

## Responsible Tourism in Bahrain

Habis Alsamawi

College of Arts, Bahrain University, Kingdom of Bahrain

### Abstract

The tourism industry has become one of the most considerable economic sectors in the world. Gulf countries, especially Bahrain, included tourism as one of the most important exports that will help to diversify the country's Gross National Product (GNP), dependence on oil exporting only. However, little research has been done to highlight the driving factors of tourism and its impact on economic and cultural development, or focused on ways to outweigh these negatives through a cautionary management of tourism and increasing tourist willingness to pay.

This paper is a behavior oriented study that investigates and explains the perceptions and preferences of responsible tourists toward selected tourism sites in Bahrain. It is structured in threefold: first, it reviews the historical development of tourism in Bahrain; second, it presents the research approach and the selection of the analyzed sites; third, it presents the findings concerning tourists' demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, tourism participation rates, and perceptions toward responsible tourism.

Data were collected by means of questionnaire interviews. 844 questionnaires were analyzed. Findings demonstrated the importance of the tourists' concerns in the planning process of tourism sites.

**Key words:** Bahrain, responsible tourism, behavioral approach, tourism planning, perceptions and value systems, sustainable tourism.

### Introduction

A common theme in tourism, recreation and natural attractions research has been to understand the preference of individuals regarding the choice selection of destination. Several behavioral models have been developed that address this preference- behavior (Kerr and Manfred, 1991, Manfred, et. al, 1992, bright et. al, 1993, Eagly and Chaiken, 1998, and Bright 2003). These general linear models of attitudes and behavior focused on single behavior. The benefits of this approach of research approved to be valuable to understand the social psychology of individuals. Also it helped decision makers to develop strategies and marketing policies to attract sizable waves of tourists and recreationists. Therefore, tourism planners and marketers have recognized the need to target homogenous components of a heterogeneous market as well as the individual preference or the market as a whole.

The tourism industry has become one of the most considerable economic sectors in the world (Brakk, 2005). Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), especially Bahrain, United Arab Emirate (Dubai) and Oman included tourism as one of the most important exports that will help to diversify the country's GNP dependence on oil exporting only. However, little research has been done to highlight the driving factors of tourism and its impacts on economic and cultural development (Sinclair, 1998, Nowak, Sahli and Sgro 2005), or focused on ways to outweigh the negative factors through a cautionary management of tourism and increasing tourist willingness to pay, and ultimately tourism receipts (Carina, 2005, ReMaquieria, Lozano and Gomez, 2005). Brau and Cao (2006) pointed out the key issue of how to assess the transformation of tourist sites and destinations as the result of a rational attempt to respond to tourist preference. Jackson and Schinkel (1981) and Najjar, Donnell and Samawi (1992) emphasized the importance of showing what users prefer rather than what recreation and tourism managers believe users prefer. The value

of tourism sites exist only in the minds of tourists. Bahrain is experiencing rapid growth in tourism facilities, despite limited resources, physically and in labor force.

Responsible tourism demonstrates the potential for direct economic gain inherent in the non-extractive use of the natural environment based on its aesthetic and educational value. It requires for the natural environment to be intact and relatively perfect in state. The term responsible is typically defined as responsible travel to areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well-being of local people. It is travel to destinations where the natural areas and cultural heritage are the primary attractions. It includes an interpretation experience delivered to small groups by small-scale businesses, and stresses local ownership.

The main concern is to encourage the local inhabitants to involve in tourism activities, and stresses on conservation of nature by educating the visitors how to protect and respect the culture visited. Local people also can play a good role if they are well educated by encouraging tourists to see their communities as more than a site for recreation (Goodwin, 2016).

