Sustainable Tourism –
Dubai Roams with Responsibility

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Abstract: Sustainability is indispensible. Be it in relation to the environment, employees, customers, or quality. Tourism is an industry that is the backbone of several economies, some due to nature’s endowments and others due to man-made elegances. Ever since the oil and gas resources have depleted, Dubai is particularly focusing on tourism as its major forex earner. With innumerable attractions the place is blessed to be the number one choice of tourists, but the Government has taken an oath to tread a path of responsible tourism. The study uses primary data available in Dubai Tourism and Commercial Marketing website and several such authentic government websites. It also uses fairly large amounts of secondary data, from travel websites, news reports and press releases. The objective of the study is to understand the measures that Dubai adopts and to suggest measures to make tourism sustainable and more responsible. While the study is entirely on Dubai, the model can be easily replicated on countries focusing on tourism and are subject to similar natural environments. Keywords: eco-tourism, environment, green tourism, responsible tourism, sustainability

Glossary
DGTP – Dubai Green Tourism Programme
DSTI – Dubai Sustainable Tourism Initiative
DTCM – Department of Tourism and Commercial Marketing
EWS-WWF - Emirates Wildlife Society in association with WWF
T & T – Travel and Tourism
UAE – United Arab Emirates
WTTC – World Travel and Tourism Council

1.0 Introduction

Every country has its USPs. Each has its competitive advantage. Germany is the helm of technology; India has a strong agricultural base; Japanese have an adorable work culture. Dubai is no exception to the rule. Besides others, there is a strong advantage in tourism, which makes millions of people from various walks of life throng along to this part of the world, for tourism. The tourist favorite destinations are second to none in the world, and in some cases the only one in the world. One cannot but miss Dubai, for all that it builds and nurtures. Dubai is a chosen destination for tourists, thanks to natural landscapes and terrains as well as active Government initiatives in uplifting the attractiveness quotient of the country. Sustainable tourism is picking up and the thrust on this area is much in the recent past. While tourism is rising, but proving extremely volatile, it is in the destination’s interest to imbibe qualities of sustainability to it.

Dubai is the commercial capital of United Arab Emirates. Identified as one of the tourist hot spots, this city identifies itself as one of the few that maintains its position as a chosen holiday destination. There are different reasons why people tour Dubai and there are seasonal vagaries in the purpose too. The city itself is very inviting, endearing and affordable. This is the reason that people from scattered geographies throng along to Dubai for a vacation and as is the case with Asian neighbors, for a weekend getaway too!

1.1 What is sustainability?

The best-known definition of sustainability or sustainable development comes from the World Commission on Environment and Development which defines it as "forms of progress that meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs". It is significant to our understanding that sustainability is about more than just looking after our natural environment. It is also about considering the social and economic impact of what we do and how we do it.

Sustainability is a good business practice. While it results in lower costs, the resultant efficiency in resource management is appreciable. It attempts to increase the economic life of assets and ensures that the future generation will have sufficient resources to sustain healthy livelihoods.
1.2 The tripod of sustainability

Environment: Natural resources are extremely scarce and we ought to protect it from corporate exploitation and neglect. Dubai ensures that it supports initiatives such as renewable energy, reduction in the usage of fossil fuels, sustainable agriculture and fishing, tree plantations and afforestation, recycling, and improved management of waste.

Economy: Dubai is one of the few countries that has analysed the pressures on the resources due to population growth beyond proportion. People aim for a better lifestyle than before, and this causes them to consume more than their fair share. A sustainable economic model has been developed to ensure fairer distribution of resources. There is a genuine interest in enabling economic growth through healthy balance with ecosystems.

Social: Dubai teaches us that, as responsible global citizens, we must pay ever-increasing attention to social disruptions that threaten the well-being of people and the environment. We have an ethical responsibility to do something about human inequality, social injustice, and poverty. This aspect of sustainability seeks to support moves like peace, social justice, poverty alleviation, and such others that hold a promise of accelerating social equity.

