourism resulted in a Cronbach's Alpha of 78.9 %, which is significantly higher than the minimum threshold reliability score, 70.0% (Table1). This indicates the Likert scale for the Questions were suited and consistent in measuring climbing and nature tourism in SA.

**Table1:** Cronbach's Alpha to measure reliability

Item	Value
Cronbach's Alpha	0.789
No. of Items	17

### b. Pearson Correlations Matrix

There is a weak but significant correlation between attributes of nature, convenience, camping, social interaction, and tourism promotion elements (human elements, nature of services, and customer satisfaction). Notably, people's opinion that satisfied visitors would promote nature tourism is positively related to camping activities, social interaction, and convenience attributes, as shown in the Pearson correlation matrix in Table2 below. Further, people's opinion on incorporating nature tourism in the Saudi Tourism ministry weakly correlates with convenience, camping activities, social interaction, and nature activities.

**Table2: Pearson correlation matrix**

		Satisfied visitors would promote nature tourism in SA	Nature tourism should be part of the tourism ministry vision
Enjoy nature camping and tourism	Pearson Correlation	0.164**	0.200**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.003	0.000
Nature tourism is critical in Saudi tourism	Pearson Correlation	0.256**	0.293**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000
If I ever go camping, I intend to explore Saudi culture	Pearson Correlation	0.238**	0.250**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000
I can travel to Riyadh purposely for camping	Pearson Correlation	0.173**	0.193**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.001	0.000
If there is a good value program, a good number will go to Riyadh	Pearson Correlation	0.409**	0.335**
camping	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000
No plans to tour Riyadh, but If there is a good camping package, I will go	Pearson Correlation	0.268**	0.366**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000
Satisfied visitors would promote nature tourism in SA	Pearson Correlation	1	0.434**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000

Nature tourism should be part of the tourism ministry vision Pearson Correlation 0.434

\*\* 1Sig. (2-tailed) 0.000

N 338 338

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

### c. Multiple Linear Regression

Regression analysis indicates that around 14.9% of variations in the tourism promotion on human resources are explained by people's satisfaction by nature, whether an individual is an expert in camping or not, and the feeling nature tourism is critical to tourism in Saudi Arabia. Marginal effects passed the significance test, and that all model predictors were considered critical towards influencing tourism promotion levels ( $F(3,334) = 19.427, p < .001$ ) (Table3).

**Table3: Regression analysis**

Parameter	Unstandardized Beta	SE	Standardized Beta	t-test	p-value
Constant	2.137	0.338		6.313	<0.001
Camping expert?	-0.325	0.123	-.151	-2.38	0.009
Nature is critical to Saudi tourism	0.433	0.063	.356	6.907	<0.001
Enjoy nature camping and tourism	0.093	0.066	.082	1.410	0.160

### Findings & Implications

All the 325 respondents were from Saudi Arabia. Only 149 of them were from non-Riyadh provinces as opposed to 176 from Riyadh province. Having such a sample ensured that the responses were accurate and relevant to the current study.

When asked if the respondents enjoyed nature and camping, 142 strongly agreed, 146 agreed, 25 disagreed, and 12 were undefined. This is a positive sign for the camping and nature tourism sector since

many of the respondents positively mean that they could be potential clients for these camps. Only 7.69% of the respondents in total disagreed.

The next question asked if the respondents were unaware of how to go about camping, to which 58 of the respondents strongly agreed. Two hundred sixty-three of the respondents agreed, and four disagreed. Many tourists do not know how to set up tents, camp etiquette, and survival tips. This means that there is a need for camping grounds to provide more services in terms of amenities such as food and tents instead of letting the campers set up their areas. Moreover, the camping site administrators will be in a good position to hire more employees who can help various campers who may be new to camping or not so conversant with multiple aspects of camping. With these measures in place, it is possible to have the camping operations flowing seamlessly so that they do not put the industry into a state of jeopardy. In terms of percentiles, those who agreed account for 80.92% of the total responses.

The follow-up question asked respondents if tourism is viewed as a distinct part of SA. Many of the respondents were hopeful about tourism development in SA, accounting for 149 of the 420 respondents. Nineteen of them strongly disagreed, while 32 disagreed. 135 of them strongly agreed. Many of the respondents also answered positively to general questions about their preference of clean campsites, cultural exploration, business, interpersonal networking, and their appreciation of nature. This can help campsites target the best and most preferred entertainment activities and promotional angles. Campsites could be marketed as fun activities for friend groups within nature or a serene environment and retreat for businesspeople and those looking to network. A camp needs to assess its target audience using the most appropriate activities and advertising to appeal to them.

However, there is a need to address specific challenges faced to ensure that camping tourism is successful. There are many challenges

in the wilderness, such as dangerous animals, inhospitable weather, and lack of facilities. There is also danger in the wild since there is a lack of communication with others. Elsewhere, there is a need to ensure that the tourists are aware of nature camping. Despite visiting the campsites for leisure, it is crucial to ensure that they undertake friendly activities and promote the preservation of the camp and the surrounding communities. As the entire world goes towards sustainability in each of its endeavors, Saudi Arabia should not be an exception; thus, it is vital to inculcate an aspect of sustainability in every significant economic activity. In this case, sustainable tourism should be a priority as the kingdom seeks to invest in industry as part of its vision 2030 goals.

SA still has a long way to develop its tourism industry as per the standards for its camps and expansion into other areas. Several noticeable challenges are plaguing the industry that requires amendment before these projects on a larger scale. Other Arab nations such as UAE have successfully invested in tourism, which can be done in SA. More advertising, tourism industry standards, and marketing need to be applied. The country also needs to consider issues such as the safety of its guests to avoid security alerts that have an adverse effect on tourism activities.

### **Conclusion**

SA must invest quite a considerable amount in initiating camping tourism. Once quality standards are set, marketing avenues should then be set up where the target clientele receives information about available camping facilities. These should be widely distributed through different media channels. Influencers should also be on board to popularize camping destinations.

Overall, SA has a bright future in the tourism industry if the industry players implement the suggestions proposed in this report. The kingdom is strong economically and has a vibrant youth, a combination that would make tourism boom quickly. This is because the financial muscle will be deployed to market the kingdom's tourism

industry everywhere. The youthful and willing population will form the first batches that will kick start the tourism industry in Saudi Arabia.

Finally, it is encouraging to know that based on the survey findings in this report, there is every positive sign that tourism will be the next thing in line with Saudi Arabia's vision 2030. The nation is also lucky to learn from other Emirates that have already invested in the industry; thus, it will be possible to have less room for error when implementing their ideas. Therefore, camping as a form of tourism, particularly nature tourism, is a viable idea that SA should invest in to achieve the kingdom's economic goals.

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