Responsible tourism asks visitors to make choices about their vacations, so that negative impacts are minimized. It is defined in the 2002 Cape Town declaration, to minimize negative economic, environmental, and social impacts. Responsible tourism can generate greater economic benefits for local people and enhances the well-being of host communities, also to improve working conditions and access to the industry, in addition to involve local people in decisions that affect their lives and life chances, and to make positive contributions to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage, and finally, to provide experiences for tourists through more connections with local people, and a greater understanding of local cultural, social and environmental issues (*International Conference on Responsible Tourism in Destinations 2002, the Cape Town Declaration, Cape Town*).

The declaration concludes with a commitment, to work with others to take responsibility for achieving the economic, social and environmental components of responsible and sustainable tourism (Goodwin, 2016).

This study investigates and explains the responsible tourism toward selected tourism sites in Bahrain. It presents the research approach and the selection of the analyzed sites; and presents the findings concerning tourist's demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, tourism participation rates, and perceptions toward responsible tourism.

### **Research methodology**

Data base for this study was part of data collected by Alsamawi, (2013 -2014), in conjunction with the assessment of tourist's views on six tourist's sites in Bahrain, in each site we distributed 150 questionnaires, the data was collected by the means of questionnaire interviews, and 844 questionnaires were collected. These sites are Al- Bander Resort, Aljazaer Beach, Bahrain Fort, Hawar Islands, Al- Areen Wildlife Park, and the Camping area at Sakhir, (see table 1 and figure 1). Bahrain is an archipelago of 36 islands; with a total area of the islands is about 771 square kilometers. In addition, the land was blessed with a remarkable number of natural springs, which irrigated the fertile north and western belts for centuries (Samawi and Al-Sayyed, 2014). The central area is low lying and barren limestone rock covered with saline sand, which supports only hardiest desert vegetation. The highest point of Bahrain is jabel dukhan, 134 meters above the sea level. The majority of Bahrain's oil wells are in this area. The country offers a fascinating blend of eastern and western cultures as high rise buildings vie for space with more traditional dwellings and ancient traditions and historical sites mix with modern developments and cosmopolitan living. Bahrain's population of around 1.31 million in 2014 consists of a significant percentage of

expatriates (% 52) from all over the world, with high density of population around 1705 person per sq.km ([www.cio.gov.bh](http://www.cio.gov.bh), 2015).

Bahrain is rich in history and ancient civilizations have only recently been discovered by international archaeologists. It's believed that for tens of thousands of years, nomads traveled over Bahrain's desert and primitive flint tools found, testify to this history. Recent finds have evidenced that Bahrain was the site of the lost civilization of Dilmun dating from the third millennium BC, often referred to as the fabled Garden of Eden and described as "paradise" in the epic of Gilgamesh. The land is repeatedly mentioned in Sumerian, Babylonian and Assyrian inscriptions as an important seaport between Mesopotamia and the Indus valley, due to the perennial abundance of sweet water. By 600BC, Bahrain was absorbed into the new Babylonian empire and once again flourished as a prosperous entrepôt (Jenner, 1984). In 323BC, two of Alexander the Great's ships arrived and new trade routes opened, resulting in such a strong Greek influence that Dilmun was renamed Tylos. Bahrain was also the site of the largest prehistoric cemetery in the world. At one stage an estimated 170,000 burial mounds covered the central and western areas. Archaeologists have found evidence of two distinct civilizations; the Dilmun and Tylos- two thousand years apart, dating from the third and first millennia, respectively (Jenner, 1984).

### **The Survey**

Eight hundred and forty four questionnaires distributed to visitors and tourists at various resorts, tourists site, and beaches located in the main island "Bahrain" and in other islands of the archipelagos.

Here is some information about the six places where tourists interviewed; Al-Bander resort is a popular destination for relaxation in Bahrain is located near Sitra Bay, it has a good facilities related to beach activities , 44 chalets and 36 cabanas, 5 restaurants, marina and 10 swimming pools, and interesting beach, health club, water sports. Al Bander attracts more than 75000 visitors yearly. Al Bander Hotel & Resort offers 4-star accommodation and a lagoon-style pool surrounded by sun loungers and palm trees.