2.0 Review of literature

Tourism is on the rise, and it is predicted that globally tourism will grow by around 4% in each of the next ten years (WTTC, 2016). Further they identify that the number of people directly employed by travel and tourism industry will be close to 300 million, or one in every eleven jobs will be in this sector. Close to 1/10th of the GDP will be contributed by T & T industry. (Refer fig. 1) Up to 14 million jobs can be risked from lack of training or skills in the tourism industry, especially where this sector employs approximately 7 times more than automotive industry. As a tourist destination, Dubai has been a chosen spot for several millions world-over. It is one of the most picturesque cities in the Middle East Asia. With skyscrapers on the one hand and floral elegance on the other, the experience is nothing short of genuine pleasure. Neat and safe roads, coupled with greenery and beauty along every inch, are not something every city can boast of.

A study of tourism in Dubai, in terms of its rating vis-à-vis other tourist destinations is quite encouraging though volatile. Traveller’s Choice Destinations 2016 list, published by Trip Advisor, identifies UAE’s commercial capital Dubai, to be the only UAE destination to make it into the top 25. Where it was identified as one of the top 10 destinations in 2011, the position slipped drastically to 25th in 2015 and seems to have fought its way through to reach the top 13 last year (Emirates 24/7 news, March 29th 2016).

Traveller’s Choice further interrogated into the traveller’s favourite places worldwide, which also placed Dubai at a pedestal. The commercial capital was an undisputed chosen spot for several due to the following reasons. It

- Is a cosmopolitan oasis overseeing the Arabian desert,
- Is a city of superlatives
- Is the proud owner of the world’s largest dancing fountain,
- Nests the world’s tallest building (Burj Khalifa),
- Has the only 7 star hotel (Burj Al-Arab),
- Houses the largest set of artificial islands (Palm Jumeirah), and
Boasts of the largest natural flower garden (the Miracle Garden)

Last 10 years statistics on the tourist numbers flocking Dubai is alarming. While the number of immigrants to Dubai in 2012 spelt a number of 10 million, the Dubai hotels welcomed approximately 11 million guests in the year 2013, which is an increase of almost 8.5%. The figures for 2014 gleamed with positive energy, recording a further rise to 13.2 million guests. The country is very positive on meeting its target of 20 million visitors by the year 2020. (Dubai Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing (DTCM)) (Refer Table 1 & Figure 2)

Table 1: Tourist trend

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Tourists (in millions)</th>
<th>% rise</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>7.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>4.93</td>
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</tbody>
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While the tourism numbers in absolute terms is on the rise, there is a steep decline in the percentage growth in tourists. This indicates that Dubai is facing an uphill as far as tourism attractiveness is concerned. The only year showing any promise is 2013, and the reasons for this is the additional infrastructural facilitation undertaken by the DTCM, as presented below.

Tourism is set to be on an all new high with the Dubai World Expo planned in 2020. The Emirates tourism is on a threshold of new opportunities and challenges, but the advantages seem to be outweighing the hurdles of hosting the expo. The Government is investing heavily into infrastructural projects, including in-city travel. The Lapita Hotel, a Polynesian Hotel, it is adorned with 501 rooms and 3 villas, and will ease the problem of housing tourists that will pour in for the World Expo.

3.0 Why is Dubai a chosen tourist destination?

Dubai is a chosen spot for many for its natural and man-made beauties, but its exciting to identify the various excuses people find to visit Dubai for a vacation.

Table 2: Reasons to visit Dubai (Source: http://www.best10travel.com)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Shopping</th>
<th>2. Safe city</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3. Warm Weather</td>
<td>4. Cheap eats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Modern Architecture</td>
<td>6. Hospitality</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Major golf tournaments</td>
<td>8. Man-made islands</td>
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3.1 Factors facilitating tourism – in the recent past

The number of visitors has grown, thanks to the city’s efforts in this direction. The DTCM is actively participating in making Dubai an attractive tourist destination. To list a few of these attempts,

- the expansion of Emirates airline’s and flydubai’s fleet and network;
- the opening up of the third cruise terminal, which enabled growth in Dubai’s cruise industry; and
- Better accessibility to Dubai, on account of adding 13 more European Union member states to the current 15, who can obtain their visa on arrival.

