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Middle East and North Africa Leisure & Attractions Council

VENDOR TALK – FEBRUARY 2025

CULTURAL INTEGRATION IN ATTRACTIONS: BRIDGING HERITAGE AND MODERN TOURISM IN SAUDI ARABIA

An article by: **SEA**
EXPO

Introduction

The words of renowned author Steve Berry, famed for his understanding of history and culture, ring true today more so than ever before: "A concerted effort to preserve our heritage is a vital link to our cultural, educational, aesthetic, inspirational, and economic legacies - all of the things that quite literally make us who we are." His insight is particularly relevant to Saudi Arabia's efforts in preserving the kingdom's cultural heritage while promoting economic growth and becoming a globally renowned, vibrant entertainment hub.

The entertainment and leisure industries face several consequential challenges. One primary obstacle is keeping content relevant and fresh amid rapidly changing consumer preferences. As audiences increasingly seek immersive and interactive experiences, curators must innovate continuously to capture attention.



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Additionally, rising costs associated with event production and logistics can strain budgets, making it essential for designers to find cost-effective solutions without compromising quality. In response to these challenges, Saudi Arabia actively instills a vibrant leisure and entertainment ecosystem.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) is investing heavily in large-scale entertainment projects that this article will touch on, including the Red Sea Project and NEOM, which aim to create unique attractions that draw both local and international visitors.



Red Sea Project, Saudi Arabia

Cultural integration, heritage, and storytelling in attraction design transcend trends. In fact, when one considers them, they are a fundamental strategy that enriches visitor experiences and fosters community pride.

In the Kingdom, these principles reinforce the goals of Vision 2030 to position the nation as a global hub for entertainment and tourism. By intertwining local culture, heritage, and storytelling into the fabric of attractions, designers create environments that resonate deeply with audiences while advancing economic and social benefits. Enhancing visitor experiences is one of those benefits.



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Enhancing Visitor Experiences Through Cultural Integration

Believe it or not, visual appeal is merely the first step in attracting visitors. Attractions incorporating local culture into their designs captivate audiences by providing immersive storytelling experiences that connect visitors to the soul of the place or event they are attending.

The renowned Diriyah Gate, the birthplace of the first Saudi state, is being revitalised as a cultural destination featuring museums, arts districts, and historical tours. Visitors can engage with guided narratives highlighting Diriyah's pivotal role in Saudi history, creating a profound connection to the Kingdom's heritage.

Similarly, Qiddiya, an entertainment megaproject near Riyadh, integrates traditional Saudi arts and crafts into its design. Through live performances and interactive exhibits, Qiddiya offers visitors an authentic glimpse into the Kingdom's cultural richness while positioning itself as a world-class leisure destination



Diriyah Gate, Diriyah, Saudi Arabia

Cultural narratives transform sites into immersive experiences that leave visitors with a deep appreciation of the heritage they encounter. With an entertainment and leisure market worth over 64 billion USD, KSA's commitment to catalysing the success of the entertainment industry is clear. Furthermore, cultural integration is integral to preserving heritage and educating audiences.

Preserving Heritage and Educating Audiences

Attractions in Saudi Arabia serve as custodians of heritage by embedding cultural narratives into their design. For example, The King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture (Ithra) celebrates Saudi traditions through art exhibitions, workshops, and storytelling events, preserving local customs through education.

