

## Role of DSF in the field of active tourism development in Dubai

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### Abstract:

*The Dubai Shopping Festival (DSF) has become an integral component of the tourism industry in the UAE and it has a positive impact on Dubai tourism. This study has aimed to identify the role of DSF in the field of active tourism development in Dubai.*

*In the coming years, the festival will continue to gain strength, to make Dubai one of the world's must-visit family attractions.*

**Key words:** Dubai Shopping Festival (DSF), Tourism Industry.

### Origin, History & Overview of DSF

The Dubai Shopping Festival (DSF), known in Arabic as '*Layali Dubai*', was launched in February 15, 1996 by the Dubai government under the directives of His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, UAE Vice-President, Prime Minister, and Ruler of Dubai as a retail event aimed to revitalize retail trade in Dubai, United Arab Emirates and to stimulate the economic and tourism sectors in the city. The inaugural DSF attracted around 1.6 million shopping crazy crowd from across the world (Mydsf, 2009).

It has since been promoted as a tourist attraction to position Dubai as a leading tourist destination and since then it

has become an annual shopping, entertainment, and cultural extravaganza that continues to promote tourism in Dubai and draws people from around the world each year. This yearly month long event is usually scheduled during the first quarter of the year, attracting about 3 million people to Dubai. Drawing upon the age-old mercantile traditions of the Emirate and the variety of influences of its multi-ethnic population, DSF was the first initiative of its kind in the region, and proved to be highly and instant success with young and old alike. It also laid the foundation stone for the close cooperation between the government and the private sectors and was the catalyst for many successful public private partnerships (Wells, R., 2007). According to Anwar and Sohail (2004) UAE is perceived to be a shopping haven and it attracts the largest number of tourists.

Dubai Shopping Festival has become a global attraction today and a distinguished landmark in the global festivals calendar, offering the best in shopping, winning and family entertainment.

DSF, the largest shopping and entertainment extravaganza in the Middle East for 20 years running, it's the longest running festival of its kind in the world. DSF has had around 35 million visitors since 1996, which have spent close to Dh74 billion in shopping malls, airlines, hotels and entertainment outlets (Khaleej Times, 2010).

The number of tourists who have visited Dubai during DSF in 1996 was 1.6 million who spent AED 2.15 billion in shopping during the festival (Saleem 2010). The year 2009 saw 3.35 million tourist arrivals with tourist spending at AED 9.8 billion (Saleem 2010). A growth 109% in arrivals and 390% in tourist spending in a time span of fourteen years only reiterates the synergy between shopping as a tourism activity and the retail sector.

The DSF theme of 'One World, One Family, One Festival' is a reflection of the event's universal appeal and attracts millions of visitors every year from all over the world

(Gulf News, 2010). The 2016 Dubai Shopping Festival is expected to give much needed boost to Dubai tourism industry and the retail sector.

During the Dubai Shopping Festival exciting activities for the entire family go on throughout the various areas of Dubai. The main focal point of the festival is the Global Village, as it is where the international community gather together to display their culture and heritage through exhibitions of traditional handicrafts, clothing, music, and dance. This location is said to be more ideally positioned, as it is intended to be easily accessible to people who would be visiting from the nearby emirates of Abu Dhabi and Sharjah.

## **DSF 2015**

The 20th edition of DSF, which commenced on January 1, was organized by the Dubai Festivals and Retail Establishment (DFRE), an agency of the Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing (DTCM). As the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition of the DSF concludes its "Journey of Celebrations" on February 1, it is clear that the region's most popular and visited festival remains a central pillar in promoting Dubai around the world. Festival organisers and its partners, the wider retail environment, are acutely aware of the pivotal role the event has played in taking Dubai's extraordinary story and 43-year-old journey to every corner of the globe. (Khaleej Times, 2015a). DSF has attracted a staggering 56 million visitors spending a total of AED 145 billion during its first 19 editions (Khaleej Times, 2015a).

DSF has become a vital pillar of that branding success alongside other organisations like Emirates airline, iconic hotels and buildings such as Burj Khalifa and Burj Al Arab, state of the art shopping malls and fantastic transport infrastructure. (Khaleej Times, 2015b).

Numerous residents and visitors of various ages and nationalities have the opportunity to experience more than 150 citywide events, mega attractions, and numerous shopping and mega raffle winning opportunities across the length of the festival. DSF 2015 also saw Dubai accomplishing another Guinness World record, this time for the longest handmade gold chain in the world, aptly called the 'Dubai Celebration Chain.' (Khaleej Times, 2015b).