3.2 Tourism offerings

The Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing is vociferously engaging to make the range of tourism offerings more holistic. This has taken shape in

- Positioning the UAE as the world’s leading family destination.
- Promoting Dubai as a destination for events, with the ultimate aim of redefining status of Dubai from the regional events hub to a sought after location for global events and entertainment; and
- Enhancing Dubai’s status as a business destination.
3.3 Geographical expanse of tourists

Dubai is working on a 24*7 plan to strengthen tourism. All painstaking efforts through infrastructure development and tourism offerings have failed to kick-start and pull in the crowds from developed nations. The official tourism promoting body of Dubai, DTCM recently commented in a report that while the tourist numbers may seem on the rise, a closer look will reveal that almost 20% of the tourists are from the regions of Saudi and India. Among the western regions, UK tends to lead the chart with 0.76 million tourists. Australia expanded to the greatest extent, up by almost 39% from 193,000 in 2012 to more than 269,000 in 2013.

A glance through the chart below (Refer Figure 3) will show India to be a topper on the tourism chart. Not only in terms of absolute number of tourists visiting Dubai, but in terms of relative growth percentage too, India has been loyal to Dubai, and consistently and increasingly prefers to travel to Dubai. Any country successful on the tourism front will understand that it is not just a game of numbers. While the number of tourists must increase, the profile, purpose and geography matters too. Success is measured in terms of the revenue generated by an activity. Tourism must attract enough travelers from the developed and well-to-do countries in order to generate good forex. Having said that, such crowds are very demanding who will travel to the best destinations that provide them value for money.

![Figure 3 – Visitor Statistics (Source: http://www.visitdubai.com)](http://www.visitdubai.com)

As explained by a registered tourist guide in Dubai, the percentage of tourists from European and American countries has declined over the past few years. They always expect new tourist attractions and seldom travel to watch the same experiences for repeated experiences. After the Burj Khalifa opening in 2010, no major attractions have sprung up and the tourism industry is seriously thinking about additions to make the place more desirable for European and American audiences. Most of the visitors, as statistics reveal, is from Asian countries itself. Dubai Tourism is on a new highway to development since, and has planned a huge array of attractions to be announced in due course for sustainable tourism.

3.4 Major tourist attractions:

Dubai is the world’s largest, most attractive, easily accessible, and favorite touring destinations to millions. There are several attractions like the Creek park (which houses the dolphinarium), the Gold Souk, Marina Beach, Aquaventure water park, Ski Dubai, Children’s city, Alserkal Art district, Kite beach, Dubai Opera, IMG Worlds of Adventure, Emirates’ Mall, Heritage village, Global Village, Sheikh Zayed Road, Dubai Museum, Emirates Towers, Dubai Fountain, Dubai Mall, all of which are enduring in the true sense. The more recent additions to the list include Motiongate, Legoland Water Park, and Bollywood Park. The experiences they offer are simply amazing and the infrastructure, state-of-the-art. Some of the outstanding and all-time-favorite Dubai tourist attractions include:

- **Burj Khalifa:** This is Dubai’s landmark building and at 829.8 meters is the tallest building in the world. All of 160 floors, the 90 second trip to the 124th floor, for a 360 degree view of the city from the observation deck, is a must-do on every tourist’s list. Most picturesque during the day is the seamless ocean on the one side, and the endless deserts on the other. At night the city lighting, sky scrapers and the Dubai fountain (the world’s tallest performing fountain) is a sight you don’t want to miss. [Refer pic.1]
- **Burj Al Arab:** The world’s tallest hotel, this one stands close to 320 meters tall on its own artificial island adorning the coastline in Dubai. The hotel exterior is lit up with choreographed color lighting shows at night. In the grandeur it puts on, it happens to be acclaimed as the most expensive hotel, with a suite costing as much as $15000 for a night. [Refer pic.2]
- **Desert Safari:** Heading out to the desert for a day is what every tourist wants to indulge in, no matter what season of the year. While camel trekking is a conventional way to complete the safari, adventure lovers can surely try the 4WD safaris. A roller coaster experience awaits you in dune bashing, which is a heart-in-the-mouth excitement when land cruisers rush you at full speed down the huge wave of sand. The desert expanse also permits sand-boarding and quad biking for those with an extra bone for adventure.[Refer pic.3]
- **Palm Jumeirah Cruise:** A two hour breath-taking ride in a sleek speedboard, around the Palm
Jumeirah is an excitement to all age groups. The boat takes you around the Palm-tree shaped archipelago of Jumeirah. The gigantic Atlantis and the Palm hotel are to watch. The cruise winds up with a trip around the astounding sail-shaped Burj Al-Arab. [Refer pic. 4]

