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الغطاء النباتي ومكافحة التصحر  
National Center for Vegetation Cover  
Development & Combating Desertification



وزارة البيئة والمياه والزراعة  
Ministry of Environment Water & Agriculture



# Ecotourism Concept Master Plans and Investment Opportunities for Saudi Arabia National Parks



Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations  
–Riyadh, 2022



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المملكة العربية السعودية



# Ecotourism Concept Master Plans and Investment Opportunities for Saudi Arabia National Parks

## Study Findings of Al Madinah Al Monawarah and Asir Region National Parks (2018-2019)

Presented to FAO - P.M.U by: Steve Kamerino  
On 4<sup>th</sup> April 2022

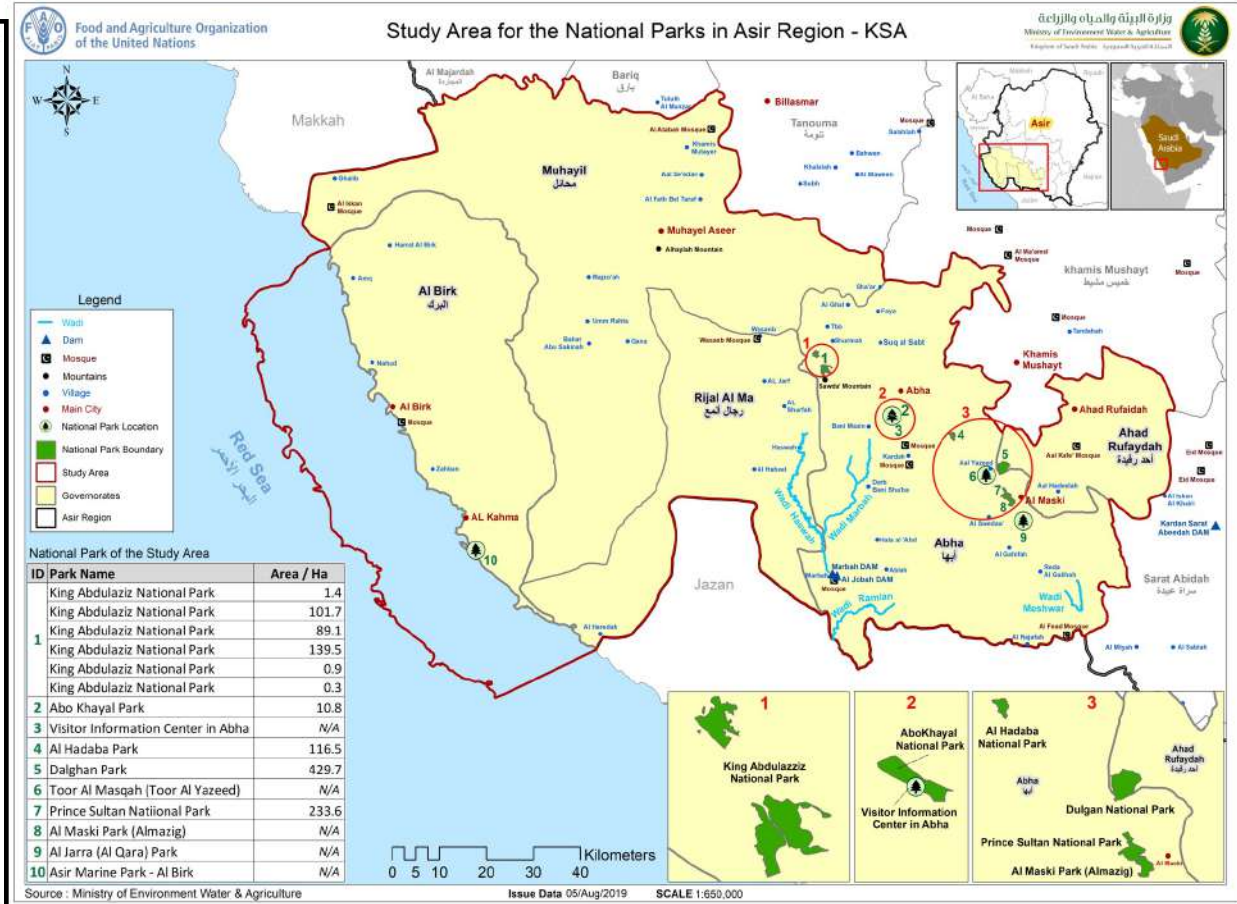
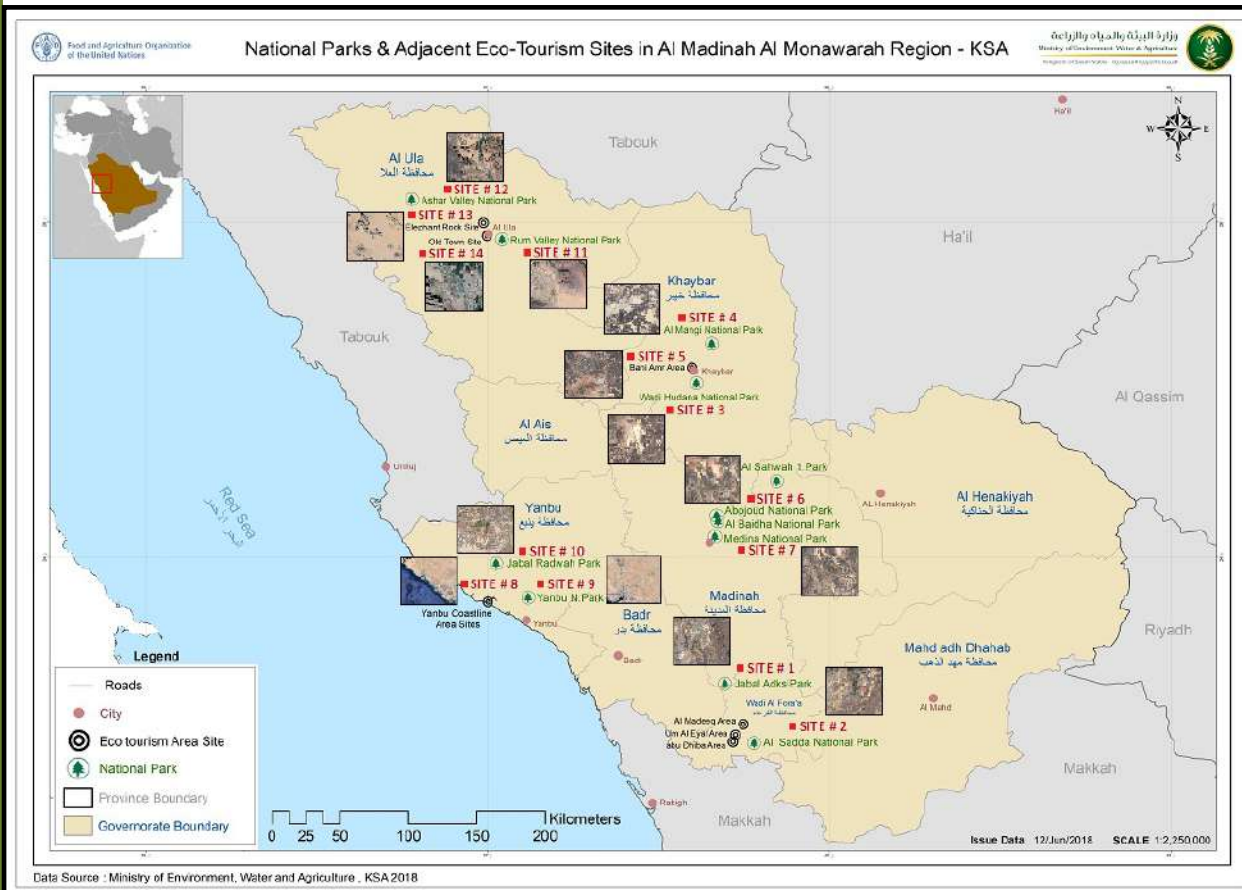
### Project Team