The exciting agenda featured a diverse array of activities held under five themes: 'Journey Into Style', 'Journey Into the Unique', 'Journey Into Entertainment', 'Journey Into Winning' and 'Journey Into Music'(Mydsf,2015).

Celebrating its 20th anniversary in 2015, the Dubai Shopping Festival (DSF) is the largest shopping and entertainment extravaganza in the Middle East. Drawing visitors from across the globe, DSF kicks off Dubai's calendar of events each year with a wide variety of events, activities and promotions. From international concerts, musicals and shows, to sports, outdoor, and fashion events, Dubai Shopping Festival caters to every age segment.

### **Major challenges faced by the DSF organizers**

DSF's emergence as a special interest tourist attraction is an outcome of prevailing political, economic, socio-cultural, geographical and historical structures and processes, which have determined its tourism and non-tourism assets. Dubai has enjoyed a six-year boom as a financial and tourism hub but a few years consumer appetite has been battered by the global economic downturn. Over the years, the annual festival, seen as a key barometer of Dubai's economy, has been popular both with tourists and the country's resident population, lured by the emirate's tax-free status and glitzy mega malls. Dubai has benefited from internal peace and stability and active tourism promotion around the world. Collectively, these forces have

allowed investment in the transport, accommodation and attraction sectors and vigorous marketing campaigns, which have assisted in rectifying original deficiencies in tourism resources, amenities and access.

Dubai has thus taken advantage of the strengths it has and attempted to dismantle or surmount the barriers to development faced. Several obstacles have still to be fully overcome, yet must be scaled if the momentum is to be maintained and targets reached. There are even some doubts about whether such attainment is desirable given possible adverse impacts, which could represent further hurdles to sustainable long-term growth.

Global financial crisis in 2009 and 2010, resulted a drop in tourist numbers has contributed to sluggish sales (The Age Traveller, 2009). Hotel occupancy rates have dropped down by 25 percent and hotels have been forced to slash their rates. But the UAE is managed to accelerate the economic growth through tourism in subsequent years.

## **Research Methodology**

The method adopted in the study is mostly of descriptive. This qualitative study involved analyses of various literature searches and observations. This study identifies the role of DSF in the field of active tourism development in Dubai through the analyses of various literature searches and observations.

## **Findings**

DSF was not just about shopping and retail, which has traditionally been a strong growth sector of Dubai.

Shopping scored the most positive effect on Dubai's personality. The DSF has become an integral component of the tourism industry in the UAE and it has a positive impact on Dubai tourism. This study shows that from a tourist's

perspective there is a close relationship between all tourism related facilities and shopping at one destination.

This study observed that shopping is a favourite activity for most visitors to Dubai. Dubai faces competition from its neighbours, who are also promoting shopping festivals with the aim of attracting tourists. The development of festival tourism industry can enhance the image of Dubai as a shopping haven and a leading tourist attraction in the Middle East.

In many ways, the relevance of DSF goes beyond its success as a shopping and entertainment event. It underlined for the first time Dubai's can-do ability to host large-scale events, which is now reiterated with the successful bid to host the World Expo 2020 (Khaleej Times, 2014)

Both the public sector and the private sector, through their active participation shaped DSF as a spectacular success and enhanced the Infrastructural development of Dubai. The active participation of the region's corporate sector has been a primary reason for the festival's continued success, and lined up a wide array of exciting promotions and offers for all DSF shoppers.

Right from the branding of the festival to the array of activities planned, the focus, from the inception of DSF, was on positioning Dubai as a family destination and in highlighting the cosmopolitan outlook of the city. Now in its 20th year the Dubai Shopping Festival is one of the best-loved events in the city. Famous around the world for offering up brilliant discounts, amazing promotions and world class entertainment it is a tourist attraction bringing visitors from all over the world to the city. (Mydsf, 2015)

## **Conclusion**

As the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition of the Dubai Shopping Festival conclude its Journey of Celebrations” on February 1, it is clear

that the region's most popular and visited festival remains a central pillar in promoting Dubai around the world.

In the coming years, the festival will continue to gain strength, leveraging Dubai's central location and enhanced airline connectivity, and the fantastic growth of its shopping mall sector, to be the world's must-visit family attraction.

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