

## **The Impact of the COVID-19 Crisis on Tourism in Jazan, Saudi Arabia**

**By**

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### **Abstract**

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected virtually every major economic sector, especially those in which interactions among humans are essential. One of such sectors is tourism. In response to the new pandemic situation, governments around the world have taken new measures for protecting the general public from the spread of the virus. Saudi Arabia is one of the countries that have been significantly affected by the pandemic situation. The Saudi tourism sector has been markedly affected. One of the prominent tourism destinations in Saudi Arabia is the Jazan region. The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis has left a negative impact on tourism activity in Jazan and in Saudi Arabia as a whole. The main goal of the present paper is to investigate the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on tourism in Jazan, Saudi Arabia. This paper adopts the literature review research methodology, which involves reviewing literature and resources that are relevant to the paper's main topic. Literature and resources reviewed in the paper include relevant articles, theses, documents and information published by competent authorities in Saudi Arabia, and relevant news articles published online. The present paper is of both theoretical and practical significance. The theoretical significance of the paper stems from that it addresses a contemporary and timely issue that affects several parties, including the Saudi government, people working in the tourism industry in Jazan, and domestic and international tourists in Saudi Arabia. The research topic is also a novel one that has not received adequate attention in research, and thus the present research represent a contribution to fill the research gap in that regard. Moreover, the paper aims to present a number of suggestions for further research on the impact of the COVID-19 on the Saudi tourism industry. With regards to the practical significance of the study, it stems from that it may provide competent authorities and policymakers in Saudi Arabia with practical suggestions for improving the state of the Saudi tourism industry, while maintaining the protection of public health in the country.

**Keywords:** COVID-19 – Jazan – Saudi Arabia – Tourism.

### **Introduction**

In today's globalized markets, the world is continuously transforming into a small village. This has resulted in the growth of many economic sectors that rely on the free movement of people and commodities. One of the most prominent of such sectors is the tourism sector. Tourism has witnessed growth globally, and today it is considered a major source of national income for many countries around the world.

Saudi Arabia is among the countries in which the tourism sector has witnessed noticeable growth in recent years. Tourism has been a central area of attention in Saudi Arabia's

economic plans and strategies within the last few years. The development of the tourism sector is included among the main goals that the government of Saudi Arabia aims to achieve as a part of its national Saudi Vision 2030. For achieving that goal, the Saudi government analyzes the current and prospective tourism market opportunities, searches for new opportunities for expanding the market, and formulates marketing strategies accordingly (Reddy & Kalyan, 2017, 2).

One of the rising tourism destinations in Saudi Arabia is Jazan, which is a region located in the southwestern part of Saudi Arabia. Jazan is unique for the diversity of its natural environments, in addition to its wealth of traditional heritage and cultural attractions. As a result, Jazan has become a prominent tourism destination in Saudi Arabia.

Despite the growth potential for Jazan as a tourism destination, tourism development in that region has encountered many challenges recently. This is largely due to the outbreak of the global COVID-19 pandemic. As a result of the pandemic, most countries, including Saudi Arabia, have adopted new measures to regulate movement and travelling. This has had negative impacts on tourism globally, including in Saudi Arabia, thereby resulting in the decline of tourism activity in the Jazan region. From the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Saudi government has been keen on achieving a proper balance between meeting public health priorities and supporting the tourism sector in Saudi Arabia.

## **Overview of Jazan**

Jazan occupies a unique location in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It is located in the southwestern area of the country, particularly along the borders with Yemen and on the Red Sea. The total size of the Jazan area is approximately 13,500 km<sup>2</sup>. The capital of the Jazan area is the city of Jazan. The climate in Jazan is considered relatively temperate compared to the rest of Saudi Arabia; during summer temperature levels range between 38.5 °C for highs and 29° for lows, while in winter temperature levels range between 29 °C and 21 °C. Humidity levels vary, but they are generally higher in areas near the Red Sea coast (Yahiya, 2012, 422-423).

Geographically, Jazan consists of three main areas: Tihama, which is the coastal plain bordering the Red Sea; Jazan's plateaus, which includes valleys near the Tihama coastal area; and the Sarwat Mountains area. In addition to these areas there are the Farasan Islands, located ashore of Jazan in the Red Sea (Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage, n.d., 40).

Jazan is one of the regions of Saudi Arabia that have a significant developmental potential. It has assets that allow for development in the sectors of agriculture and tourism. Additionally, Jazan is unique for its maritime wealths, thereby providing the region with a significant potential for development in the fishing sector (Al-Thaqafi, 2021).

## **Significance of Jazan as a Tourism Destination**

The tourism industry is considered novel in Saudi Arabia. The country aims to establish a sophisticated tourism industry by exploiting the tourism potential of different regions across the country. One of the most promising regions for tourism in Saudi Arabia today is Jazan. There are many reasons that make Jazan a unique tourist destination in Saudi Arabia.