**AbdulKarim Al Howaish-Socio-Economic Expert**

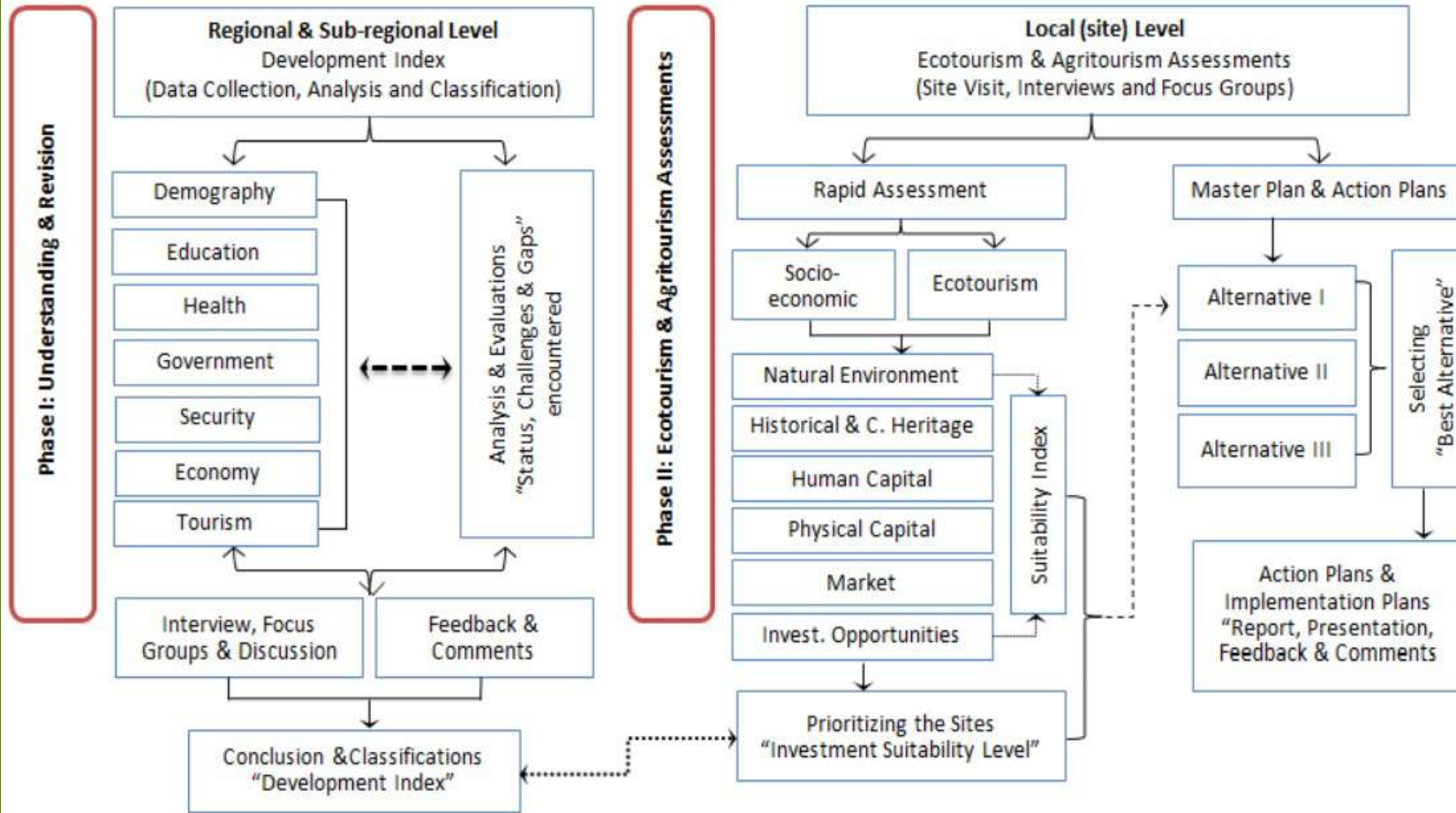
**Tony Charters A.M –Ecotourism Expert**

**Steve Kamerino – National Parks Planning and Development Expert**

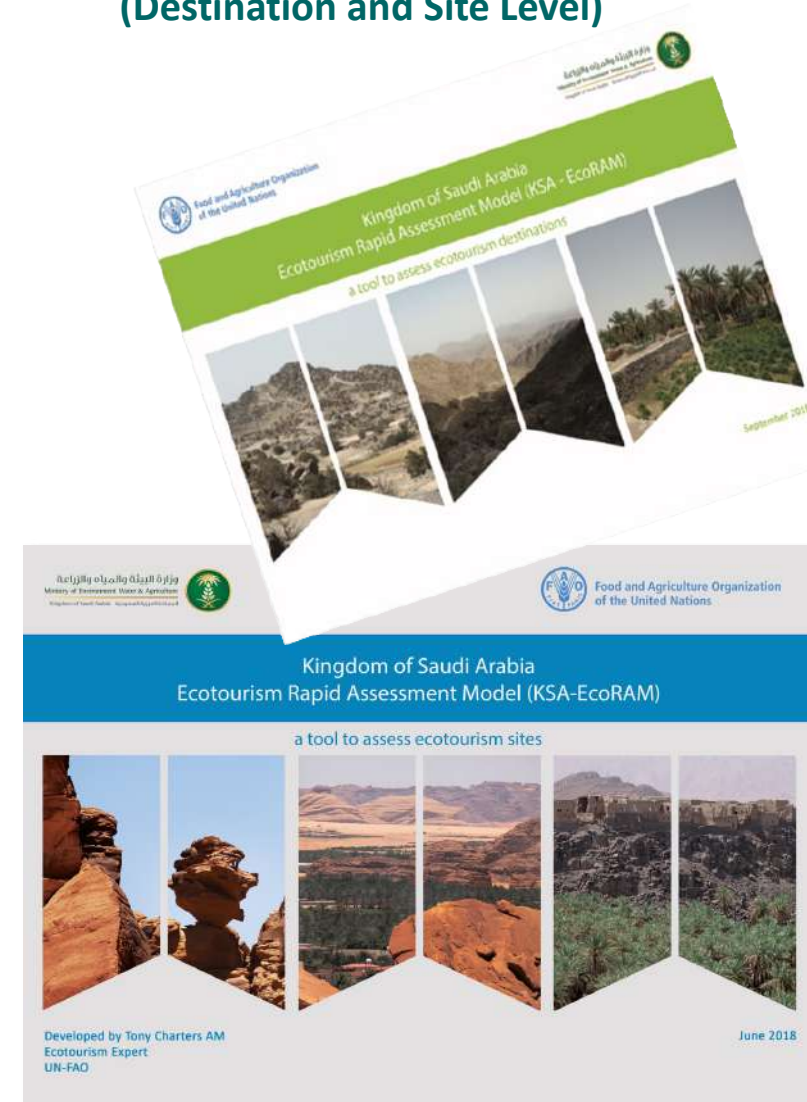
# The Study Areas



# Methodology for Situation Assessment



## Ecotourism Rapid Assessment Tool (Destination and Site Level)



# Cont'd-Methodology for Situation Assessment



### Strategic Overview of each Site against the key Eco-RAM criteria:

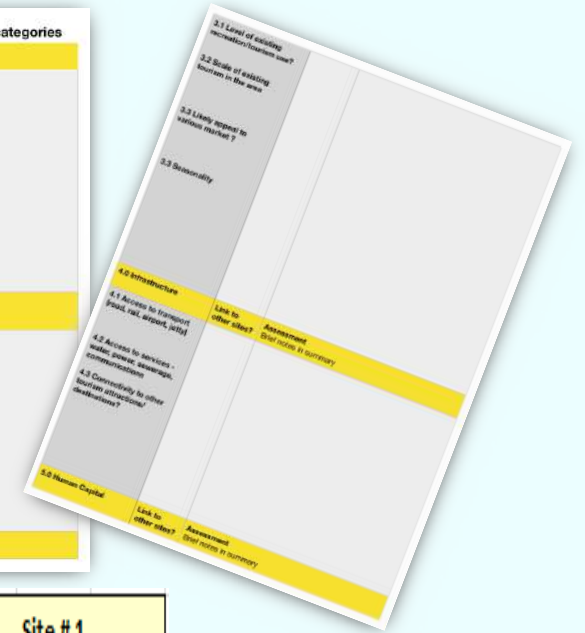
1. Natural Environment
2. History & Cultural Heritage
3. The Market
4. Infrastructure
5. Human Capital
6. Investment



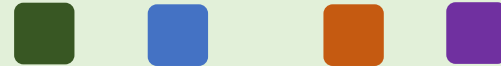
Full Eco-RAM assessment on selected sites

Strategic Overview of Site using KSA- EcoRAM categories

1.0 Natural Environment	Link to other sites?	Assessment Brief notes in summary
1.1 Iconic/high value natural feature present?		
1.2 Natural values requiring high level of protection?		
1.3 Public access permitted?		
1.4 Capability to manage tourism impacts?		
2.0 History & Cultural Heritage	Link to other sites?	Assessment Brief notes in summary
2.1 Iconic/high value historical/cultural site?		
2.2 Condition of attribute?		
2.3 Site open to public and non-Muslims?		
2.4 Intangible heritage eg cuisine, local music		
3.0 The Market	Link to other sites?	Assessment Brief notes in summary



Strategic assessment of National Parks at destination level



Selection of National Parks with potential for in-depth analysis



Team applies Delphi technique to score weightings for each site against the 6 criteria of Eco-RAM



Results summarized to determine National Parks with Excellent, Good, Acceptable and Limited potential

Criteria	Site # 1		
	Weight	Scores (1-5)	W*S
1. Natural Environment	18%		0.0
2. Historical & Cultural Heritage	17%		0.0
3. Human Capital	14%		0.0
4. Physical Capital	15%		0.0
5. Market	19%		0.0
6. Investment Opportunities	17%		0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>		<b>0.00</b>

- Excellent potential
- Good Potential
- Acceptable potential
- Limited potential

