

SAUDI ARABIA DEVELOPING LEISURE TOURISM AND MICE INDUSTRY



Leisure tourism and MICE industry are quickly developing in Saudi Arabia. Growing numbers of Saudi tourists attract international travel companies.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia attracts a growing number of tourists. Being the home of the two holiest places in Islam – the mosques in Mecca and Medina – the country’s travel industry mainly focuses on religious pilgrimages. Mecca receives over nine million pilgrims a year coming from various parts of the world. **Besides faith-based travel Saudi Arabia with its Red Sea beaches also offers numerous activities for leisure tourists, divers, as well as nature lovers, who come to explore local deserts, valleys and mountains.**

More than a thousand tourism destinations and landmarks – of natural and cultural heritage – were identified by the Saudi Commission for Tourism & Antiquities, the kingdom’s tourist board. Most of the sites have significant potential for tourism, yet further development of infrastructure is necessary.

Saudi Arabia is also considerably popular among event organizers resulting in the growing importance of local MICE industry. Almost 92,000 sq meters of exhibition area is available in the country. The three major exhibition venues can be found in Riyadh, Jeddah and Abha hosting various trade and industry markets and fairs every year.

Among the leading tourism fairs is Riyadh Travel Fair attracting domestic and international hotels, airlines, travel agencies, as well as media. Last year 130 exhibitors from 28 countries attended the fair. More than 30,000 visitors are expected at this year’s edition taking place between 23rd and 26th May 2011.

The rising interest of international travel companies in the Saudi Arabian market has been bolstered by growing numbers of Saudi tourists. **In 2010 more than 4.5 million Saudis traveled abroad for their summer vacation where they spent \$ 33 billion.** According to a recent survey 74% of Saudis plan to travel for holiday every year which is the highest percentage among other Arabian states. The survey also showed what countries attracted the Saudi tourists the most - 45% of them traveled to Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon, and 30% to Western Europe such as Switzerland, Austria, and France. The United States of America, especially California and Florida, comes second in rank. Among other popular holiday destinations were Malaysia and Indonesia.

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