Jazan is considered one of the prominent tourist destinations in Saudi Arabia. One of the main features of Jazan as a tourist destination is the variety of terrain. This is noticeable in that the area has mountains, valleys, forests, plains, islands, sandy beaches, and mud coasts. Moreover, levees, waterfalls, and springs can also be found in the Jazan area (Yahiya, 2012, 425). Jazan is also notable for having dozens of forests, which are characterized by the diversity of plant and tree species (AL-Asmari & Zeid, 2020, 72). The number of forests is approximately 100, which differ in terms of size and the commonly found species of plants. Jazan is the sixth largest tourist-attracting area in Saudi Arabia. If religious tourism is excluded, it ranks fourth. In the Saudi ecotourism market, Jazan is the second largest destination in the country, only behind the region of Asir (Yahiya, 2012, 425).

Jazan has witnessed growth of ecotourism in recent years. Since 2009, Saudi authorities have been seeking to attract investments into ecotourism, with special focus on Farasan Islands, which are located about 40 km ashore of the city of Jazan. The Saudi government considers the Jazan area as a promising tourism destination, with current development plans aiming to improve Jazan's potential as a destination for coastal, marine, and spa-resort tourism attractions. The efforts of tourism development in the Jazan area are undertaken under the oversight of the Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities (SCTA) through the Jazan provincial Tourism Office. The SCTA plans to develop the Jazan area into a major destination for coastal, marine, and spa-resort tourism in Saudi Arabia. The SCTA has developed a guide with a list of technical specifications for potential investors. The SCTA also maintains close cooperation with the Jazan Municipality (Ayachi & Jaouadi, 2017, 242).

Based on the above, it can be stated that Jazan is gradually receiving more attention as a potential tourist destination. Saudi authorities aim to exploit Jazan's unique characteristics, especially its natural assets. Jazan is unique for the diversity of its natural environments, thereby making it a potential hub for various niches of natural tourism. More importantly, Jazan has the potential to become a major destination for coastal tourism in the Middle East region. However, this requires the consistency of the efforts of Saudi authorities for developing the touristic capabilities of the Jazan region.

## **Tourist Attractions in Jazan**

The significance of the Jazan region as a tourist destination in Saudi Arabia is increasing. This significance is largely attributable to the variety of attractions found in the region. The attractions found in Jazan can be categorized into two main groups, which are natural and man-made attractions. Natural attractions include the natural assets and characteristics of Jazan that attract tourists interested in visiting the Jazan region, while man-made attractions include institutions, facilities, and cultural artifacts that attract tourists.

### ***Natural Attractions***

Jazan is unique for the diversity of its natural touristic assets. It has a diverse terrain topology and different types of natural environments. Moreover, the region is notable for its relatively temperate climate. All these factors make Jazan one of the most unique tourist destinations in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Among the main natural attractions found in Jazan are the Feefa Mountains. The Feefa Mountains are a mountain range located approximately 90 kilometers from the Jazan Airport. These mountains are popular due to their temperate climate and green sceneries, which are a result of the regular raining all year round in the area. The Feefa Mountains are shaped as

circular terraces, which are covered with vegetation (Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage, n.d., 43).

Jazan is also known for its hot water springs, which often attract visitors interested in the therapeutic benefits of hot spring bathing. The most well-known hot water springs in the Jazan area are those located in Bani Malek and Khobah. Water in these hot springs is rich with chemical components such as healthy alpha and gamma radiations. Additionally, the water temperature can reach 45 °C. Therefore, Jazan's hot springs are ideal destinations for tourists who are interested in natural therapies for conditions such as skin diseases and rheumatism (Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage, n.d., 43).

Another prominent natural attraction found in Jazan is the Beesh Beach, which is a destination for tourists interested in water activities. Moreover, sand dunes can be found near the beach (Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage, n.d., 43).

Visitors of Jazan can also visit the Lajab Valley. The Lajab Valley is located approximately 130 kilometers from the Jazan Airport. The valley is 11 kilometers long and was originally formed as a result of a crack in Al-Qahr Mountain, which was a part of the Great Rift Valley (now in Africa) before the formation of the world continents in their current state (Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage, n.d., 43).

The coastal environments are among the most well-known natural attractions of Jazan. Jazan's coastal location has helped it turn into an attractive tourism location in Saudi Arabia. Jazan's share of Saudi Arabia's coastal line along the Red Sea is approximately 200 kilometers. Several beaches are located along Jazan's coastal line, which include Al Shuqaiq Beach to the north and Al Muwasem Beach to the south. This makes Jazan an ideal destination for family tourism. There are resorts located near beaches that provide visitors the ability to practice many water activities, such as fishing trips, boat rides, and watersports. Moreover, many dive centers are located across Jazan's beaches, thereby offering tourists the ability to organize dive trips to explore the underwater world of the Red Sea (Saudi Tourism Authority, 2021).