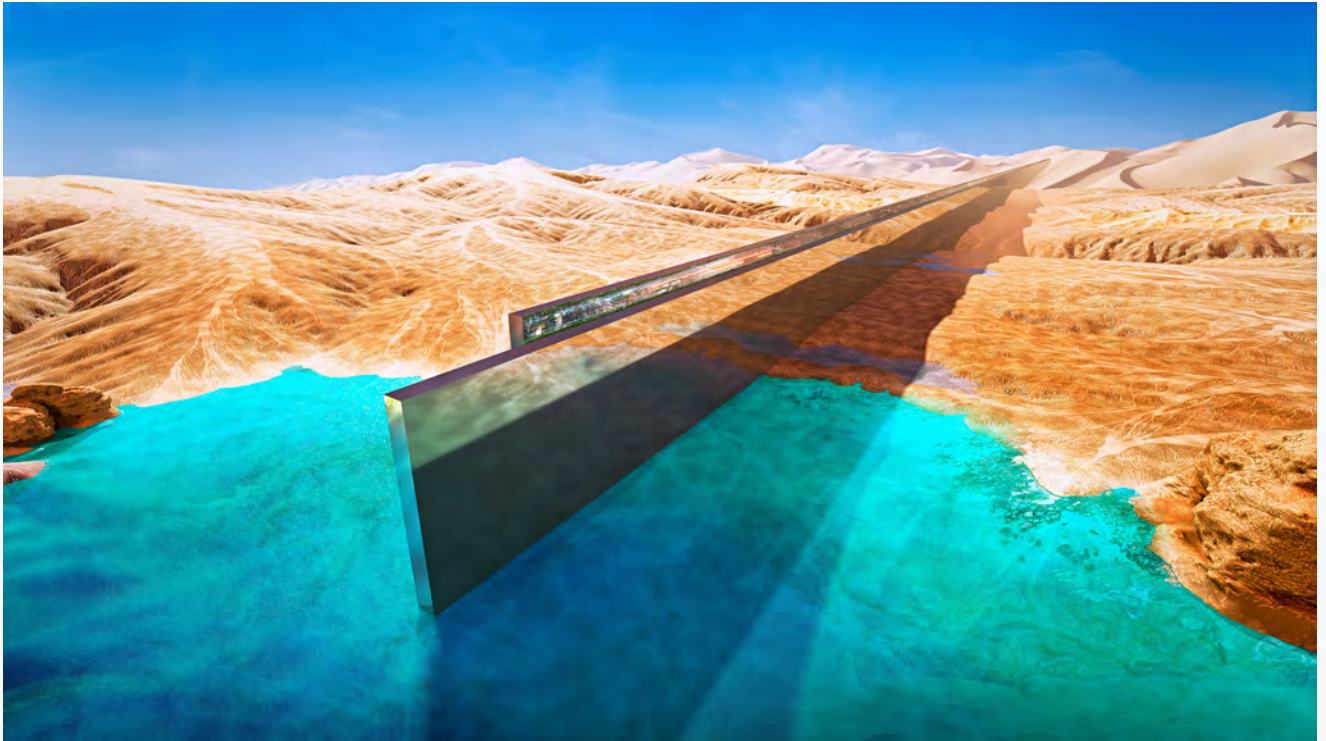


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We cannot discuss heritage and culture without discussing the benefits of integrating culture into our tourism spaces.



The Line, Neom, Saudi Arabia

Driving Economic Benefits Through Cultural Tourism

Attractions rooted in local culture imbue community pride while driving economic growth. Riyadh Season and Jeddah Season exemplify how cultural festivals can blend local traditions with entertainment, attracting millions of visitors and significantly boosting the economy. Mega projects like NEOM contribute to economic development by blending Bedouin traditions with leading technology. This progressive approach appeals to global audiences while supporting local communities through job creation and infrastructure development.



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Advancing Community Pride and Identity



Maraya, AlUla, Saudi Arabia

When attractions reflect local culture and heritage, they instil pride within communities. For example, AlUla, home to ancient Nabatean tombs and rock art sites, has been transformed into a cultural tourism hotspot. Guided tours are micro events that emphasise AlUla's historical significance while celebrating its unique place in Saudi identity.

Festivals like Winter at Tantora amplify community pride by showcasing traditional music, crafts, and cuisine. Saudi Entertainment and Amusement (SEA) Expo's entertainment and amusement facilities grant access to solutions catering to the demands for family-friendly venues and experiences. The beauty of these events is that while they attract international tourists, they also strengthen local identity by celebrating the Kingdom's rich heritage.

Sustainable Development Through Cultural Integration

Incorporating local culture into attraction design supports sustainable development by ensuring heritage remains relevant for future generations. NEOM integrates sustainability principles with cultural preservation, creating immersive experiences honouring regional traditions while appealing to modern tourists.

Similarly, Diriyah Gate blends preservation with innovation by revitalising historic areas into vibrant cultural hubs. Another way of preserving heritage in attraction design is, of course, storytelling.



The Line, Neom, Saudi Arabia



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The Role of Storytelling in Attraction Design

Over the past decade, the world has been centred on storytelling, and for good reason. Before the art and joy of writing, entire histories were passed down orally. It's in our very nature to tell stories, and storytelling is the cornerstone of effective attraction design, providing a medium through which cultural narratives come to life. Attractions like Qiddiya use interactive storytelling through its unique themes - zones inspired by Saudi Arabia's culture and heritage. By prioritising authenticity and relevance, these initiatives ensure visitors have a lasting appreciation for Saudi Arabia's unique cultural identity.

Engaging Regional Audiences: Authenticity and Relevance



SEA Expo 2024, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Attractions must focus on authenticity to resonate with regional audiences. Riyadh Season skilfully incorporates elements of traditional Saudi hospitality alongside modern entertainment offerings. This blend appeals to domestic visitors seeking familiarity and international tourists eager for authentic experiences.

Platforms like SEA Expo serve as pivotal spaces for industry collaboration, the ultimate hub for entertainment and leisure industry professionals, offering unparalleled opportunities to elevate their attractions. By bringing together global leaders, innovators, and visionaries, SEA Expo facilitates collaboration and knowledge sharing.

Attendees can explore industry-advancing technologies, discover emerging trends, and network with key stakeholders. The Expo reinforces the Kingdom's leadership in addressing global challenges and advancing development in entertainment and leisure.



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SEA Expo 2024, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia is at the forefront of leveraging cultural integration to transform its entertainment landscape, enabling the growth and success of its attractions industry and encouraging the embedding of cultural narratives into attraction design. Through initiatives like Diriyah Gate, Qiddiya, NEOM, and Riyadh Season—alongside platforms such as SEA Expo—the kingdom is redefining itself as a global hub for leisure and

KSA is undoubtedly positioning itself as a global leader in entertainment ingenuity while imparting a deep sense of national pride and driving sustainable economic growth within the GCC region.

As we wrap up our exploration of cultural integration in attraction design, a single truth emerges: merging heritage, storytelling, and culture into your design results in artfully curated spaces. It also builds bridges across time and communities, ensuring heritage remains vibrant and relevant while we create authentic and memorable spaces.

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As a child, Sarkis' dreams were filled with visions of writing for television comedy, imagining himself crafting sketches for legendary shows like Saturday Night Live. Though life took him in a different direction, his passion for humour and storytelling continues to shape every endeavour he undertakes.



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Saudi Entertainment & Amusement (SEA) Expo



The Saudi Entertainment and Amusement (SEA) Expo is the premier platform for the entertainment and leisure industry in the GCC. SEA Expo aligns with Vision 2030's objectives to position Saudi Arabia as a global hub for entertainment and tourism. With significant investments in mega projects like Qiddiya, Diriyah Gate, and NEOM, the Kingdom is transforming into a world-class destination for leisure and recreation.

As the largest event of its kind in the region, SEA Expo facilitates networking, collaboration, and innovation by bringing together key decision-makers, industry experts, and solution providers. It serves as a gateway for international businesses looking to tap into the lucrative opportunities presented by Saudi Arabia's rapidly evolving entertainment landscape



Visit www.saudientertainmentexpo.com for more information