- Miracle Garden: The Dubai Miracle garden is a flower garden which came to life on the valentine’s day of 2013. Spread over 72,000 square meters, this is the world’s largest natural flower garden, which proudly nurtures more than 109 million flowers planted. It is the winner of several awards for new garden experiences, and features as a Guinness world record winner for being the largest natural flower arrangements. [Refer pic. 5 & 6]

- Other noteworthy attractions are the Dubai Fountain (Refer pic. 7) and the Cayan Tower (Refer pic. 8), which is a craze among international visitors. The dancing fountain is one of the best in the world. The architecture of the latter is amazing, and is fondly known as the ‘twisted’ tower.
Additional Tourist attractions:

3.5 Ongoing/future projects

With a view to increasing tourism inflow, especially for the upcoming World Expo in 2020, Dubai has undertaken/is considering undertaking the following projects, few of which are green initiatives:

Mohammad Bin Rashid Al Maktoum Solar Park: To put the Expo's theme into practice, Dubai is ensuring that it looks after future generations by investing in solar energy. A new plant will be installed at Al Maktoum International Airport, which would limit the hub's carbon footprint and help to power other places in the emirate. While not directly affecting the tourists that arrive at the airport, it does mean that that environmental impact of their visit will reduce significantly. People landing in Dubai are sure to appreciate the efforts.

Dubai Canal Project: This Venice-like canal project will cost enormously, and is on the verge of completion. Falcon Island will have a central canal that has been described as a "little piece of Venice in the Middle East" by the company designing the project. It is to be powered by innovative solar technologies and its hybrid district cooling systems will be responsible for temperature control. The marine features of the man-made island will be a big part of its appeal.

Bluewaters Island: Located just off the Jumeirah Beach Residence, Bluewaters Island will be a mixed-used development that will be home to retail, residential, hospitality and entertainment zones. Cherif Hosny, chief hospitality officer at Meraas Holding, the developer behind the project, said: "Bluewaters Island is a unique proposition that will enrich Dubai’s tourism offering.” It is to also feature a bespoke souk and a promenade that will boast al fresco restaurants and dining outlets serving visitors a wide range of cuisine. The market will be home to a mix of stores and have a food hall, selling fresh produce in a traditional setting.

4.0 Analysis of tourist trends

The tourist interest only seems to gain momentum with a hot spot like Dubai. One must admit that the largest and best attractions can be witnessed at this location. What is it that is intriguing about this place as a tourist destination? Dubai, as for its geographical terrain is basically a vast scatter of desert region. The way this country has emerged as a preferred tourist location, and for reasons not even remotely related to a place with arid terrain, is praiseworthy. 80% of its attractions are water parks, theme parks, gardens, underwater zoos and hotels, and the like... Sounds like quite a dream to materialize.. How did they make it happen? And even so, with the mission to ingrain sustainability into the initiative?

5.0 Challenges in Dubai Tourism

Though Dubai has a high and rising tourist trend, it is not a smooth sail all through. Both
nature and manifested challenges daunt it at every step. (Refer Figure 4)

5.1 Environmental/Natural resource concerns

Tourism contributes as much as 30 percent of the growing GDP in Dubai. The economy is largely dependent on this for its growth, with oil and gas resources depleting at a fast rate. Tourism has flourished very well, but not without its own demands and challenges. Making a city attractive for tourists is not easy either. A desert to start with, much needs to be considered to make it a place habitable and more so, a spot for tourists to desire and plan a vacation.