### ***Man-Made Attractions:***

With regards to man-made attractions in Jazan, they include sites and festivals. One of the main attraction sites in the Jazan area is the Heritage Village of Jazan. The village is located approximately five kilometers from Farasan port. This village provides demonstrations of the cultural heritage of the Jazan area, in addition to that it is the home of a community that still adheres to inherited local traditions and values. It also a meeting point for different topologies of terrain, including coastal and mountainous terrain. The village also offers its visitors the opportunity to witness several aspects of the culture of the local area, such as traditional folklore, cuisine, and handicrafts (Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage, n.d., 42).

Another prominent attraction site in Jazan is the Hafah Tourism Marina, which is located approximately six kilometers from the Jazan Airport. The marina offers tourists a variety of activities, such as trips to islands around Jazan, including Farasan islands, where tourists can enjoy the coastal environment of the Red Sea (Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage, n.d., 43).

Jazan also has a rich repository of heritage and archaeological sites. Table (1) provides a list of the most prominent of these sites in the Jazan region.

**Table (1).** *A List of Prominent Heritage and Archaeological Sites in Jazan (Dwidar, 2020, 68-69).*

Site	Description
The Great Mosque	The mosque's location is in the Abu Arish city. It is approximately 300 years old. It has a large roof that includes 18 domes, and the inner area of the mosque consists of four courts.
Military Castle of Abu Arish	It is a military fortress located in Abu Arish city. The architectural design of the fortress is of a Turkish style. The castle was built using traditional bricks, with walls covered in mortar. This heritage site is estimated to date back to 200-300 years ago.
Location of Sabia	Sabia is a heritage site located to the northeast and near Jazan's coastline. It consists of an old and a new part. Based on evidence from old poems, it is believed that Sabia has existed since even the pre-Islamic era. Archaeological evidence collected near the Red Sea coast shows that the site was constructed during the 12 <sup>th</sup> century.
Al-Dawasri Castle	This castle was built in a mountainous area of Jazan in approximately 1810. It includes four towers and a large courtyard.
Qal'at Al-Atraak (Castle of the Turks)	This heritage site is located in a mountainous area of Jazan. It was originally built as a strategic military fortress, as the fortress provided a wide viewing area of Jazan's coastline. The castle was constructed using solid rocks, with plastic used for covering the inner and outer sides of walls.

In addition to these sites, there is also the Jazan Dam. In fact, the Jazan Dam is one of the main attractions located in the Jazan region (Yahiya, 2012, 425).

Festivals are among the key factors responsible for the growing popularity of Jazan as a tourism destination. Among the most prominent of them are food and beverage festivals. The main food and beverage festivals hosted in the city include the coffee festival, honey festival, festival of mango and tropical fruits, and Alhareed (type of fish) festival (Haressy, 2018, 4). These festivals often attract thousands of visitors. For example, the coffee festival attracts approximately 10,000 visitors, while Alhareed attracts approximately 23,000 visitors. In general, food and beverage festivals in Jazan, and in Saudi Arabia in general, are held during the seasons of harvesting. For example, the festival of mango and tropical fruits is held annually in April, while Alhareed festival is held in March and April. Such festivals play a significant role in attracting tourist waves even during the periods of low tourist activity in Saudi Arabia. Moreover, these festivals have played a major role in mitigating the seasonality of domestic tourism inside Saudi Arabia, as domestic tourism activity is often high during the months of summer. Therefore, the Saudi government has paid attention to supporting food and beverage festivals in order to support tourism in local areas, including in Jazan (Haressy, 2018, 6).

Alhareed Festival is annually held in the Farasan Islands. "Alhareed" is a type of fish that is known globally as "Parrot Fish". The festival is annually held at the timing of Alhareed fish approaching the shores of Farasan Islands. The Mango Festival is held during the month of May, which coincides with the harvest season of Mango in the Jazan area. The Mango Festival is an example of the role of agriculture in supporting tourism in Jazan, as the festival is known for its agricultural exhibitions. In addition to these exhibitions, various entertainment and cultural events are held during the festival. In the Mango Festival, visitors can enjoy the

opportunity to taste different mango varieties, such as Tomi, Kent, Indian, and Jalenn (Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage, n.d., 41-42).

Food and beverage festivals have helped Jazan not only attract domestic tourists, but also those from other countries. For example, the honey festival has helped Jazan establish a reputation among both domestic and international tourists. The coffee festival has also achieved success in that regard, as the festival has become an attraction for coffee experts from many countries around the world, including Guatemala and Germany. Alhareed festival has succeeded in attracting tourists not only domestically, but also regionally and internationally. The festival receives visitors from other countries in the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) region, such as Bahrain, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates, while international visitors come from countries such as the United States, New Zealand, Germany, and France. With regards to the festival of mango and tropical fruits, the majority of its visitors are from locals, and they often come with their families rather than visiting alone (Haessy, 2018, 60-61).

Jazan is also known for its Winter Festival. This festival is held annually in the winter season, particularly in the month of January, which coincides with the mid-year holiday. This festival offers visitors a variety of recreational activities. Visitors can enjoy shopping, cultural events, and a variety of water activities. The climate in Jazan during the month of January is warm, thereby making the Jazan region an attractive tourism location during the winter season (Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage, n.d., 41).