The second site is Bahrain Sailing Club, where located in Al Jazayer Beach, few miles away from Al Areen Wildlife Park. It attracts people who enjoyed water sports; it has many facilities such as swimming and skiing.

The third place is Bahrain Yacht Club which is located on Sitra Bay close to Al Bander Resort, the club attracts visitors and members who enjoyed water sports facilities, such as swimming, fishing, sailing and diving. Besides other facilities such as restaurants and cafeterias that attracted many recreationist in summer time.

The fourth place is Hawar islands, situated 24 km away from the southeast of Bahrain mainland. This site is a 45 minute exciting boat ride away. On the site 60 spacious accommodation units, besides restaurants and café and many other outdoor activities. In 2014, around 18000 visitors had visited Hawar to enjoy the natural features for one day visit or overnight stay. An archipelago comprising of six major and over thirty smaller islands of various sizes with a total land area of the islands is approximately 52 km<sup>2</sup>.

Hawar site is home to many bird species, more than 250,000 birds, notably Socotra Cormorants, and rare marine species and wildlife, such as Dugongs and Chelonians Mydas at the seas around. There are small herds of Arabian Oryx and Sand gazelle. Hawar Islands is a key tourist destination in Bahrain and home to a unique eco-system that draws many tourists (Figure 1).

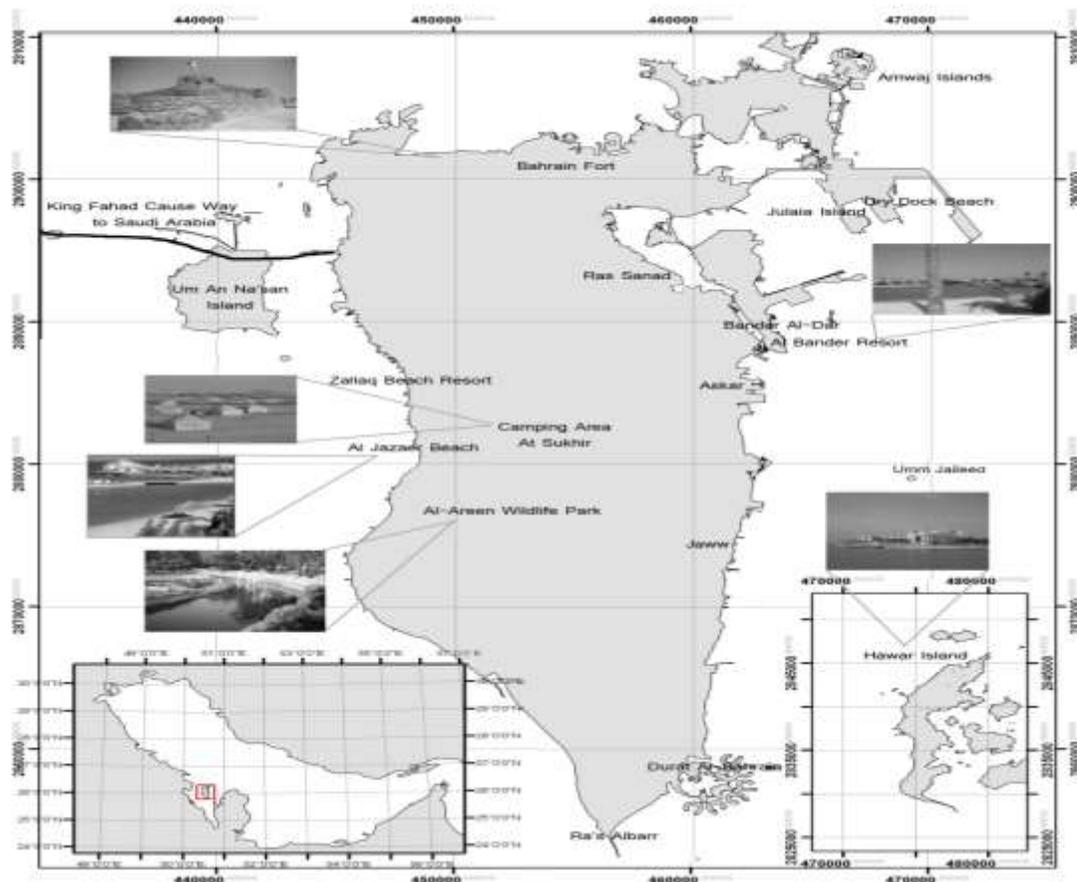
The fifth site is Al- Areen wildlife Park, situated close to Bahrain International Circuit, F1. Al-Areen Wildlife Park and Reserve project was established in 1976 in order to preserve what is