## Overview of Study Findings (Al Madinah Al Monawarah Region National Parks)



Al-Madina Al Monawarah Region

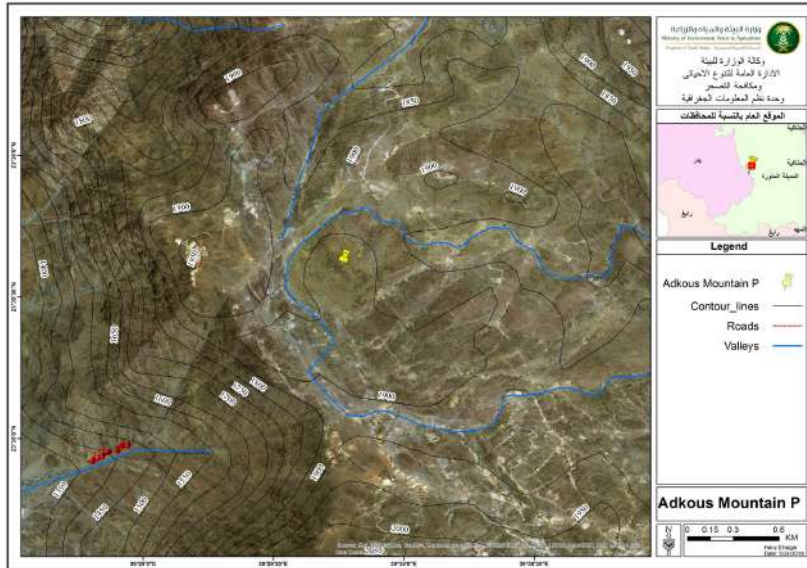
Sites	Steve	Tony	Howaish	Av. Score	Rank
1 Site #1: Adkous Mountain Park – Madinah	3.37	3.52	3.04	3.31	12
2 Site #2: Al Sadah Valley (including the Valley, Abu Deeba'a, Al Madiq and Um Al Eyal areas) – Wadi Al Fra'a	4.05	4.36	4.32	4.24	8
Site #3: Khaybar Area Sites					
3 Location A: Wadi Hidnah - Khaybar	2.5	2.75	1.73	2.33	14
4 Location B: Al Mangi National Park (Umm Amir NP) - Khaybar	3.16	3.62	3.88	3.55	11
5 Location C: Bani Amir Areas - Khaybar	4.53	4.67	4.54	4.58	2
6 Site #4: Al Beydah National Park Including Abu Al Dude Park – Madinah	4.52	4.14	4.33	4.33	7
7 Site #5: Al Madinah National Park - Madinah	4.15	3.81	3.96	3.97	9
Site #6: Yanbu Area Sites					
8 Location A: Coastal Line - Yanbu	3.86	4.31	4.83	4.33	6
9 Location B: Yanbu National Park - Yanbu	2.97	3.44	3.12	3.18	13
10 Site #7: Radua Mountain Park – Yanbu	3.88	4.04	3.85	3.92	10
11 Site #8: Ram National Park – Al Ula	4.36	5.00	4.03	4.46	4
12 Site #9: Eshar National Park – Al Ula	4.36	4.63	4.03	4.34	5
Site #10: Al Ula - World Heritage Sites					
13 Location A: Elephant Rock Area	4.36	5.00	4.53	4.63	1
14 Location B: Old Town Area	4.15	4.64	4.64	4.48	3
<b>Average (Score)</b>	<b>3.9</b>	<b>4.1</b>	<b>3.9</b>	<b>4.0</b>	<b>–</b>

Site	Overall Av. Score	Rank
Site #10-1: Elephant Rock Area - Al Ula	4.63	1
Site #3-3: Bani Amir Areas - Khaybar	4.58	2
Site #10-2: Old Town Area - Al Ula	4.48	3
Site #8: Ram National Park - Al Ula	4.46	4
Site #9: Eshar National Park - Al Ula	4.34	5
Site #6-1: Coastal Line - Yanbu	4.33	6
Site #4: Al Beydah National Park Including Abu Al Dude Park - Madinah	4.33	7
Site #2: Al Sadah Valley - Wadi Al Fra'a	4.24	8
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Site #7: Radua Mountain Park – Yanbu	3.92	10
Site #3-2: Al Mangi National Park (Umm Amir NP) - Khaybar	3.55	11
Site #1: Adkous Mountain Park – Madinah	3.31	12
Site #6-2: Yanbu National Park - Yanbu	3.18	13
Site #3-1: Wadi Hidnah - Khaybar	2.33	14

## Al-Madinah Al-Monawarah Region Findings



### Jabal Adkous National Park in Al Madinah

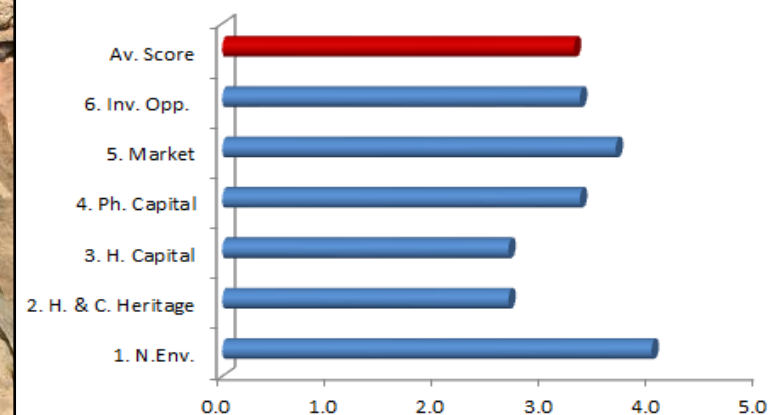


### Site Characteristics

- Accessible road network linking Park to Madinah
- Park road network rugged suitable for only 4WD vehicles
- Stunning landscape
- Cool climate throughout the year (mountainous)
- Farming activity and old terraces at the site
- Human habitation and dwellings in the park
- High development area

### Potential Ecotourism Experience /Activities

- Adventure day tours
- Ec lodge
- Walking trails
- Mountain biking
- Trekking
- Overnight camping
- Mountain climbing
- Cultural tourism  
(Artefacts, Cuisine, Music and Home stays)



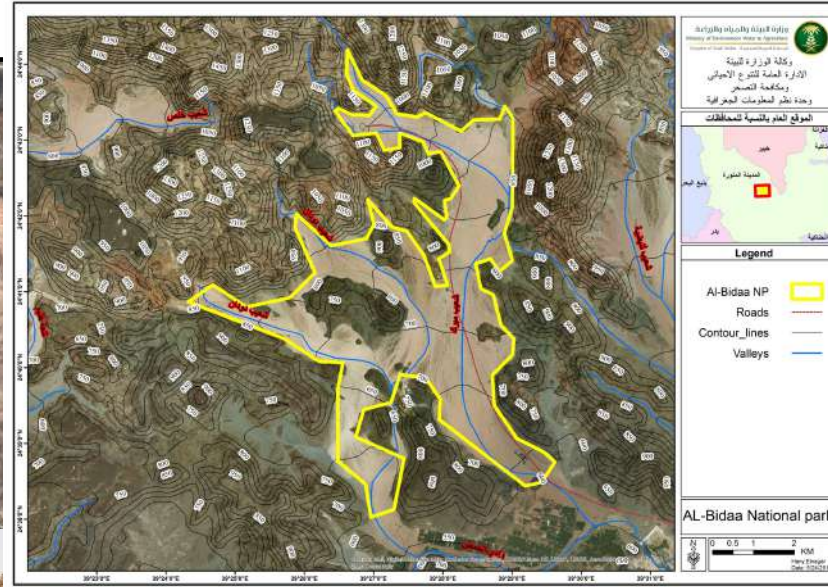
**3.2** Acceptable Potential



## Al-Madinah Al-Monawarah Region Findings



### Al Baydha National Park in Al Madinah

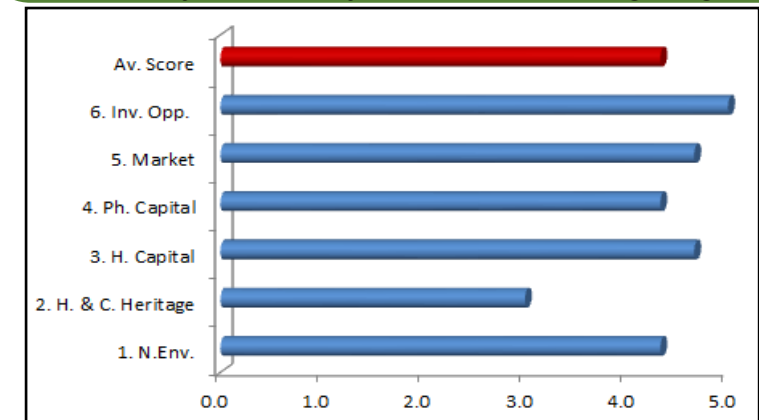


### Site Characteristics

- Accessible tarmacked road network linking with Madinah
- Series of mountains (Jibal Al-baydha)
- Rock outcrops
- Sand on flat plains
- Valley (Wadi Al-Jinn/Al-Baydha)
- Vegetation (trees, shrubs and grass)
- High development area

### Existing Ecotourism Experiences

- Camel rides
- Quad bike rides
- Day camping
- Barbeques and coffee shops
- Traditional stories of Wadi Al-Jinn that defies Law of gravity
- Heavily visited by Umrah visitors going to Madinah