The tourism sector in Jazan is also supported by the presence of handcraft industries. The significance of handcraft industries stems from their role in informing about Jazan's local culture and encouraging the holding of special events that can attract tourists (Zakria & Al Rajihi, 2020, 494).

Based on the above, it can be stated that Jazan is a unique tourist destination in Saudi Arabia. The variety of tourist attractions in Jazan makes it a potential competitive tourist destination in Saudi Arabia. The unique climate and topological characteristics of Jazan provide it with unique natural assets for attracting tourists with different touristic interests, such as the enjoyment of natural scenery and participating in events or activities reliant on those characteristics. Moreover, Saudi authorities and the local community share the interest in holding festivals and events to celebrate Jazan's cultural heritage and local industries.

## **Tourism in Jazan before the COVID-19 Crisis**

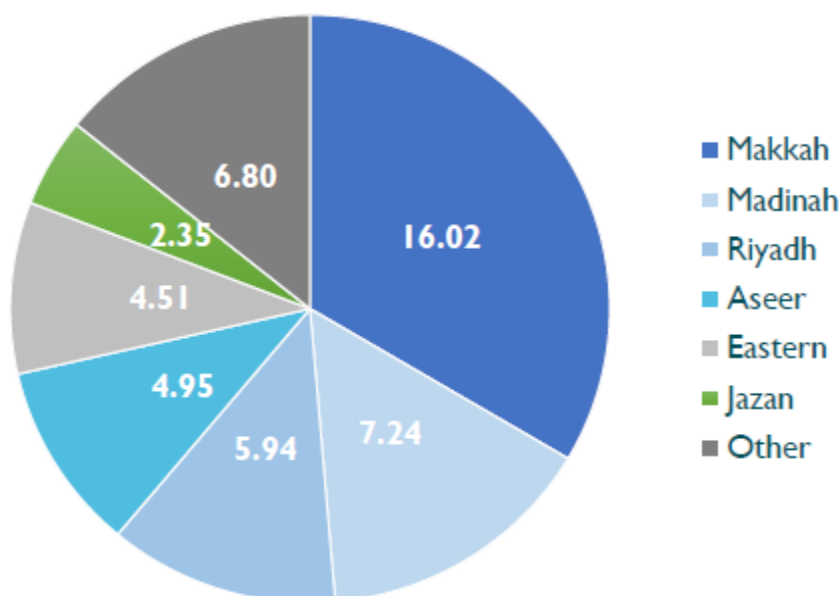
Saudi Arabia is one of the emerging tourism destinations in the world today. Prior to the global outbreak of the COVID-19 crisis, the Saudi government took several measures to establish and develop the local Saudi tourism market, after several decades of having been virtually inexistent due to stringent travel policies implemented by Saudi authorities. In order to understand the state of tourism in Jazan before the COVID-19 crisis, it is of importance to discuss the state of tourism at that time in Saudi Arabia as a whole, while focusing on the major steps taken by the Saudi government to support and nurture the national tourism sector.

In recent years, the Saudi government has spent billions of dollars to support and develop the tourism sector. The tourism sector is a major area of focus for Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, which aims at shifting the Saudi economy from being oil-dependent to becoming more diversified. Supporting the tourism sector is a key objective for achieving that goal of the vision (Raffoul, 2021).

One of the major steps taken by the government to encourage tourism across Saudi Arabia, including in Jazan, was the liberalization of the country's tourism policy in 2019. In accordance to the new reforms, the government facilitated the procedures of acquiring a tourist visa, thereby replacing the stringent policy that had been in place for decades (Al Arabiya, 2021).

The Saudi government launched the tourist visa in September 2019. The government offered several facilitations, including providing the citizens of 49 countries with the ability to complete visa acquisition procedures electronically. Moreover, visitors from the United States, United Kingdom, and European Union can acquire tourist visas upon arrival to Saudi Arabia. These facilitations helped in attracting a large number of tourists prior to the outbreak of the COVID-19 crisis; approximately 400,000 tourist visas were issued during the period between the timing of launching the tourist visa (September 2019) and the outbreak of the crisis (March 2020). The outbreak of the COVID-19 virus in Saudi Arabia halted tourism activity to a stop, as the government banned international travelling (Raffoul, 2021).

Jazan started emerging as a prominent destination for domestic tourism in 2019. However, the proportion of domestic trips to Jazan in 2019 is relatively small compared to that of all other major tourism destinations in Saudi Arabia. Figure (1) illustrates the shares of number of domestic trips for each of the major tourism destinations in Saudi Arabia in 2019.