i. Perennial constructions: Tourism calls for a lot of construction - of the tourist sites and attractions that would cause inflow in the number of visitors. Not only does it contribute to environmental pollution through dust and debris, but to peace-damaging noise pollution too. HH Sheikh Mohamed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, ruler of Dubai, vice president and prime minister of the United Arab Emirates, said he expects to triple demand and supply of the tourist trade. “Responsible travel and tourism growth is key to fulfilling our expectations.” Speaking at the World Travel & Tourism Council’s Global Travel & Tourism Summit, Dubailand CEO Mohamed Alhabbai said: “We follow the path laid out before us by HRH Sheikh Mohamed bin Rashid al Maktoum. Execution is the next vital component of this effort.

ii. Eco-hazardous construction: The perennial constructions in Dubai, of residences, commercial spaces and tourist destinations not just add to dirt and noise pollution, the long term impacts are breath taking. All sky-scrapers are developed to be tourist attractions. All tall towers, with glass hugging exteriors, is only a pleasure to the eyes. The irrational use of glass in construction poses hardships [1, 3]. While it is well known that glass transmits light, is easy to clean and maintain and gives good elevation to buildings, the dangers posed by the use of glass outweigh its benefits. Glass absorbs heat and hence act as a greenhouse. It is thus not suitable in warm and hot climates. It will increase A/C load and more energy consideration for air conditioning.

iii. Hot and humid weather: Located close to the equator, with seas on the one side and the desert on the other, the weather is a perfect one to cause sun strokes and deaths. The residents of Dubai are themselves vacationing outside of Dubai during summers, and those who stay on prefer to be indoors with a full blast of air conditioning; further damaging the environment and adding to the already high temperatures.

iv. Water crisis: Primarily a vast expanse of desert region, the city is not endowed with many water resources. The United Arab Emirates is among the top water-scarce countries in the world. However the country has one of the world’s highest per capita water consumption of 550 liters per day. The country is experiencing a rapid increase in population which has in turn resulted in huge demand for water. Almost 24% of all water is used for private household consumption. The government has made sufficient provision for clean drinking water to reach households through taps, however, the usage of old and rusted pipes, cause bacteria to thrive in them making it unsafe. Further, the tanks in which they are stored are a regular hoard of dead rats and rodents, which also make consumption of such water harmful. All water used for construction and washing is grey water. Water used for agriculture and floral irrigation is grey too. The million dollar question that still haunts them is “Will the water shortage disrupt/stunt the development and cause bottlenecks to the growth of tourism?”

5.2 Infrastructural concerns

While all looks prim and proper in the city of Dubai, the inside story is not all that rosy, and for a tourist staying overnight or a weekend, it may not be life-changing too. Nonetheless, they are bottlenecks which hinder the growth of Dubai as a tourist destination.

i. Small city: Dubai in terms of area, is smaller than the smallest state of the US. What is worse is the population is large and growing, and expected to grow to more than 4 million residents soon. Besides normal pressure on infrastructure, there is a persistent inflow of foreign tourists which add to the burden. Several tourist destinations are set on reclaimed land as well!

ii. Traffic and congestion: The city has roads that are extremely congested with traffic. It may take well over an hour to travel short distances of 3-4 miles.

iii. Parking issues: There is acute shortage of parking space, which is why most residents give up luxury of travelling by their own private vehicles and hire cabs or take the metro. After a tough ride, when you do reach the destination, there is no parking space; and if you are lucky enough to find one, they charge you a ransom as parking fee.

iv. Poor sewage system: The city is a desert. It hardly rains, and when it does, the rain water cannot be handled well enough. The sewage system is crammed and the stink is unbearable. There is no land left in Dubai, every inch of it is
exploited with sky scrapers and planning a drainage system or rain water clearance mechanism must be priority.

5.3 Human factors

Environment and infrastructure play a strong role in adversely impacting the popularity of Dubai as a tourist destination. Besides these, man-made roadblocks in tourism development exist and must be carefully and quickly redressed.

i. Road rage: Speed control is something that the Government must consider seriously and address promptly. Not many survive an accident, and the freeways are some of the deadliest in the world. Drivers move around aimlessly and rashly, not just endangering their own lives but also risking other commuters.

ii. Non-christened roads: Though this problem is largely addressed as of now, there are still a number of lanes and streets that bear no name. It is extremely difficult to locate a building or residence, since street names are not available. Locations are explained either through directions of left and right, or through its distance from a popular landmark. Most addresses still use a post box no. system, making navigation difficult and almost impossible without local help.

iii. Red tape: Dubai is a land of rules and regulations. It is believed that it is one that does not believe in the freedom of speech or movement. Certain television channels are blocked and installing certain technologies in communication requires special permissions. There is no such thing as freedom of press or genuine journalism. As a tourist or traveler you can be intimidated, as your passport will now be requisitioned for every transaction you engage in.