remaining of the Arabian endangered wildlife. Bahrain is considered a leader in recognizing the threats to wildlife, as it has established Al-Areen Wildlife Park and Reserve in order to protect the rare animals and work for its reproduction in addition to being an educational center for wildlife.

Al-Areen Wildlife Park was primarily developed to provide a refuge for the endangered species, and to accomplish this, the area was divided into two main sections, the park and the reserve. The park occupies three square kilometers, where the public are able to take a round in the park's tourist busses. And while walking around the park, visitors are able to see a collection of 45 mammal species and 82 different bird species of birds from the Arabian Peninsula, East Africa, North Africa and Asia. The second part is the reserve, which occupies another four square kilometers allocated for the conservation, preservation and breeding of rare Arabian animals. Access to the reserve is restricted, except for specialists, researchers, veterinarians and the animals' keepers. Mammal species in the reserve include: the Arabian Oryx, Nubian Ibex and the Bahraini Reem Gazelle.

Finally, the sixth site is the Camping area at Sakhir, situated close to Sakhir Palace and the Jabal Doukhan. The site attracts thousands of Bahrainis flock to campsites during the country's annual camping season, from November to March. Families often meet in large gatherings on Fridays, with children playing together and older members catching up on gossip over tea or freshly-roasted coffee. During the day, people play sports like volleyball and football, ride bikes or hop on dune buggies. At night, the skies light up with floodlights and bonfires, while lamps strung around campsite fences create a warm, welcoming atmosphere.

Figure 1: Tourist study areas in Bahrain



The questionnaires were surveyed in the six locations and received the following numbers as it shown in the table 1: Al-Bander resort (16.3%), Aljazer Beach (15.6%), Bahrain Fort (16.8%), Hawar Island (17.2%), Al- Areen Wildlife Park (17.2%) and the Camping area at Sakhir (16.7%). In this study we analyzed the above- mentioned questionnaires by tabulating the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of tourists as well as their preferences and evaluations of the recreational activities within the six sites. For accuracy results, we used all of the questionnaires as the sample size (N=844), however in some variables the sample size was different due to the fact that some respondents left an empty answer.

Table 1: Interviews places in Bahrain

No	Tourist Site	Frequency	percent
1	Al-Bander Resort	137	16.3
2	Aljazaer Beach	132	15.6
3	Bahrain Fort	142	16.8
4	Hawar islands	145	17.2
5	Al- Areen Wildlife Park	147	17.4
6	Camping area at Sakhir	141	16.7
	Total	844	100

**Analysis and findings:**

844 questionnaires were analyzed; however the size of population varies among analyzed variables due to the missing answers for different questions. Table 2 shows selected demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the surveyed sample. The sample population was mainly dominated, by males (64%) and within the age category of young adults (52% were 19-35 years old); married (58%); Bahraini (45%); highly educated (46% with college degree; and 22% with post graduate degree); and represent the lower middle income population (37% earn less than 750 BD; and 24% earn between 751 and 1500 BD. These findings reflect the fact responses were chosen as leaders of their groups and that most visitors came in family groups. The data in table 2, also suggest that visitors to these sites are generally well educated, family – oriented young adults, who represent a low-to-middle income Bahraini population who may not be able to afford the costs of other fancy private outdoor tourist sites and resorts. Thus, the analyzed sites can be remarked as recreational sites for local tourism and can be supported or subsidized by the government.