**Figure (1).** *Distribution of numbers of domestic trips in Saudi Arabia in 2019, by region (Japan External Trade Organization, 2020, 14).*

Figure 1 shows that Jazan had the smallest share of domestic trips of any region in Saudi Arabia, with only 2.35% of the flow of domestic trips in 2019. Jazan significantly lagged behind other major tourism destination in Saudi Arabia, such as Makkah, Madina, and Riyadh, and even neighboring destinations, namely Aseer. The low percentage for Jazan as a tourism destination may be attributable to lacking the competitive capabilities in other destinations, with examples of these competitive capabilities including religious value (as in the cases of Makka and Madina) being a major metropolitan destination (as in the case of Riyadh).

In 2019, Jazan received about 23,000 air flights, transporting about 2.6 visitors (Saudi Press Agency, 2021). According to data published by the Saudi Ministry of Tourism, the total volume of

domestic tourism spending in Jazan reached 2.95 billion SAR (including 2.89 SAR billion from local tourism), while it was only 59 million SAR from inbound tourism (Ministry of Tourism, n.d.). Thus, the level of tourism spending in Jazan was relatively low, given that the total tourism spending of domestic tourists alone across the country during 2019 reached approximately \$61.2 billion (Japan External Trade Organization, 2020, 14). With regard to the number of tourism nights in Jazan, it reached 16.26 million from domestic tourism (including 15.72 million from local tourism), while the number from inbound tourism was only 539,000 (Ministry of Tourism, n.d.).

From the discussion above, it is noticed that Saudi Arabia had exerted major efforts for developing and supporting its national tourism sector over the years preceding the outbreak of the global COVID-19 crisis. The Saudi government was aware of the strategic significance of developing the tourism sector as a part of its strategic vision for national development. However, the COVID-19 crisis has come as an expected blow to the Saudi tourism sector. In order to respond appropriately to the consequences of this crisis on the tourism sector, Saudi authorities have to adopt and implement measures that are in line with the latest standards of prevention and treatment of the COVID-19 disease.

### **Tourism in Jazan during the COVID-19 Crisis**

Beginning from the outbreak of the COVID-19 crisis, bans and restrictions remained in full force and effect until September 2020, when the government announced the resumption of permission of international travel, albeit to a limited extent. On May 17, 2021, the Saudi government announced lifting the ban on outbound travelling from Saudi Arabia to 30 international destinations. However, the government continued imposing the ban on inbound travelling from 17 countries. The government also announced that Saudi citizens who travel to countries placed on the "red list" will be subject to a total ban on all international travelling for three years (Raffoul, 2021).

Despite the serious public threats of the COVID-19 pandemic, Saudi authorities, including those at the local level in Jazan, aim to exploit its unique characteristics for supporting tourism. Dr. Majed Al-Gohary, secretary-general of the Jazan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, stated that Jazan has made remarkable achievements in economic development, in the light of the Saudi Vision 2030, which has left positive impacts on the course of economic development across the country as a whole, but more particularly in the Jazan area. Al-Gohary also highlighted the potential of the Jazan area as a major tourism destination, mainly owing to its unique mountainous areas as well as its variety of natural and topological features, such as desert, plateaus, hills, valleys, islands, and beaches, with a unique diversity of climate, which includes desert, coastal, and mountainous climates. Al-Gohary considers all these factors significant attraction factors for tourists who are interested in visiting the Jazan region for exploiting its heritage and culture (Al-Thaqafi, 2021).

With regards to statistics on tourism in Jazan during the COVID-19 crisis, as of the time of writing this article, the Saudi government has only published data concerning the state of tourism across Saudi Arabia, including Jazan, for the year 2020 only; no reports have been published for the year 2021 as of yet. According to the published data, tourism in 2020 was significantly and negatively affected as a result of the crisis. The total volume of domestic tourism spending in Jazan reached 1.66 billion SAR (including 1.64 billion SAR from local tourism), while it was only 28 million SAR from inbound tourism. The number of tourism nights from domestic tourism reached 12.96 million (including 12.82 million from local tourism), while from inbound tourism the number was only 138,000 (Ministry of Tourism, n.d.).



Based on this data, it is evident that tourism in Jazan was severely affected in 2020 due to the COVID-19 crisis. Domestic tourism spending in Jazan decreased by a staggering 44% compared to the level of 2019, with a near equivalent decrease in local tourism spending. The situation was further exacerbated with regards to inbound tourism spending, with a decrease of about 52.5% during the same period. With regards to the number of tourism nights from domestic tourism, it fell by about 20.3% between 2019 and 2020, with the decrease for local tourism being slightly lower at approximately 18.5%. However, the decrease rate is significantly higher with regards to the number of tourism nights from inbounds tourism, as the rate is approximately 74.4%.

## **Measures Taken by the Saudi Government to Contain the Impacts of the COVID-19 Crisis on the National Tourism Sector**

### ***Travel Bans and Restrictions:***

The outbreak of the COVID-19 crisis has been a major blow to the Saudi tourism sector. In response to the crisis, the Saudi government adopted new measures for controlling the spread of the COVID-19 virus and containing the impact of the crisis on different economic sectors, including the tourism sector.