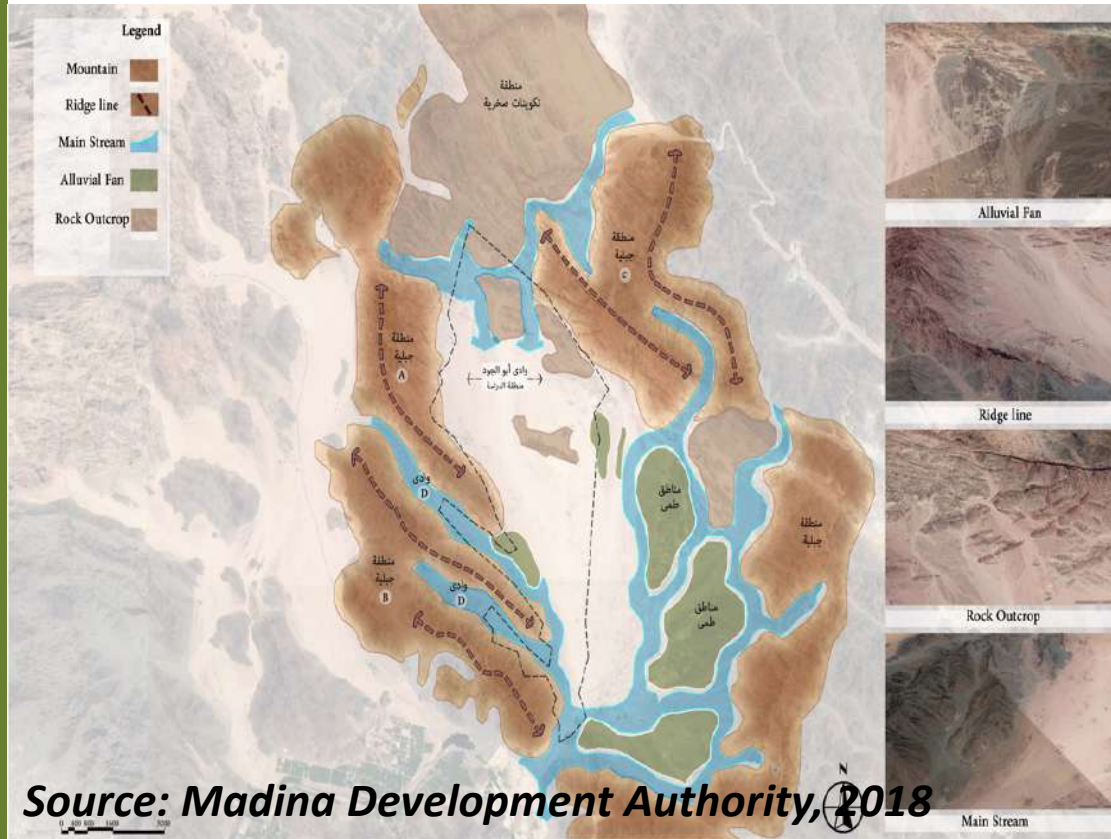
4.3

**Good  
Potential**



# Al-Madinah Al-Monawarah Region Findings

## Abo Joud National Park in Al Madinah



Alluvial Fan



Ridge line



Rock Outcrop



Main Stream

### Site Characteristics

- Series of mountains
- Narrow valley at the Park entrance that adjoin Al-Beydha
- Hydrology issues during rainy season at the valley
- Rock outcrops
- Drainage streams and tributaries
- Alluvial fans and ridge lines
- Historical traditional background as horse riding area
- Recycled water nearby
- Large areas with potential for Agri-tourism
- In high development area
- Master Planning Exercise for the Park undertaken by Madina Development Authority



## Al Madina National Park in Madinah

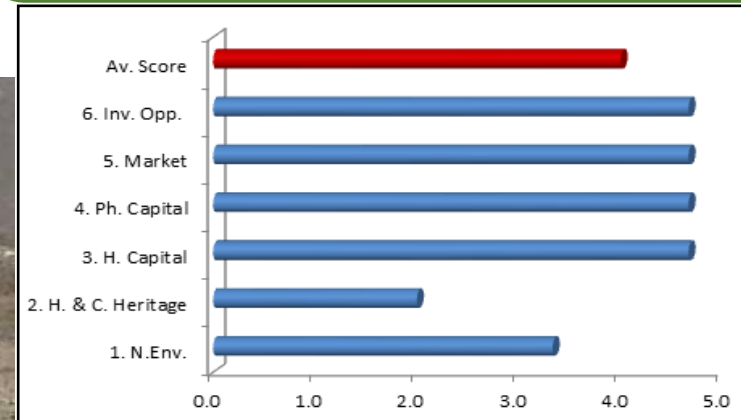


### Site Characteristics

- Urban Park
- Accessible road network linking park to Madinah city
- Park with good infrastructure
- Camping facilities
- Residential units, offices and conference room
- Nursery with tree seedlings
- Master Plan developed by MDA

### Existing Ecotourism Experiences

- Day camping
- Heavily visited by Umrah visitors going to Madinah
- Local visitations mainly on weekends
- Water park facilities to be installed within the park



**3.9** Good Potential



## Al-Madinah Al-Monawarah Region Findings



### Al Saddah Valley National Park

(Includes Abu Dhiba, Al Madheeg and Umm Al Eyal in Wadi Al- Foraa area)

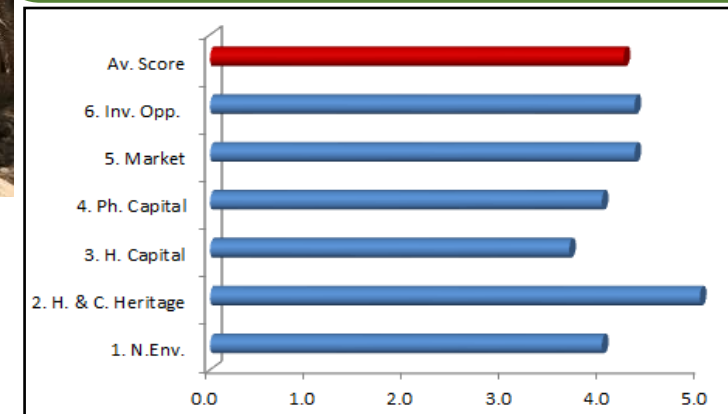


### Site Characteristics

- In a Low developed area
- No existing infrastructure at the sites
- Adjacent sites have iconic cultural values such oasis, Turkish fortress, palace, oasis, traditional mud walled houses and date palm plantations

### Possible Ecotourism Experiences

- Day tours, evening tours and light shows
- Accommodations
- Agritourism
- Cultural tourism that would link the National Parks products with adjacent villages and towns



4.5

**Good  
Potential**



## Wadi Hidna National Park in Khaybar

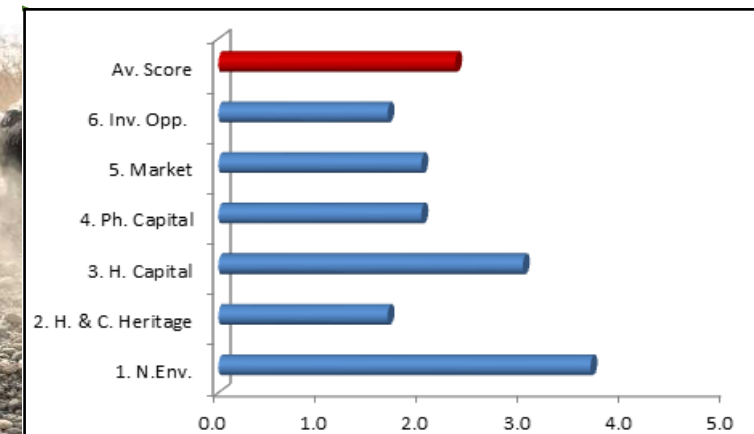


## Site Characteristics

- In a Low developed area
- No existing infrastructure at the sites
- Heavily degraded due to livestock grazing

## Possible Ecotourism Experiences

- Day tours, evening tours and camping
- Agritourism linking with nearby agricultural farms



**2.3** Limited Potential



## Al Mangi (Umm Amir) National Park in Khaybar

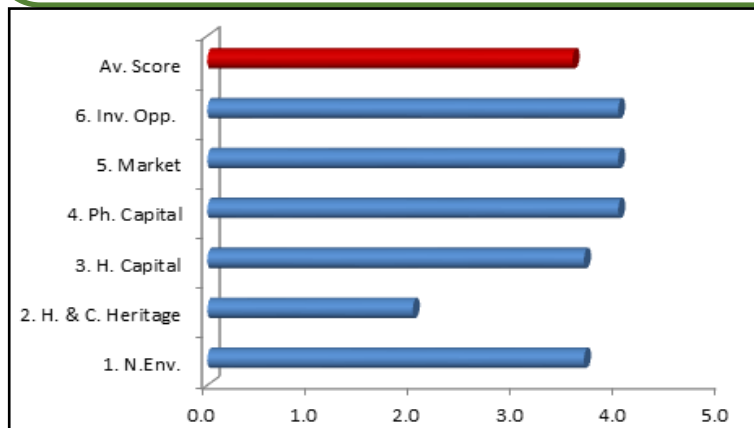


## Site Characteristics

- In a mid development area
- Close to Khaybar service centre
- Close to agricultural areas
- The park is fenced
- Lack visitor infrastructure

## Possible Ecotourism Experiences

- Well positioned for day use camping
- Agritourism linking with nearby agricultural farms



**3.5** Acceptable Potential



## Al-Madinah Al-Monawarah Region Findings

### Bani Amir Areas in Khaybar

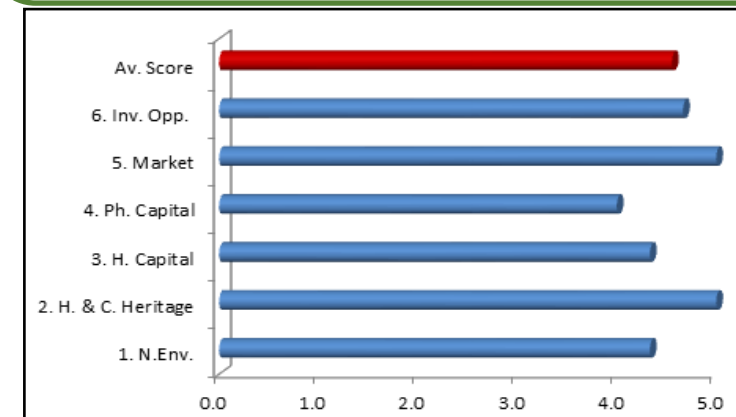


#### Site Characteristics

- In low developed area
- Well serviced touring route
- Iconic sites at Bani Amir, Waeeh fortress and cultural village
- Community involvement and participation

#### Possible Ecotourism Experiences

- Well positioned for day use camping
- Opportunity for integrating large scale ecotourism, cultural tourism and agritourism
- Accommodation, day tours and homestays