6.0 Sustainable tourism

Sustainable tourism aims at meeting needs of tourists and host regions, while protecting the natural, societal, cultural and economic resources on which the host region depend upon [2]. It basically implies that tourist activities must attempt to minimize the damage to the environment and where possible, impact the environment in positive ways. In a pure sense, sustainable tourism means committing to make a now impact on natural environment and local culture, while simultaneously attempting to generate income and employment. Sustainable tourists are community of tourists that are sensitive to dangers of growing dangers due to tourism growth and the pressure it would place on biologically diverse habitats and indigenous cultures.

6.1 Eco-friendly measures for sustainable tourism in Dubai

6.1.1 Maintenance of existing tourist attractions. All operations which are volatile to temperature and constraints of water resources need to be kept in constant vigil and close monitoring. There are checks and balances in place to ensure that such state-of-the-art tourist destinations are operated and maintained in the best possible manner with only scope to better the tourist experience.

Miracle garden: This attraction operates only during seven months of the year. The other 12 months are non-operational and closed to tourists. This is owing to the high temperatures in Dubai which have a tendency to rise up to 40 degrees centigrade, which makes it unsuitable to flower gazing. Also, the flowers in this garden are maintained with the help of re-using water through

Figure 4 – Ishikawa diagram indicating factors affecting Dubai tourism
drip irrigation, where an average of 757,000 liters of water is used per day.

**Desert safari:** Platinum Heritage, Dubai is the single desert safari company to obtain the prestigious Green Tourism Award by Dubai tourism. Some of their environmental strategies include

- **Ban on Dune bashing:** Bashing of sand dunes leads to severe desertification, due to which vegetation and wildlife is lost forever. It threatens the natural habitats of insects and reptiles, moving them deeper into the desert, subjecting them to extreme pressures for survival.

- **Use of renewable energy:** The use of generators or city power sources is very limited. It works on a strategy which uses multi-stage approach to preserve the environment. It starts with using gravity to design the camp, so as to reduce energy requirements. Next, find out and obtain low energy equipment such as refrigerators. Use LED lights that need much less power, without compromise on lighting. Finally, install solar panels and batteries. Not only is energy saved, but is made eco-friendly and sustainable.

- **Transportation strategy:** The vehicle used for steering through a desert must be extremely functional, and may call for more fuel. Fuel efficiency is surely a matter of concern, but more important is the vehicle’s environmental impact. The use of strong and sturdy vehicles such as Land cruisers and Hummers calls for long term use and less quantity of scrap to be disposed of. Such scrap usually consists of non-recyclable plastics, toxic heavy metals and asbestos. Thus use of appropriate vehicles helps avoid environmental damage.

**6.1.2 Eco-tourism.** HE Khalid Bin Sulayem, director general of the Dubai government’s Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing, noted that everyone in the travel and tourism sector should play a role fully as world citizens. It will be interesting to watch a city champion the sustainability cause while beating the world’s best tourism destinations hands down, that is with water not gone as Dubai oil and pearls had in the last decades.

Speaking about the crucial question of who will sustain the long term demand for these gigantic tourist structures, Mr. Alhabbai said that Dubai will aim at bringing international tourists by associating with major international brands bringing in more guests. They likewise attach themselves to the giant companies such as Universal Studios, Dreamworks, Marvel and Six Flags.

**6.1.3 Dubai Green tourism program.** A Department of Tourism and Commercial Marketing initiative since, 2007, Dubai Green Tourism Programme (DGTP) helps Dubai become more sustainable and efficient at resource management. The overall mission of the DGTP is to bring about an awareness, create a framework to encourage sustainability, incept carbon footprint reduction strategies, and to disseminate out-of-the-box solutions to improve sustainability.