From the onset of the COVID-19 crisis, the Saudi government has taken rapid measures to contain the spread of the virus across the country. One of these measures pertains to quarantine. The government has reserved thousands of rooms in tourism facilities and hotels across the country to receive international travellers as well as Saudi travellers returning from abroad (Medabesh et al., 2021, 1167).

The designation of quarantine centers across the country has affected the Saudi tourism industry, including in Jazan, significantly. This is largely attributable to the government's decision to designate thousands of hotels as isolation centers. As a result, inbound tourists who are suspected of being infected with the COVID-19 virus are isolated in hotels with accordance to safety guidelines proposed by the World Health Organization. The Saudi Ministry of Health and the National Center for Disease Prevention coordinate their efforts to maintain compliance with these guidelines (Medabesh et al., 2021, 1169).

On July 30, 2021, the Saudi government has introduced new measures for easing travel restrictions, in an effort to support the national tourism industry. The Ministry of Tourism has permitted foreign tourists to enter the country, thereby lifting a 17-month international travel ban. However, this ban lift applies only to tourists who have received certified full vaccination prior to entering the country, provided that they have also undergone a PCR test within 72 hours prior to arrival, with the result being negative. Moreover, tourists must register these details at competent health authorities (AFP, 2021).

However, as of September 2021, there is still a suspension imposed upon the entrance of visitors from a list of countries in which the status of the COVID-19 pandemic remains unstable. These countries are Vietnam, Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Indonesia, India, Egypt, Pakistan, Lebanon, Turkey, and Brazil (Saudi Arabian Airlines, 2021).

It is noteworthy that the Saudi government has lifted all restrictions and bans imposed on domestic flights, thereby facilitating movement for domestic tourists. All public transportation modes as well as from and to ports or airports operate with no restrictions.

However, wearing a face mask at all time is mandatory. Preventive measures are also implemented without any relaxations (TravelBans, 2021).

***Public Health and Safety Regulations:***

The Saudi government has imposed a list of preventive measures with accompanying penalties for failing to comply. These measures pertain to several phases of the travelling journey, including before, during, and after visiting Saudi Arabia. With regards to the preventive measures implemented before travelling to Saudi Arabia, they include the following (Saudi Arabian Airlines, 2021):

1. Any visitor diagnosed with the COVID-19 virus or having contacted another person diagnosed with the virus must inform competent health authorities in the country of origin and not travel to Saudi Arabia until the passage of at least 14 days from the timing of the contact. Violations of these requirements are subject to fines, which can be as high as (500,000) Saudi Riyal, in addition to incurring the responsibility for the effects/damages resulting from the violations on others.
2. Undergoing PCR tests within the timeframe specified by the Saudi government is mandatory, as the results of the PCR test are a proof of the COVID-19 infection status. Failing to meet this requirement results in the denial of entry to Saudi Arabia.

International travellers are required to provide a proof of results of a negative PCR test carried out by a certified test laboratory. However, the period between having the PCR test and arriving to Saudi Arabia should not exceed 72 hours. Checking temperature is an obligatory procedure for all arriving travellers. Moreover, all guests visiting Saudi Arabia must also undergo a routine PCR test within 24 hours from the timing of arrival and also on the seventh day from the timing of arrival (TravelBans, 2021).

All international visitors arriving to Saudi Arabia are required to undergo an institutional quarantine, at the visitor's own expense, for a period of seven days, starting from the time of arrival to the country. Institutional quarantine can be completed at the quarantine facilities approved by the Saudi government. Leaving quarantine is not permitted unless the results of both tests are negative. These guidelines do not apply to children aged 8 or under (Saudi Arabian Airlines, 2021). It is important to note that travellers who have been vaccinated prior to arriving to Saudi Arabia are not subject to the institutional quarantine measures, but they are required to show a certificated proving the vaccination status (TravelBans, 2021).

It is mandatory to have a vaccine certificate that is officially certified by the authority undertaking the vaccination process in the tourist's home country. The period spanning between the timing of receiving the last dose and arrival to Saudi Arabia must be at least 14 days. Carrying vaccine certificates at all times is mandatory for all visitors, otherwise officially adopted mobile applications must be used to prove the health status. Failure to adhere to these guidelines results in the tourist becoming subject to legal liabilities (Saudi Arabian Airlines, 2021).

The Saudi authorities have also imposed preventive measures for responding to threats of infection upon visitors' arrival. These measures include the following (Saudi Arabian Airlines, 2021):

1. Upon the detection of any respiratory symptoms (e.g., shortness of breath, coughing, or fever), the visitor is required to report to competent Health Control Centers.

2. Visitors are required, at points of entry, to sign documents required by competent health authorities regarding the reporting of respiratory symptoms.
3. Visitors must download all the applications required by competent health authorities and register their data using these applications.
3. Failure to comply with the aforementioned measures subjects violators to penalties, with accordance to the "Health Control at Points of Entry Regulation". Fines imposed on violators can reach (500,000) Saudi Riyals, in addition to incurring the responsibility for the effects/damages resulting from the violations on others.

