

Dubai: Excellence in Destination Branding

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Abstract: Dubai was a desert kingdom with no natural resources. To attract income, Dubai determined to evolve into a tourist destination which was unrivalled and drew from both the natural climate and terrain and from artificial climates and terrains. Its destination branding campaign was a tremendous success.

Keywords: Destination Branding, Tourism Menu, Dubai, Excellence Model, Terrain.

INTRODUCTION

Three decades ago few had heard of Dubai. One of the 7 principalities which form the United Arab Emirates, Dubai had, unlike most countries in the Gulf, neither oil nor gas. Seeking to place them on the global map and generate income close to that of the other principalities, Dubai began to evolve into a tourism destination and when it had turned its yellow sand into gold, it embarked upon a focused destination branding strategy [1].

The evolution

The terrain is sandy, the weather reaches above 55°C, the plans to recreate Dubai were ready but the climate was hostile [1]. Nevertheless, Dubai built the first and, only, underwater hotel, which then rose to high peaks above the water, it built the largest manmade structure in the world, Burj Khalifa, established what is now counted as the most coveted real estate in the world, in addition to shopping centres which literally equaled none.

It then created a manmade island in the form of a palm tree, and the world, scaled down to utmost

precision, then transformed both into high-class resorts and tourist attractions.



Fig-1: The universe island [7]

Exploiting the terrain

Dubai created two terrains and environments. The indoor terrain was cool and included features and entertainment zones which were unique to the region. Amongst these were artificial mountain slopes, featuring various degrees of difficulty, for skiers. At the same time, it created sand dunes and special skies for sand dune skiing [1]. Within its borders, Dubai

appeared to have captured most everything, including a world class aquarium wherein fortified glass tunnels were placed into the sea, allowing visitors to actually walk through the depths of the sea and view the sea creatures in their natural habitat [2]. Furthermore, whilst boasting ownership of some of the best thoroughbred Arabian, Dubai introduced the world to camel racing

[2]. Horse-racing could be watched anywhere but camel racing, only in Dubai.

Dubai, however, realised that it could not survive on tourism alone and thus maximized the services it could offer foreigners. It is now one of the most reputable financial centers in the world and boasts a media city which is actually rivalled by one a handful [3].

Generating interest

Dubai boasts the best airport in the entire world. The airport was created to admire and astonish layover and transit travelers and push them to think of the wonders which lay beyond the airport. Hence, the first impression of Dubai was an airport which was specifically constructed and branded to brand Dubai as a destination which had to be visited Norwich and Costa [2].

Branding

Dubai engaged in a destination branding strategy which is considered a Model of Excellence. With regards to its real estate properties, they gifted the world's top favourite celebrities with houses, amongst which we may mention David Beckham [4]. Fashion magazines displayed Beckham and all other celebrities in their houses in Dubai, in their new homes, taking care to mention the amenities. The trickle effect began, and more and more people began to purchase homes and apartments in Dubai, whether for investment or holiday purposes [4].

In line with its branding, Dubai held regular musical concerts and festivities, featuring the top selling artists in the world. Added to that, it constantly held competitions asking for the presentation of ideas for implementation in Dubai, specifically designed to attract tourists [3]. Hence, it offered the global community an opportunity to express their ideas and feel as if they were a part of something which was ever-evolving and recognized no limits. The winners, based

on their positioning, were awarded a house, a duplex, an apartment, a two week stay for two people at one of Dubai's most fashionable hotels, together with free passes to all that the principality had to offer and, finally, the last winner received the same price as the first, but the duration was one, not two weeks [3].

Branding Excellence

Dubai is a highly unique example of destination branding because, in the most literal sense of the word, it had nothing to offer tourists but sand. Without oil and gas, Dubai was simply a port city. Certainly, it was an important city, but was nothing more than that. The entire world was outpacing them by leaps and by bounds, be it their six other Emirati brother-principalities or any other Gulf or Middle Eastern country. Thus, it first set itself up as a financial centre, through a generous loan from Abu-Dhabi [5], the largest and the leader of the seven Emirati principalities [3]. It proceeded to brand itself as a financial centre and companies were offered very attractive benefits to open branches in Dubai [3].

Following its successful branding as a financial centre, Dubai realised that it needed other sources of income. Hence, it overhauled its infrastructure, again with a loan from Abu Dhabi [5], and began to build the new Dubai, a place which was once nothing but desert into a place that contained countless wonders.