The non – Bahraini visitors represent the expatriates who work in Bahrain (13% Asians; 17.6% Europeans; 6.4% Americans; and 7.4% Arab nationals), and can be included within local tourism. Finally, 10% came from other Gulf States, are mainly from Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Kuwait.

To foresee the level of recreation use likely to be placed upon responsible tourism, it is useful to analyze the travel behavior of visitors in order to gain an understanding of how often visitors use recreation facilities and determine the variables that most affect the frequency of use. Literature suggested that typical local tourists now consider travel distance and road network as the most important factors in the selection of recreational site, especially during the weekends, holidays and summer.

Table 2: Demographic and socio-economical variables

Variables		Count	%
1.Marital Status	Male	542	64.2
	female	302	35.8
2. Age in years	Less than 18	45	5.3
	19-35	438	51.9
	36-59	337	39.9
	60 and over	24	2.9
3.Education level	Less than high school	54	6.4
	High school	214	25.4
	Graduate	388	46.0
	Post Graduate	188	22.2
4.Monthly income/BD*	Less than 750	316	37.4
	751-1500	203	24.1
	1501-2250	111	13.1
	2251 and more	127	15.1
	No response	87	10.3
5.Family size	Less than 2	68	8.1
	3 to 5	373	44.1
	6 and more	403	47.8
6.How many people accompanied	None	268	31.7
	One	113	13.4
	Two to four	372	44.1
	Five and more	91	10.7
7.Nationality	Bahrain	383	45.4
	Asians	111	13.1
	Europeans	149	17.6
	Americans	54	6.4
	Gulf	85	10
	Arabs	62	7.4
8.Occupation	Public sector	188	22.2
	Students	113	13.4
	Professional	161	19.1
	Private	382	45.3

Note: \*1 BD = 2.65 \$

In this study ,we found that the majority of responds were driving their own car (78%), 58% undertaking short day trips during weekend , and 30% during holidays to proximate resort such

as Al-Bander resort . these high percentages as indicated in table 3 , are largely a function of the accessibility of the analyzed sites and the time and mode of transportation. Families prefer to have a one day trip during weekends and holidays as opposed to the time need for extended trips (19% for two day trips; and 11% for 3 and more day trips). Table 3 also shows that recreation participation in Bahrain is common during the four seasons of the year with slight concentration during summer 40%.

Table 3: The Characteristics of trip Information

<b>1.Number of visits</b>	No.	%
3 or less	472	56
4-10	253	30
11 and more	119	14
<b>2.Group structure</b>		
Alone	287	34
With family	380	45
With friends	177	21
<b>3.Mode of travel</b>		
By car	658	78
Bus	97	11.5
Boat	89	10.5
<b>4.Season of visit</b>		
Summer	338	40
Autumn	169	20
Winter	160	19
Spring	177	21
<b>5.Days of visit</b>		
Weekends	490	58
Holidays	253	30
Week days	101	12
<b>6.Length of visit</b>		
One day	591	70
Two days	160	19
Three and more	93	11

The opportunity for several outdoor activities and services within the site appears to be key factor. Because the most popular activities of respondents were swimming 53.5%, sports 42%, picnicking 35%, boating 29%, sightseeing 26%, photography 25.6%, and fishing 23.8%, these activities reflect the recreational orientation of the Bahraini and others toward the sea and open space as well as the geography and climate of Bahrain (see table 4).

Table 4: Preferences of Recreational Activities

Activities	Frequency	Preference %
Sightseeing	220	26.1
Hiking	122	14.4
Picnicking	295	35
Sports	358	42.4
Swimming	452	53.5
Sunbathing	176	20.8
Boating	247	29.3
Water ski	152	18
Photography	216	25.6
Bird watching	77	9.1
Fishing	201	23.8

A level of satisfaction towards services (table 5) at the site also was found to be important to understanding the nature of recreation participation.