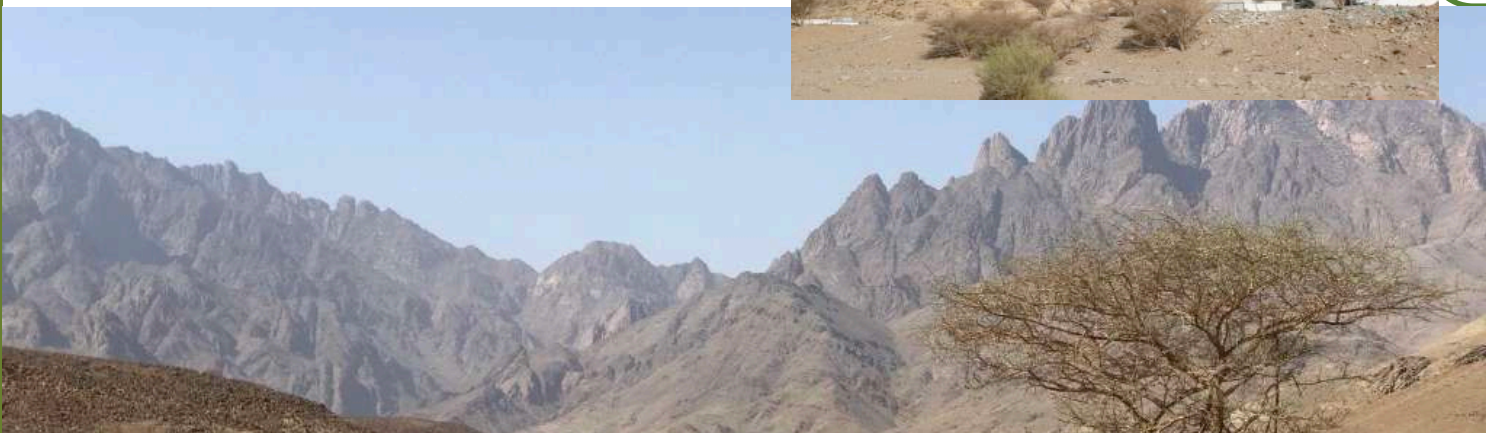
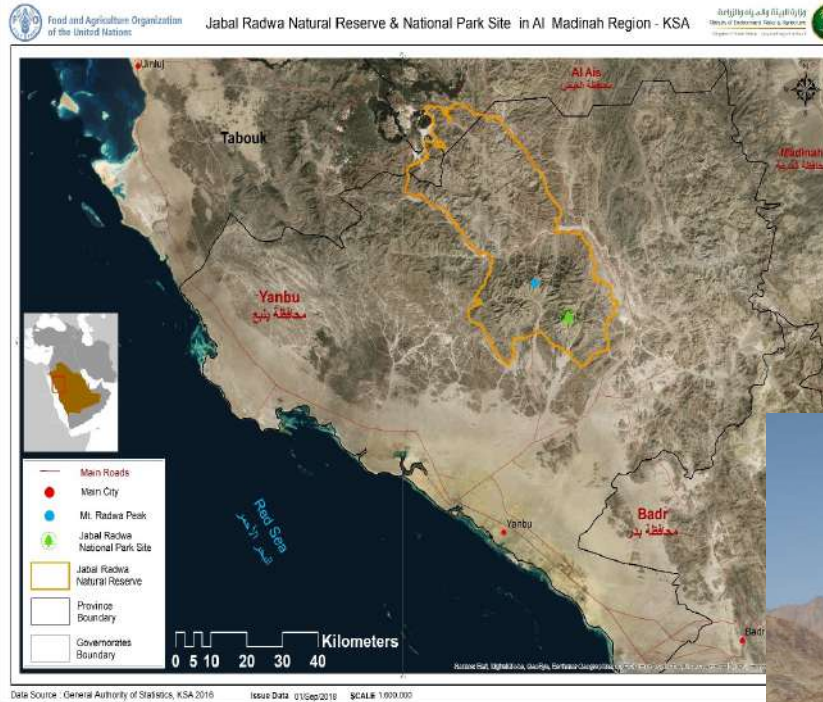
**4.6** Excellent Potential



# Al-Madinah Al-Monawarah Region Findings



## Jabal Radwah National Park in Yanbu Al Nakheel

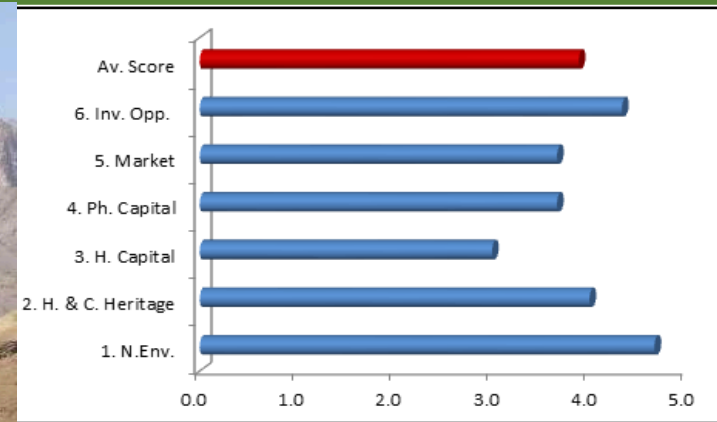


### Site Characteristics

- In remote area 40km from Yanbu industrial city
- Rugged, inaccessible mountainous landscape with deep and narrow valleys in Rakhou village
- Village inhabited by culturally secretive Al Jihini tribe
- Healing waters (cultural belief) from nearby spring
- Historic mosque and above ground rock houses
- Old date plantations in nearby Nakheel area
- Archaeological site in nearby Al Nakhal area

### Possible Ecotourism Experiences

- Mountain climbing and trekking
- Cultural tourism
- Ec lodges at the mountain tops



**3.9** Acceptable Potential



## Yanbu Coastline in Yanbu Industrial City

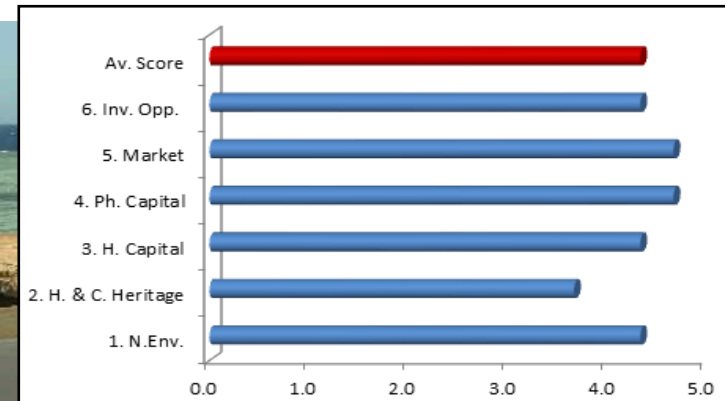


### Site Characteristics

- Development at the beach area (not ecologically sensitive)
- High Development Area
- Close to the Royal Commission Park of Yanbu
- Close to Yanbu city service area

### Existing Ecotourism Experiences

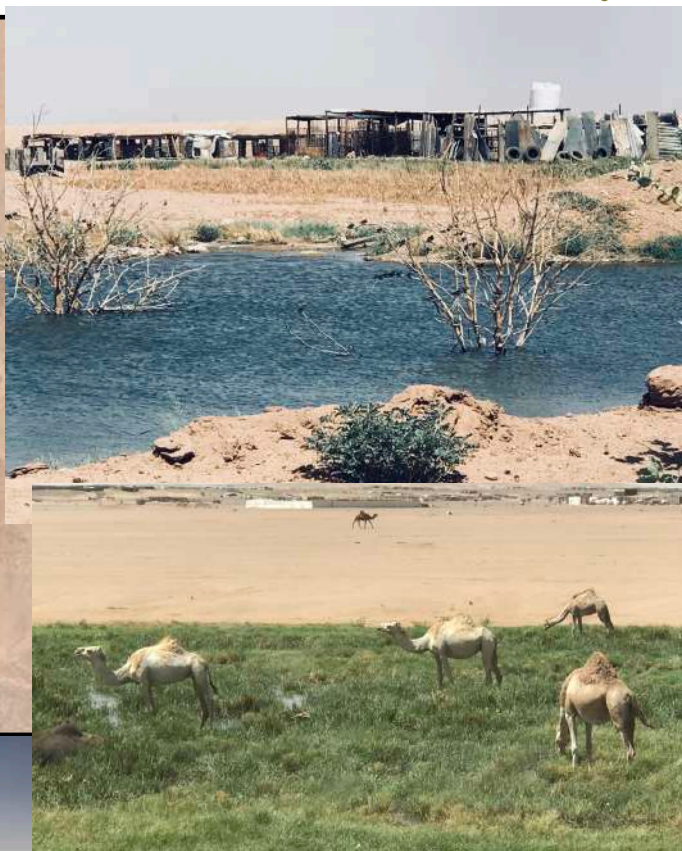
- Beach tourism activities
- Accommodation units such as hotels and beach resorts



**4.3** Good Potential



## Yanbu National Park in Yanbu Industrial City

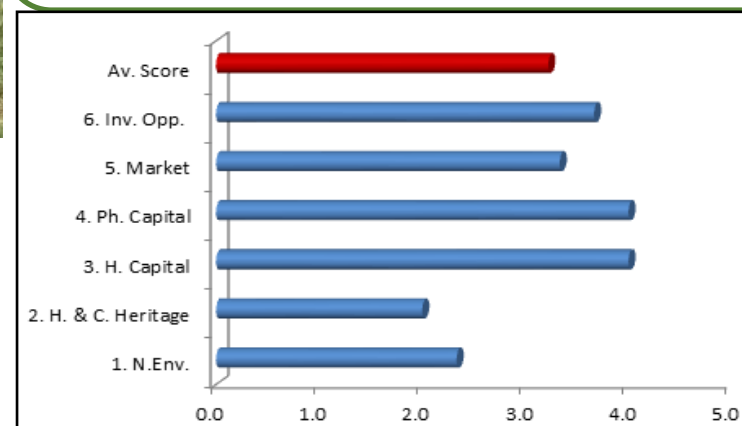


## Site Characteristics

- close to Prince Abdulaziz Airport
- Close to the city of Yanbu
- No existing national Park activity
- Evidence of camel grazing in the park zone
- In a high development area