In consultation with key governmental partners and the hotel industry, DGTP was founded, to be a long-term sustainability programme that includes essential tools and services for hotel

Towards the end of September, 2016, Dubai’s Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing (Dubai Tourism) made an announcement that it was partnering with four locally-based environmental entities to kick-start its Dubai Sustainable Tourism Initiative (DSTI) aimed at positioning Dubai as one of the world’s leading sustainable tourism destinations.

The successful inculcation and adaptation of the initiative would be possible only through arrangement of relevant training workshops so as to reap the benefits of sustainability management methods by sharing best practices with all stakeholders in the tourism industry.

Commenting on the partnership with the environmental entities, Ahmed Khalifa Al Falasi, CEO, Corporate Services and Investments, Dubai Tourism, said: “The signing of MoUs with major players in the field of environmental conservation represents a crucial step in our Dubai Sustainable Tourism Initiative, which is inspired by the vision of His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum UAE Vice President, Prime Minister and Ruler of Dubai to transform the emirate into a sustainable city. Dubai Tourism feels proud to have pioneered this local initiative to encourage stakeholders in the hospitality sector to contribute meaningfully towards environmental sustainability, and ultimately a flourishing green economy that will help ensure a healthy emirate for future generations.

As the Dubai Sustainable Tourism Initiative is a cornerstone of tourism development in the emirate, Dubai wishes to express their appreciation for the wholehearted support extended by the aforementioned partners as it touches the heart of Dubai’s sustainability strategy, which revolves around the key pillars of innovation and collaboration. Dubai is confident that other environmental groups will join the Dubai Sustainable Tourism Initiative, and together they can help make a difference.

DSTI provides a platform to share best practices in environmental sustainability with the hospitality industry and the community. Among the main
objectives of DSTI are to promote energy conservation, create energy efficiency services, and increase the adoption of environmental sustainable practices among the hospitality sector.

Mr. Waleed Salman, Chairman of Dubai Carbon, said that there is a need to ensure that all stakeholders adhere to green practices. He stated that he is quite confident about their partnership with the tourism industry and that the association will bring forth material changes in consumption patterns and influence positive actions to go green. He remarked that Dubai Carbon’s green assessment tool will enable tracking of operational efficiencies especially in tourism and hospitality, thereby maintaining that the tourism sector will not just be green, but sustainable too.

Mr. Ali Al Jassim, CEO, Etihad ESCO, said: “Dubai Sustainable Tourism Initiative is a major step forward to make Dubai greener. Etihad ESCO has been instrumental in developing expertise and enabling clients save energy in their buildings; through signing this MOU with Dubai Tourism, we are pleased and excited to be able to contribute to the initiative by helping Dubai hotels save electricity and water to make them more sustainable and efficient.”

Ms. Habiba Al Marashi, Chairperson, Emirates Environmental Group, said that they are delighted to be collaborating with the Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing on Dubai’s Sustainable Tourism Initiative to help strengthen the sustainability agenda in the tourism sector within Dubai. In a country where tourism is a big industry, strong emphasis is placed on environmental conservation and sustainable development within the tourism sector. Its continuous effort towards raising awareness of the importance of sustainable practices aligns with the core values of EEG. They are confident that partnering will have a positive impact on the UAE and the tourist community.

Ms. Laila Abdullatif, Deputy Director General, EWS-WWF, mentioned that they are excited to be partnering with the Dubai Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing to foster more sustainable practices within the tourism sector in Dubai. The Dubai Sustainable Tourism Initiative is a good example of how public-private partnerships can unite to take forward, the sustainability agenda in the UAE and deliver tangible results within a key sector. The Initiative will also bring us closer to the UAE Vision 2021, supporting the government in turning its ambitious plans into reality through scaling up sustainable development and efficient resource management.”