Table 5: Levels of Satisfaction %

Items	Low 1	Below Ave 2	Average 3	Above Ave 4	High 5	Degree of Satisfaction %
Entrance fee	155	142	288	127	132	58.5
Parking	109	112	264	196	163	64.5
Picnicking	197	230	211	125	81	52
Restrooms	245	226	189	105	79	49.2
Cleanness	262	225	134	121	102	49.9
Staffing	161	101	255	178	149	61.2
Road signs	234	184	137	147	142	54.8

Respondents were not satisfied with the sites which lacked clean restrooms 49.2%, general cleanness 49.9%, it followed by picnic facilities 52%, and driving directional signs 54.8%. The next level of satisfaction of facilities were the entrance fees of the site 58.5 %, the number and professionalism of staff 61.2%, and parking facilities 64.5%.

The study included questions regarding the awareness and knowledge of respondents towards responsible tourism. Research suggests (AP and Pang 2002; Bjork 200; Kjalager, 1999; and Sirakaya and Sonmez, 1999) that awareness and knowledge of responsible and sustainable tourism, will help in protecting and researching the physical environment and thus create and maintain a sustainable environment. A lack of community awareness and positive attitude towards sustainable tourism is likely to lead to depletion of the environment through mass tourism (AP and Pang 2005).

Findings of this study (tables 6, 7, and 8) illustrated the tourist's awareness, knowledge and interest in responsible tourism. About 68.4% of the 844 sample population reported knowledge of the concept of responsible tourism through conversations with family members and friends.

Only a small number of respondents reported a significant knowledge of the concept through listening or watching an educational program in the media outlet (5.8%) or reading an article in newspaper or journal (7.6%) or receiving a flier from any government source (5.4%), and through internet and social media 12.8%, These findings suggest a lack of the government role in educating the community about sustainable and responsible tourism.

Table 6: Awareness of Responsible Tourism

<b>Type of media</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Family & Friends	577	68.4
TV& Radio	49	5.8
Newspapers & Journals	64	7.6
Government issues	46	5.4
Internet and Social Media	108	12.8
Total	844	100

Table 7 shows the level of interest in knowing more about responsible tourism. 31.7% of respondents were not interested in knowing about responsible tourism, while 33.3% were interested, with reasons given as lack of time, lack of information, and busy with more important issues relating to jobs, housing, education and food availability, 21.7% showed fair interest, and only 13.3% are very interested.

Table 7: Levels of Interest in Knowing about Responsible Tourism

<b>Levels of interest</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Very interested	112	13.3
Interested	281	33.3
Fair	183	21.7
Not interested	268	31.7
Total	844	100

Table 8 shows the levels of interest in taking part of responsible tourism.32.4% shows much interest in taking part of responsible tourism, and 51.6% have some interest, only 3.3% shows less interest in taking part in responsible tourism.

Table 8: Levels of interest in Taking Part of Responsible Tourism

<b>Levels in taking part</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Very interested	273	32.4
Interested	435	51.6
Fair	107	12.7
Not interested	28	3.3
Total	844	100

The optimistic interpretation of these findings suggests a bright future for sustainable and responsible tourism, and consequently demand for more of governmental and private sector support for education and promotion. This support can be achieved through: 1. Improving the university level curriculum and compulsory level, courses and programs which help in

improving the level of awareness and understanding of the physical environment; 2. Recognition of the cultural and financial need and support by all stakeholders, 3. Enhance the improvement of responsible tourism from both sides , the supply and demand which seeks insights in understanding sustainable tourism from the tourists’ perspectives (local, regional, and international) as well as from the community perspective (local and national),4. There is a need for more awareness for the local community and the tourists about conservation programs and sustainable tourism, through all kinds of media, such as Radio, T.V., News papers, and internet. Finally, we asked the respondents to evaluate the application of responsible tourism in each site, so the findings are vary, where Al-Areen Wildlife Park maintain the best results (77.5 %), it followed by Hawar Islands 67.8%, Bahrain Fort 66.4%, Al Bander Resort 61.5%, Aljazaer Beach 55.8%,and the Camping area at Sakhir got the less (52%), so as we mentioned , we should encourage all sites to work on maintaining the notion of sustainable and responsible tourism by educating all staff members who deals with tourism, and through awareness programs.