## Potential Ecotourism Experiences

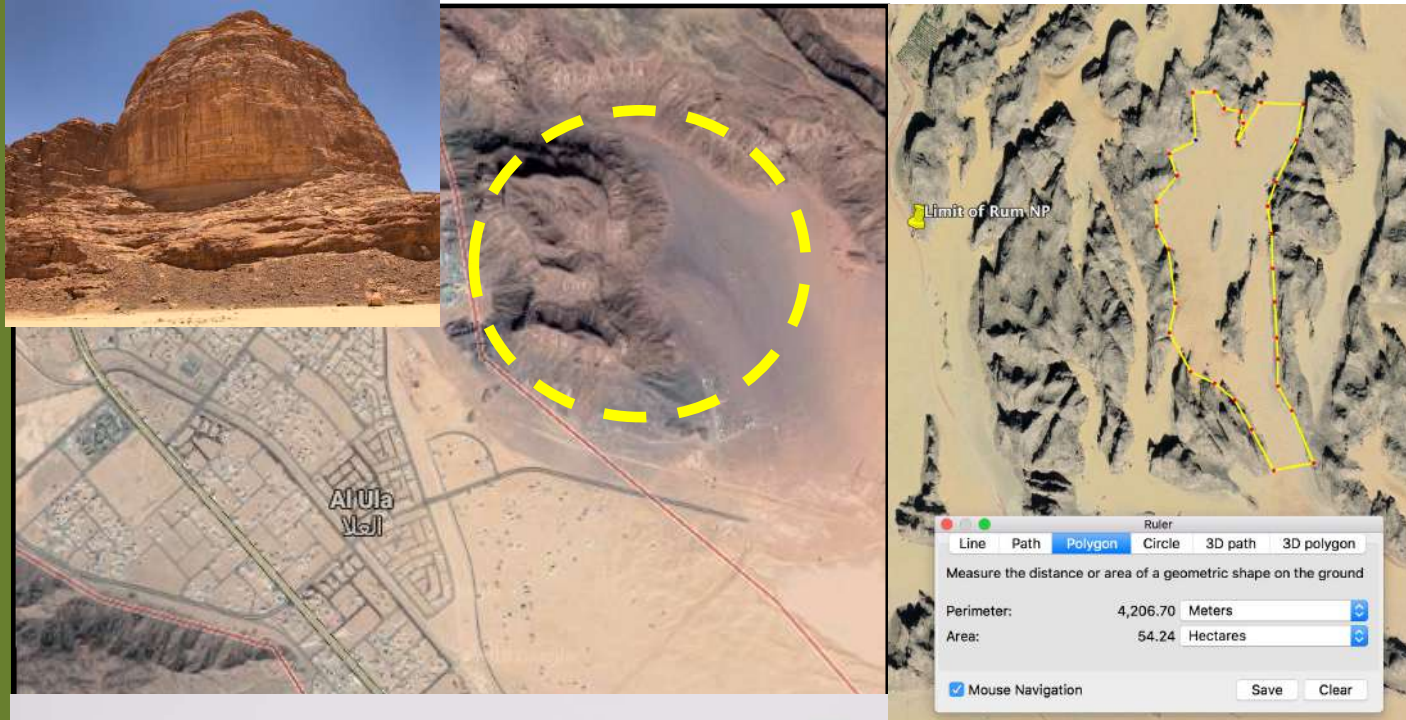
- Day camping



**3.2** Acceptable Potential



## Wadi Rum National Parks in Al-Ula

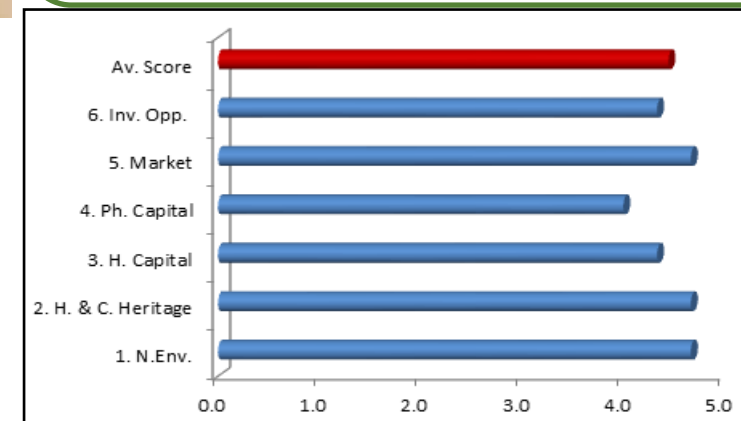


### Site Characteristics

- Close to Al Ula city
- Close to agricultural areas
- Outstanding wilderness characteristic feeling
- Valley has scenic landscapes
- Close to the cultural heritage site of Al Hijr (Madain Saleh) heritage site
- In undisturbed condition

### Potential Ecotourism Experiences

- Day camping
- Discreet photography offshoots at the scenic valley landforms



4.46

**Excellent  
Potential**



## Wadi Eshar National Parks in Al-Ula

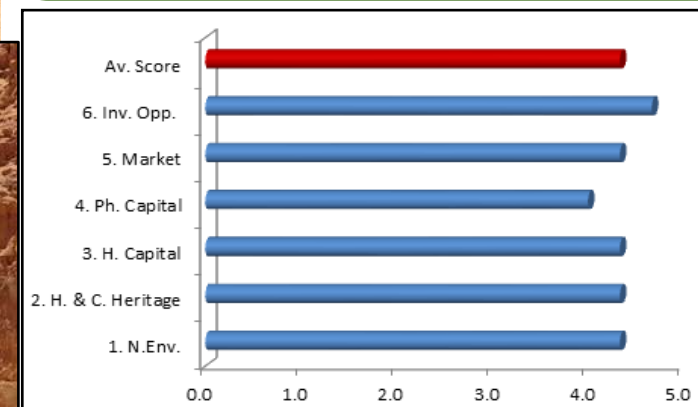


### Site Characteristics

- Close to Al Ula city
- Close to agricultural areas
- Outstanding wilderness characteristic feeling
- Valley has scenic landscapes
- Close to the cultural heritage site of Al Hijr (Madain Saleh) heritage site
- In undisturbed condition
- Close to Wadi Rum National Park

### Potential Ecotourism Experiences

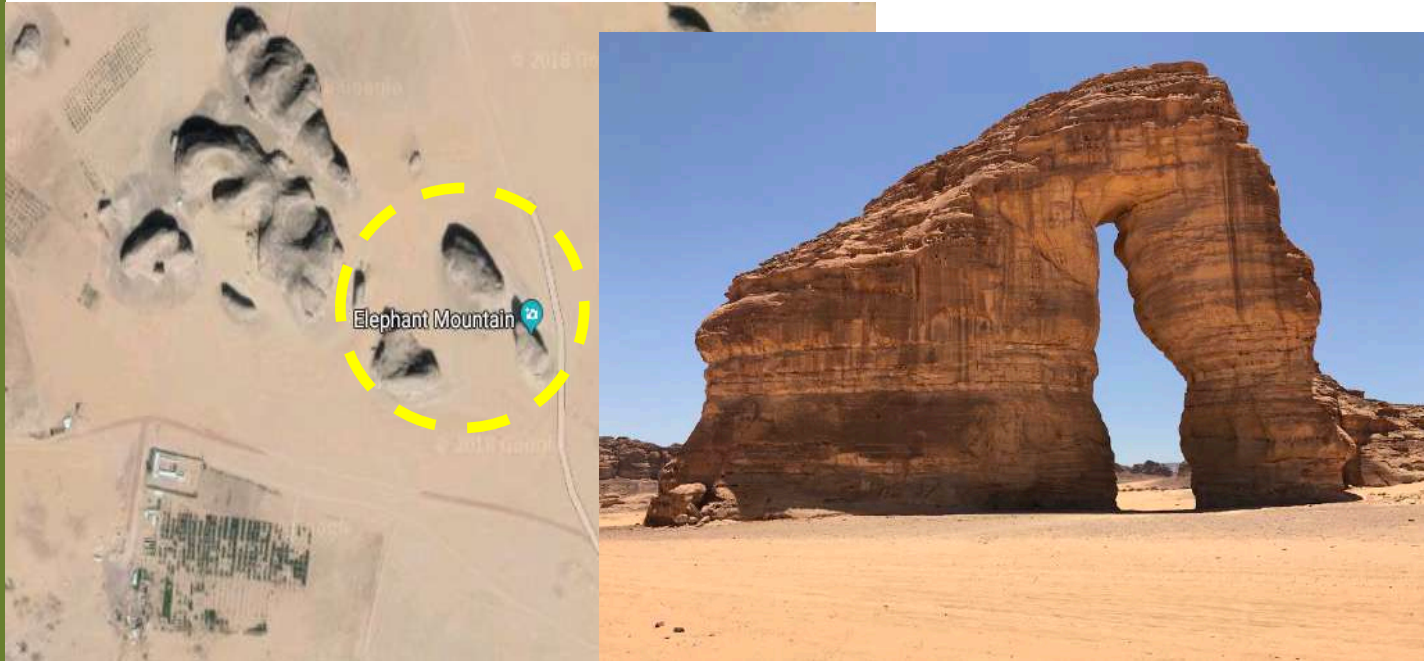
- Day camping
- Discreet photography offshoots at the scenic valley landforms
- Potential for Geotourism