6.2 Other measures undertaken towards sustainable tourism

Besides the concrete measures outlined above, and active collaborations through environmental agencies and ecosystems, there are several ways in which the tourism industry in Dubai has been engaging in sustainable practices.

a. Take necessary approvals: Alhabbai said that all constructions and development of cities will happen only after clearing rules and getting necessary approvals from authorities.

b. Scientific studies: The tourism industry was very certain that they would go through environmental impact studies—taking all the animals from the site to a conservation area. They were very serious in protecting the environment all along.

c. Green infrastructure: Notwithstanding the water scarcity, the city is determined to take on this challenge. On a more positive note it is attempting to introduce eco-friendly infrastructure:

d. Green taxis: Dubai has introduced green taxis which replace the current taxi system, to add sustainability in transport.

e. Actively engaging the private sector will also help achieve its tourism mission faster.

f. The government is in the process of introducing stringent laws to govern water supplies and enforce a machinery to ensure the execution practices in place.

6.3 Suggestions for better sustainability

The Dubai Government has been very responsible in adopting the measures that it did and associating with relevant organizations for better accountability. However, there is always scope for innovation and nuances at improvement. Suggested below are some such measures

a) Make the place more pollution free – The Dubai Government must actively engage in moves that reduce pollution of all sorts. Construction must be planned and completed in the non-touring months. Several tourist destinations within Dubai are closed for a few months, usually peak summer. This will ensure that tourists can enjoy the beauty of the city without facing the hassles of dust, dirt and noise pollution.

b) Sewage solutions - A city of sky scrapers, it is almost impossible to develop block-free underground drainage systems or ensure that water logging during downpours are taken care. However, if it has to become the number 1 chosen tourist destination, these details will have to be meticulously taken care of.
c) Construction material – While the beauty of a city built in a desert may be largely attributed to the architectural elevation, the primary material used – glass – is not environment friendly. Especially in countries exposed to a hot and humid climate, and extremes of temperature, glass is not the best material for building exterior. The architects and engineers must suggest use of a material that is more eco-friendly while not compromising on the positive properties of glass.

d) Water scarcity – It is a given that all countries enjoy certain advantages relative to others. As such, with mountains and seas on the one hand and vast desert area on the other, the country must definitely balance its water resources. Most of its tourism is due to floral glamour (the miracle garden, for example) and these are highly susceptible, in the absence of water. Thanks to the thoughtfulness of the Government, there is constant supply of drip irrigation to take care of them. What still remains a problem is drinking water. The availability and administration of drinking water is still a persistent problem and must be addressed quickly.

e) Town planning: The city can plan its tourist destination creation well in time. Further, the burden on reclaimed land must reduce. As far as possible, the flora and fauna must be maintained in its natural habitat, and human intervention must not disturb the same. All planning of cities, hotels, destinations, must ensure that basic amenities are taken care of, drainage and sewage system is provided for, and construction debris is cleaned off within timelines.

f) Road rage must be addressed with the help of regulatory mechanisms. Dubai has a stringent law already, and the enforcement is also satisfactory. Probably there is need to amend the law, or make punitive measures more critical for people driving rash, not just risking their own lives, but that of co-travelers too.

g) Waste should be disposed of properly: All waste and debris on construction sites must be disposed of immediately after the building is in place. For recurring waste, the city should investigate the possibility of having trashcans in buses and boats. Where possible travelers must be asked to use, non-plastic, re-usable containers.

h) The air quality is poor, filled with dust and dirt most of the time. Most of this is attributable to the desert sand storms, or construction pollution, or those from dense road traffic. The city must check feasibility of installing air quality monitoring devices to keep a close check, and then all industries must be subject to strict environment impact assessment processes.

7.0 Conclusion

Dubai is a dream destination. Easily accessible and affordable, this place is among the choicest of vacation destinations and is on a spree to make a mark as a business and event destination too. While it has some of nature’s best offerings in terms of natural and man-made attractions, some the largest, some the only one in the world, some unique, some exciting, one can undoubtedly call Dubai a one-stop tourist destination. What makes it even more admirable is its initiative to maintain sustainability. A bold move in itself, Dubai presents a case, where being successful as a tourist location is quite different and less fulfilling than being a destination focused on sustainable tourism. With conscious measures taken at associating with environmental ecosystems, and stringent regulations and policy decisions, this city has made a serious decision to smooth sail to accomplish its vision 2020 in terms of visitor statistics!

8.0 References

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