Table 9: Evaluation the status of Responsible tourism among the Tourist Sites

Place	Low	Medium	Strong	Freq.	Evaluation%
Al-Bander Resort	52	54	31	137	61.5
Aljazaer Beach	61	53	18	132	55.8
Bahrain Fort	46	51	45	142	66.4
Hawar islands	43	54	48	145	67.8
Al- Areen Wildlife Park	27	45	75	147	77.5
Camping area at Sakhir	76	51	14	141	52
Total	285	308	251	844	63.5
%	33.8	36.5	29.7	100	

### 3. Discussion and conclusion

There is low level of awareness and interest in sustainable and responsible tourism among residents as well as among local and regional tourist in third world countries. Bahrain is no exception. This study proved the above mentioned statement and identified the factors which affect tourist perceptions and preference in choosing recreational sites. It also clearly shows variations in perceptions and preferences related to variations in the demographic and socioeconomic background of tourists.

This type of study is fundamental to tourism and recreation planning as a dynamic incremental process that affects the spatial structure of the economy, and the preservation of the environment as a national wealth. The responsible tourism has a supply and demand sides, and focuses on the protection of the biodiversity of tourism and recreation sites. This can be achieved by implementing environmental laws that regulate the proper use and enjoyment of these sites without damaging the natural plants and living species. Laws alone are not enough or invoking them. There should be an environmental and cultural ecology of these sites by local residents and visitors alike.

The demand side focuses on the market side of tourism, the consumer’s, their perceptions, preferences and awareness of ecotourism. In addition, the focus on appreciation of the physical environment and willingness to respect, preserve and protect the environmental and cultural

ecology of these sites .This can be achieved through education, awareness, and value systems and customers provider combined ethics.

Responsible tourist sites must be viewed as attractions to sustain the environment and entertain tourists with a sense of environmental and cultural ecology, as much as we are concerned about human rights, we must also become concerned about environmental rights. If the focus of satisfaction is limited to one side, definitely the other side will be the loser.

Sultanate Oman is the most important country in the Gulf Region, who cares about sustainable and responsible tourism. During the International meeting in 2005 and 2010, they emphasized the implications of tourism to societies, especially with respect to the sociocultural fabrics of host societies and to their built and natural environments, also focusing on the role of local and regional authorities increasingly play in the development, marketing and management of tourism, they conclude the assessment of economic impacts to develop tourism and maximizing local economic benefits, ensure communities are involved and benefit from tourism .(4<sup>th</sup> *International Conference on Responsible Tourism in Destination, 10 – 12 October, 2010, Muscat, Oman*).

In conclusion and based on the findings, much work needs to be done in order to improve and increase responsible tourism. Responsible tourism seeks to maximize positive impacts and to minimize negative ones and compliance with all relevant international and national standards, laws and regulations is assumed. In addition, our contribution to move towards a more balanced relationship between hosts and guests in destinations, and to create better places for local communities and indigenous peoples; and recognizing that this can only be achieved by government, local communities and business cooperating on practical initiatives in destinations. Local authorities have a central role to play in achieving responsible tourism through commitment to supportive policy frameworks and adequate funding. We call upon local authorities and tourism administrations to develop - through multi-stakeholder processes - destination management strategies and responsible tourism guidelines to create better places for host communities and the tourists who visit. Finally, improving responsible tourism will be reliant on the need to develop all kinds of media, to exercise responsibility in the way in which they portray tourism destinations, to avoid raising false expectations and to provide balanced and fair reporting.

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