**4.34** Excellent Potential



## Elephant Rock site in Al-Ula

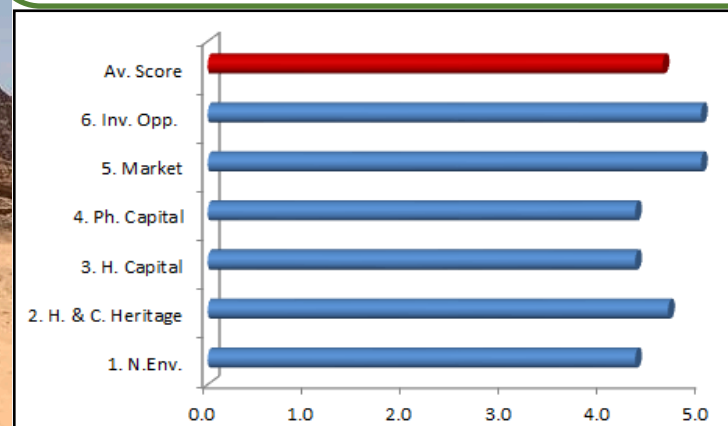


### Site Characteristics

- Close to Al Ula city
- Close to agricultural areas
- Outstanding wilderness characteristic feeling
- Valley has scenic landscapes
- Close to the cultural heritage site of Al Hijr (Madain Saleh) heritage site
- In undisturbed condition
- Close to Wadi Rum and Wadi Eshar National Parks

### Potential Ecotourism Experiences

- Day visitations
- Discreet photography offshoots at the scenic valley landforms
- Potential for Geotourism



**4.63** Excellent Potential

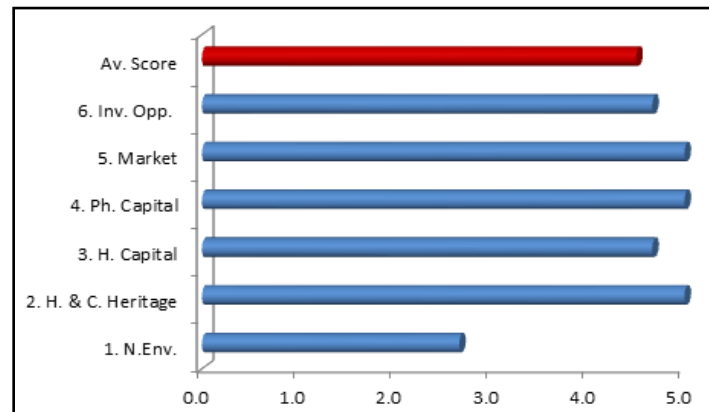


## Al Ula Heritage Village and Old Town in Al-Ula



### Site Characteristics

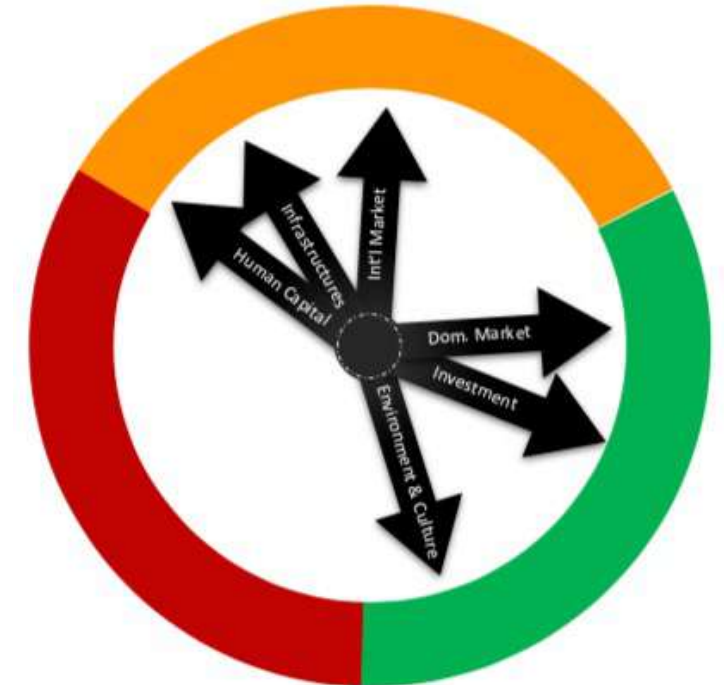
- Close to Al Ula city
- In middle development area
- Cultural destination centre
- Day use visitations
- No signages



**4.5** Excellent Potential



# Overview of Study Findings Asir Region National Parks



Destination level assessment covering

- ✓ Asir mountain ranges
- ✓ Tihama Plain
- ✓ Red Sea Coastline

## Natural Heritage

- ❖ Asir Region is the most popular region in terms of nature-based tourism
- ❖ The region has diverse and epic scale of natural landscapes (coastal beaches and islands, mountainous, wadis, plains etc)
- ❖ The region hosts the **highest peak** of the country : Jabel Sawdah, reaching 3000m.
- ❖ Dramatic cooler and wetter climate (up to 500mm of rain annually) which supports unique flora and fauna.
- ❖ Significant and widespread farming activities making the region ideal for agritourism initiatives.
- ❖ The region contains Al Sawdah, Asir National Park, the **first national park** in Saudi Arabia.



*Coastal tourism*

*Agritourism*



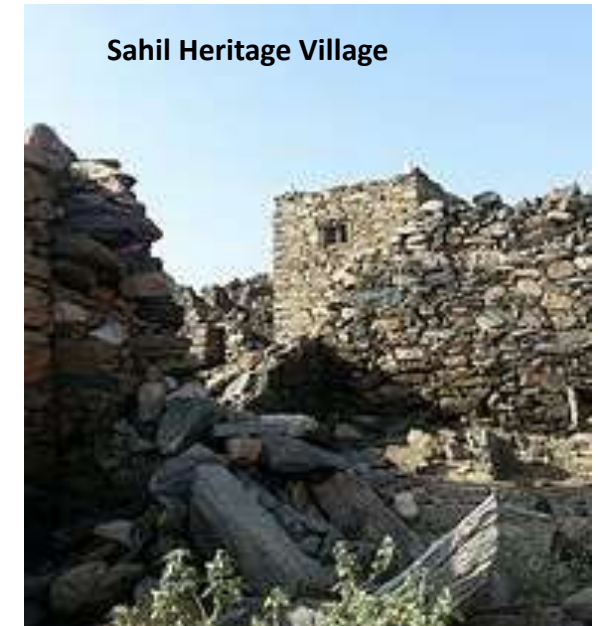
*Mountain Tourism*

## Cultural Heritage

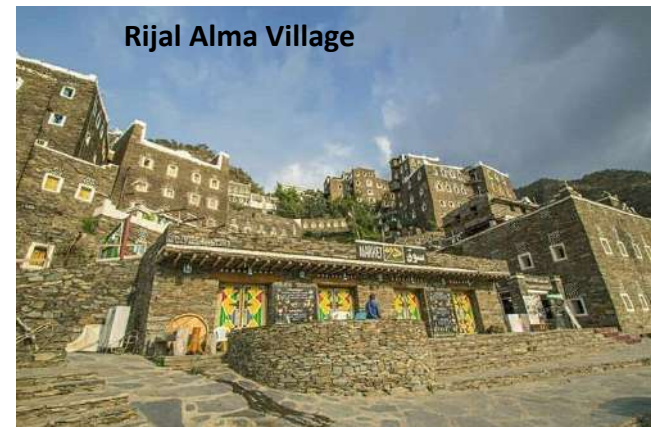
- ❖ Asir Region has significant historic archaeological sites and ruins contributing to its rich cultural heritage
- ❖ The city of Abha has historic quarters, museums with exhibitions and traditional handicrafts
- ❖ Many traditional villages are located in nearby mountainous areas. some of the destinations include Rijal Alma, Al Mufhata, Al Habala, Sahil heritage village, Al Meger tourist village etc.
- ❖ In 2018, the village of Rijal Alma finalized its submission for inclusion into UNESCO's World Heritage List. This presents a good opportunity to boost the regions tourism