Relying on the expression that impressions are made on first sight, Dubai built an airport that none could ever rival. People, who had never visited Dubai but had experienced layovers or transit flights in its airport, were struck by wonder and told any and all who were interested. This peaked enormous interest, but it was when Dubai began to brand itself as a destination for global celebrities and a principality which held one music festival after another, featuring the biggest names in the industry, did Dubai become one of the most coveted tourist destinations [2].

Global Top 20 Destination Cities Expenditure Breakdown

2016 rank	Destination City	Purpose of Visit		Expenditure Breakdown at Destination						Peak Months for Visiting
		Business	Leisure plus other purposes	Accommodation	F&B	Shopping	Local Transport	Local Services	Misc.	
1	Bangkok	14.4%	85.6%	26.0%	19.4%	21.7%	9.9%	20.8%	2.2%	April, January
2	London	20.9%	79.1%	30.1%	16.5%	46.7%	4.3%	1.9%	0.5%	July-August
3	Paris	29.7%	70.3%	44.8%	23.6%	16.7%	6.6%	8.3%	0.0%	December, March-May
4	Dubai	20.0%	80.0%	27.0%	15.0%	31.0%	9.0%	18.0%	0.0%	December, January
5	New York	13.6%	86.4%	29.1%	18.9%	24.7%	11.4%	13.1%	2.7%	July-August
6	Singapore	22.7%	77.3%	29.0%	12.3%	22.5%	4.5%	31.8%	0.0%	December, July-August
7	Kuala Lumpur	26.8%	73.2%	30.8%	16.0%	30.7%	12.8%	7.0%	2.7%	December-January, March, July
8	Istanbul	9.2%	90.8%	20.4%	30.8%	24.6%	11.0%	7.1%	6.1%	June-September
9	Tokyo	27.5%	72.5%	28.2%	20.3%	43.1%	6.9%	1.4%	0.3%	April, October, July
10	Seoul	16.3%	83.7%	24.1%	9.8%	58.7%	2.7%	2.8%	1.8%	December-January, October
11	Hong Kong	23.4%	76.6%	35.4%	19.5%	30.9%	4.5%	5.8%	4.0%	October-December
12	Barcelona	9.7%	90.3%	35.2%	29.0%	16.9%	6.8%	12.1%	0.0%	July-August
13	Amsterdam	27.0%	73.0%	44.0%	25.0%	11.9%	8.3%	4.8%	6.0%	July-August
14	Milan	27.2%	72.8%	40.4%	20.9%	20.1%	12.7%	5.8%	0.1%	July-August
15	Taipei	13.4%	86.6%	32.7%	15.0%	33.9%	13.6%	3.6%	1.2%	March, November-December
16	Rome	13.6%	86.4%	40.4%	20.9%	20.1%	12.7%	5.8%	0.1%	July-August
17	Osaka	12.0%	88.0%	23.5%	22.4%	43.4%	7.0%	1.9%	1.8%	April, July
18	Vienna	17.9%	82.1%	40.1%	18.7%	10.1%	12.5%	18.6%	0.0%	June-July
19	Shanghai	34.6%	45.4%	21.2%	9.9%	28.6%	4.8%	22.3%	13.3%	October, August, December
20	Prague	12.8%	87.2%	29.2%	27.4%	25.5%	4.8%	13.2%	0.0%	June-July

Historical data in each time series presented above has been updated with the latest figures or estimations and may not be comparable to the time series from previous editions of this report.

These details combine to form more granular profiles for each of these destination cities, and highlight their differences. For example, a vast majority of international visitors to Bangkok are there for leisure as opposed to business. Compare this to Shanghai where a slight majority are there for business purposes.

Fig-2: Dubai – 4th most visited place in the world and 4th place where tourists spend the most money [6]

CONCLUSION

Dubai has successfully transformed itself into one of the most coveted destination areas due to its use of a unique destination branding strategy which can only be described as an “Excellence Model.” While it hardly needs to continue its aggressive destination branding at this point, given its global status amongst the most visited places in the world, it is forever evolving, offering new attractions, building breathtaking structures, and updating the services included in the destination menu visitors receive on arrival for the purposes of checking the services they want, the places they need to see and hand over to the hotel concierge to make all the arrangements [4]. Accordingly, its aggressive and highly effective destination branding is ongoing.

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