



THE BUSINESS SCHOOL

**An Investigation into the Current State of International
Conference Tourism in Saudi Arabia and an Assessment of its
Future Development Possibilities**

Submitted by
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ABSTRACT

This research study aims to assess the potential for Saudi Arabia to become an international conference destination. Faced with problems created by rising unemployment, a rapidly growing population, and fears over dependence on petroleum output and price, the kingdom is currently looking to develop new sources of employment and national revenue. Having joined the World Trade Organization in 2005, Saudi Arabia is committed to liberalizing its markets and opening to foreign participation by creating investment and business opportunities. Developing an international conference sector is considered a potentially suitable way to meet the current domestic and international imperatives to change and the challenges these present.

The growth of new markets and international conference destinations in a globalizing economy is leading to increased research. However, the field is still young: there has been limited attention paid to the perspective of delegates and much of the research has been concerned with western destinations. As no other study has been carried out into the potential of this sector in Saudi Arabia, or the Gulf region, this research makes an original contribution to knowledge.

A mixed methods approach was adopted to explore and assess both the practical capacity of the country to host international conferences and the socio-political context that might impact on this development. The primary sources of data were officials in the field and visiting delegates, whose views and knowledge were obtained through the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods (through a questionnaire and interviews respectively). The results are integrated in the final discussion.

The findings indicate that, although Saudi Arabia has the practical capacity to host international conferences, the effects of an ambivalent attitude towards opening up to the outside world – expressed through a number of factors embedded in the socio-political situation in the kingdom – has led to an impasse which is blocking development.

DEDICATION

This document is dedicated to my husband - for his support and for the willpower to succeed that he instilled in me - and to my children who have supported me unconditionally.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ADNEC	Abu Dhabi National Exhibition Centre
ADTA	Abu Dhabi Tourism Authority
BECA	Business Events Council of Australia
CHRIE	Council on Hotel, Restaurant and Institutional Education
CIC	Convention Industry Council
DICEC	Dubai International Convention and Exhibition Centre
GIBTM	Gulf Incentive, Business Travel and Meetings Exhibition
GITOF	Gulf Investment and Tourism Forum
GCC	Gulf Corporation Council
GMEC	Gulf Meetings and Events Conference
HSCT	High Supreme Commission for Tourism
IACVB	International Association of Convention and Visitor Bureau
IAEE	International Association of Exhibitions and Events
ICCA	International Congress and Convention Association
ICT	Information Communication Technology
JEF	Jeddah Economic Forum
JMIC	Joint Meetings Industry Council
KSA	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
MICE	Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions
MPI	Meetings Professional International
OBB	Organizational buyer behaviour
PCMA	Professional Convention Management Association
SAGIA	Saudi Arabia General Investment Authority
TSA	Tourism Satellite Account
UAE	United Arab of Emirates
UIA	Union of International Associations
UNWTO	United Nation World Tourism Organization
WTO	World Trade Organization
IAMM	International Associations Meetings Market

