

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN EXTREME ENVIRONMENTS: LESSONS FROM DESERT REGIONS

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Abstract

This paper alerts the tourism industry and researchers to innovations in tourism development strategies in extreme environments in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the State of Qatar, the MENA region and other desert areas as a blueprint for cost-effective and culturally and economically sustainable tourism worldwide. This contribution analyzes the potential impact of green and ecotourism practices in some of the most extreme desert and marine ecosystems in the entire world: establishment of green building codes, incorporation of solar (photovoltaic) power into buildings, research into reverse osmosis desalination technology, scientific monitoring of coastal development, and initiatives to more efficiently manage scarce water resources. The State of Qatar contains two of the most extreme environments in the world – an arid desert with less than 80mm annual rain fall per year surrounded by a rapidly evaporating hypersaline sea (the Persian / Arabian Gulf), and with summer temperatures reaching to over 50°C. Thus naturally stressed biota and water scarcity means that creating natural heritage tourism will present many challenges. In addition, the conservative Muslim traditional communities who inhabit deserts often do not welcome mass tourism or non-Muslim tourists due to strong cultural differences, often related to behavior.

Keywords Sustainable tourism, desert tourism, tourism-Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Qatar

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