After entry into Saudi Arabia, visitors are required to maintain adherence to a set of preventive measures, which include the following (Saudi Arabian Airlines, 2021):

1. A visitor must adhere to the quarantine measures (e.g., time, location) which are outlined in the documents signed by the visitor. The penalties imposed in response to violations of these requirements include fines not exceeding (200,000) Saudi Riyals and/or imprisonment for up to two years. Imposed penalties are doubled in the case of repeated violation.
2. After the completion of the quarantine measures, visitors must maintain adherence to the following measures:
  - a. Social distancing. Failure to comply with the social distancing requirements is penalized with fines of up to (1,000) Saudi Riyals. Violations of social distancing requirements include not maintaining adequate distance from others, not wearing a face mask, refusing to undergo routine temperature screening upon entrance to buildings, and refusing to adhere to standard protocols for responding to fever. Imposed penalties are doubled in the case of repeated violation.
  - b. Visitors are required to avoid crowded social gatherings or invite someone else to such gatherings. The penalty for this violation is a fine of (10,000) Saudi Riyals. Imposed penalties are doubled in the case of repeated violation.
  - c. Visitors must maintain proper hygiene behaviors, such as regular washing of hands using water and soap and also the use of sanitization.
3. Upon the appearance of symptoms suggesting the infection with the COVID-19 virus, the visitor must call competent health authorities on the hotline number (937) and adhere to all of the measures necessary for protecting others from potential infection.

On August 1, 2021, the Saudi government has issued new guidelines for the protection against the spread of the COVID-19 virus. These guidelines are mandatory for all international tourists visiting Saudi Arabia (Saudi Arabian Airlines, 2021):

1. The disclosure of the immunization status is mandatory upon arrival. According to the Saudi Public Health Authority, a person is considered "immune" if they have the mobile application Tawakkalna installed and showing any of the following in their status data:
  - a. Having undergone complete vaccination against COVID-19, with two vaccine doses having been received.
  - b. Having received the first vaccine within the previous 14 days (or more).
  - c. Having recovered from a COVID-19 infection within the previous 6 months.
2. With the exception of those under the age of 12, all visitors are required to have an "immune" status, as per shown in the application, in order to be permitted to use air transportation domestically.
3. Residents are required to have an "immune" status, as per shown in the application, in order to be permitted to enter airports and travel abroad.

4. Those with the status of "not infected", as per shown in the application, are not allow to enter airports or travel.

The Saudi government has provided a list of guidelines for responding to the cases of international travellers arriving from countries impacted by the travel suspension. The government has specified certain procedures for various categories of inbound travellers. With regards to foreign travellers with an "immune" status, they must present the results of a PCR test conducted within 72 hours before arrival to Saudi Arabia; however, upon arrival, no PCR or institutional quarantine procedures are required (Saudi Arabian Airlines, 2021).

In order to achieve the success of implementing the aforementioned measures to respond to the COVID-19 situation, the Saudi government maintains close cooperation with its partners in various sectors in order to work jointly toward maintaining the safety of tourists' return to visiting Saudi Arabia (Naar, 2021).

## **Vaccination**

All international visitors, except citizens of the GCC countries, and citizens and residents of Saudi Arabia, are required to have medical insurance covering the costs of receiving medical treatment for COVID-19 in medical units such as hospitals, emergencies, and outpatient clinics, including the costs of quarantine measures. Moreover, inbound travellers must provide a proof of receiving COVID-19 vaccination including the following vaccines (Saudi Arabian Airlines, 2021):

1. Pfizer BioNTech vaccine (2 doses).
2. Oxford AstraZeneca vaccine (2 doses).
3. Moderna vaccine (2 doses).
4. Johnson Johnson's Janssen vaccine (1 dose).

In certain cases, visitors who have received doses of other vaccines may be allowed to enter Saudi Arabia. For example, visitors who have received complete vaccination (2 doses) of the Sinopharma or Sinovac vaccines, given that they have received another dose of one of the vaccines approved by the Saudi government, are allowed entry into Saudi Arabia (Saudi Arabian Airlines, 2021).

The Saudi government has also imposed a requirement that all vaccine certificates be officially certified by the health authorities in the countries in which the certificates were originally issued. Moreover, all visitors are required to carry certificates during their stay at all times, with legal penalties imposed in the case of failure to comply (Saudi Arabian Airlines, 2021).

With regards to residents returning to the country with the vaccination status being not immune, undergoing standard institutional quarantine procedures is mandatory. PCR tests are also required on the first and the seventh day from the time of arrival. Moreover, as with travellers with an "immune" status, non-immune travellers are required to have undergone a negative PCR test within 72 hours before the timing of arrival (Department of Foreign Affairs (Ireland), 2021).

The acceleration of vaccination across Saudi Arabia is a major effort by the Saudi government toward rejuvenating the national tourism industry. This is especially so in the light of the fact that the government is preparing for hosting a variety of entertainment and sports events. Not only does the government direct its attention toward rejuvenating inbound

international tourism, but it is also much interested in supporting domestic tourism. In general, the government exerts major efforts to provide vaccination to citizens and residents to protect public health and facilitate people's movement. As a result, as of late July 2021, the government has administered approximately 26 million jabs locally, with much more required to fully serve the needs of the country's population of 35 million. Beginning from August 1, 2021, receiving vaccination has become a mandatory requirement for entering all establishments in Saudi Arabia of both the private and public sectors, which include public transportation, entertainment venues, and educational institutions (AFP, 2021).

## **Technology-Reliant Measures**

The Saudi government has imposed several measures to emphasize visitors' self-monitoring of their own health status. All visitors are required to download and install the Tawakkalna and Tatamman mobile applications. Visitors are also required to designate their home locations using the Tatamman application within eight hours from the timing of arrival to Saudi Arabia. They are also required to use the Tatamman application for performing a health assessment daily. Moreover, visitors are required to constantly self-monitor their own health status to identify any signs of infection with the COVID-19 virus. Upon the suspicion of detecting COVID-19 symptoms, the visitor must call the hotline number 937 or head to the nearest healthcare firm (e.g., primary healthcare center, emergency department) to receive proper medical treatment (Saudi Arabian Airlines, 2021).

All visitors to Saudi Arabia, regardless of the immunization status, are required to fill out a "Registration Immunization Information Form" through the Muqem website. Through this website, users can register the required data and use the Tawakkalna application (Saudi Arabian Airlines, 2021).

Upon arriving to Saudi Arabia, all visitors are required to register their data pertaining to vaccination through the electronic portal "Muqem". Visitors are also required to use the "Tawakkalna" mobile application for registering their data. The use of this application is also a mandatory requirement for entering public places, given that vaccination has already been received. A vaccination status is considered approved if two doses have been received of one of the vaccines of Moderna, AstraZeneca, and Pfizer or one dose of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine. All of the aforementioned vaccines are approved by the Saudi government (Naar, 2021).

The Tawakkalna application is a major effort by Saudi authorities for facilitating movement and procedures for travellers to Saudi Arabia. The application is used to show the tourist's vaccination status. If the application shows that the traveller is "immune", there is no need for undergoing routine institutional quarantine procedures or taking a PCR test upon arrival. However, it remains mandatory to have undergone a PCR test with negative results within 72 hours before the timing of arrival (Department of Foreign Affairs (Ireland), 2021).

The preceding discussion shows that the Saudi government has been keen on adopting and implementing appropriate solutions for responding to the substantial crisis resulting from the spread of the COVID-19 virus. The discussion shows that tourism has been one of the economic sectors impacted the most by the COVID-19 crisis, as many of the measures adopted by the Saudi government to contain the spread of the virus revolve specifically around regulating travelling and movement. As of the time of writing this paper, the Saudi government is exerting much effort to rejuvenate the Saudi tourism sector. The government is taking gradual steps in that regard, and that is in order to balance between public health necessities and the requirements for stimulating and reviving the national tourism sector. These measures,

if managed properly, can help in reviving tourism in the Jazan region, which has been deeply impacted by the COVID-19 crisis.

## **Conclusion**

The present paper has discussed the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on tourism in Jazan, Saudi Arabia. Topics discussed in the paper have included an overview of Jazan, significance of Jazan as a tourism destination, tourist attractions in Jazan, tourism in Jazan before the COVID-19 crisis, tourism in Jazan during the COVID-19 crisis, measures taken by the Saudi government to contain the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on the national tourism sector.

The discussions in this paper have shown that tourism in Jazan has been significantly affected by the global COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic situation has forced governments, including that of Saudi Arabia, to adopt new measures for protecting public health and safety, but with some unfavorable repercussions on the tourism sector. The extent to which these measures are further going to affect the tourism sector in the Jazan region is still unknown, as the future of the COVID-19 pandemic is surrounded by ambiguity regarding several aspects, such as virus evolution, variants, vaccination, treatment, etc. These challenges place unprecedented pressures on policymakers in Saudi Arabia, as they have to strike a balance between the protection of public health in the country and taking the necessary measures to support the national tourism sector, especially in remote areas such as Jazan.

In the light of the discussions in the study, the author proposes a number of suggestions for research and practice:

- Suggestions for Further Research:
  - Conducting cross-sectional research on the Saudi context to compare the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on different major tourism destinations across the country.
  - Investigating international examples of how different countries responded to the COVID-19 crisis in addressing the dilemma of protecting public health while supporting the national tourism industry.
- Implications for Practice:
  - Policymakers in Saudi Arabia should investigate new solutions for facilitating inbound and domestic tourism without undermining efforts to protect public health.
  - Saudi authorities should keep abreast of the latest achievements and advancement in developing vaccines and treatments for the COVID-19 virus in order to devise improved tourism strategies under the pandemic situation.

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