Source: Pinterest



Source: Wikipedia



Source: Saudi Tourism

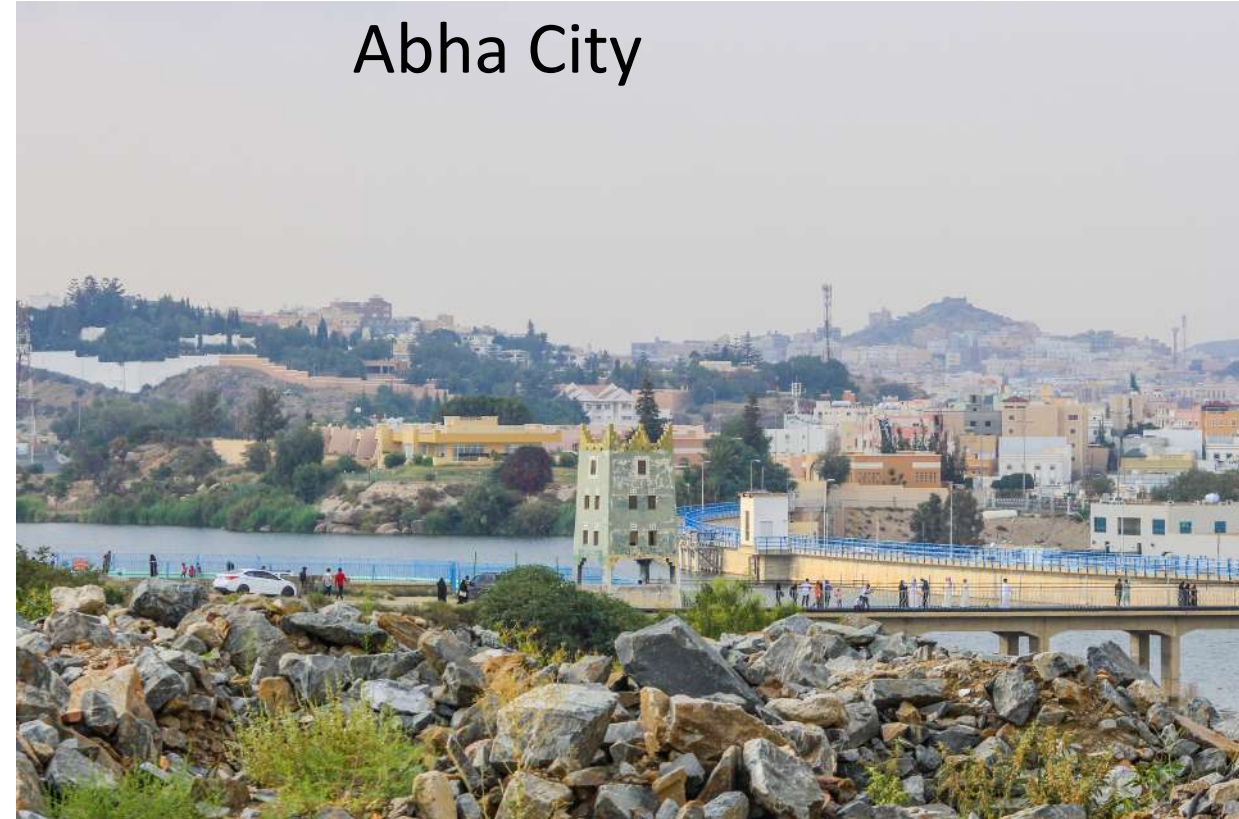


Source: Google Images

## The Market

- ❖ The region is popular and unique tourist destination thanks to its natural and cultural features
- ❖ The city of Abha was awarded “ the capital of Arab tourism for 2017”
- ❖ Abha Airport ranked 14<sup>th</sup> in 2016 with 207 497 arrivals and 192 628 departures
- ❖ The region is great interest to experienced travellers (both domestic and international)
- ❖ The region is highly popular in summer seasons as an many escape from extreme temperatures
- ❖ The region has great potential to attract international tourists especially from GCC countries
- ❖ There is however limited success in marketing and visitations during the winter season

## Abha City



Source: Saudi Tourism

## The Infrastructure

- ❖ Good air access with 2 Airports: One regional airport at Abha and a domestic airport at Bisha
- ❖ The Railway line from Jeddah and Riyadh being extended to the City of Abha
- ❖ The Road system is very comprehensive and scenic. The roads vary from highways to secondary feeder roads
- ❖ Communication networks with fixed, mobile and DSL Networks
- ❖ Power connectivity across the region is very good with 132 transformer and transmission lines
- ❖ Good water supply from several sources such as desalinated water, underground and surface water.
- ❖ Limited public transport and marine based transport that is mostly preferred by tourists



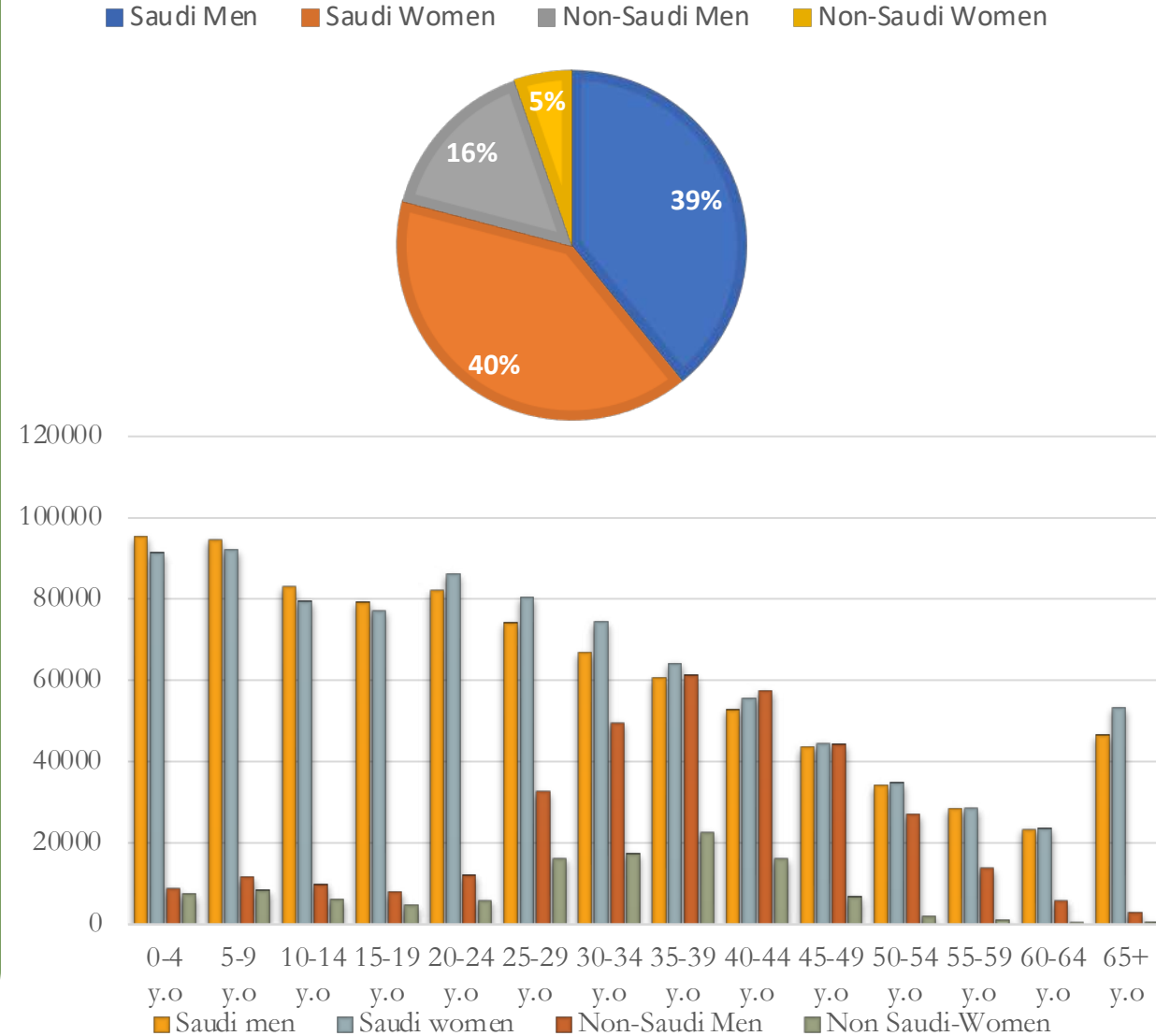
Source: Google Maps



### Human Capital

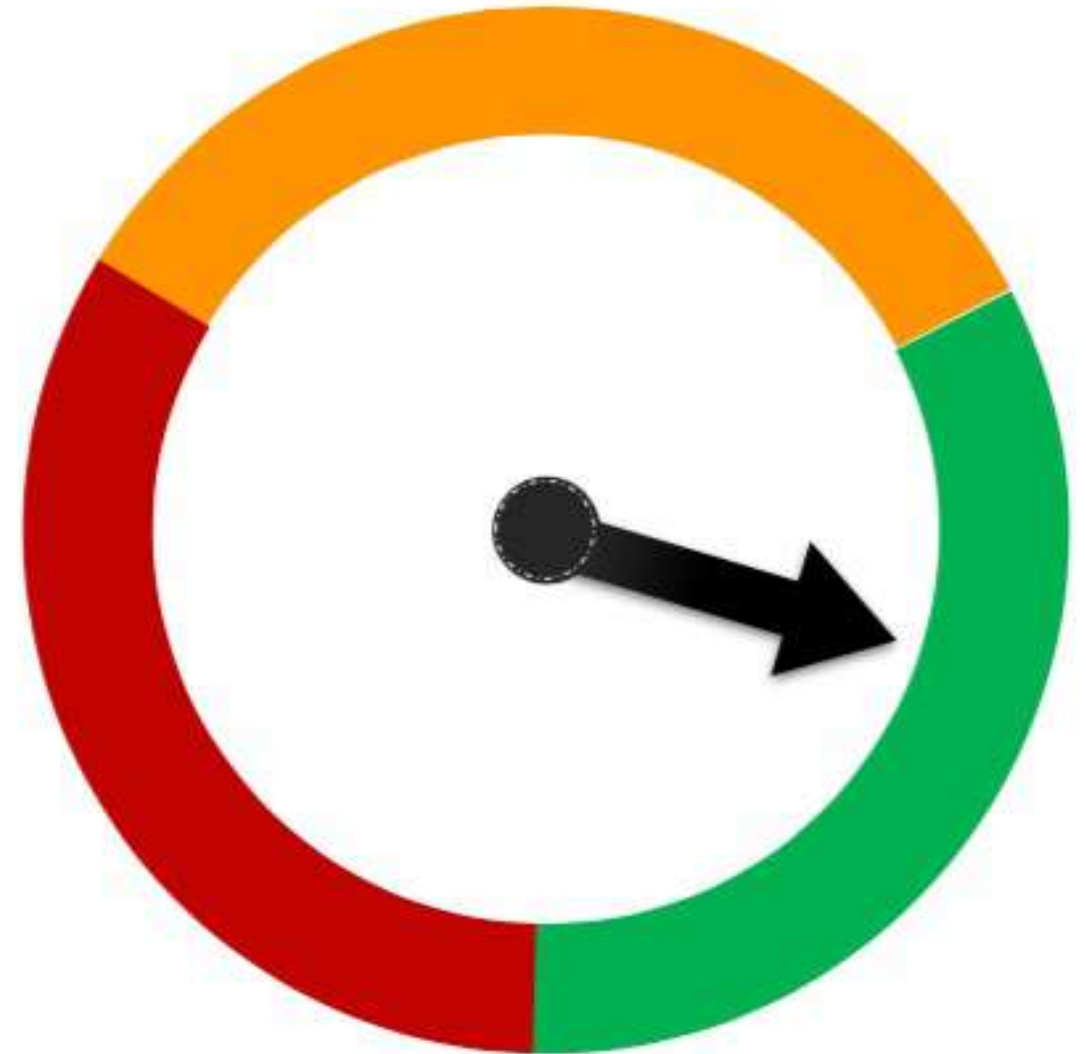
- ❖ In 2017, the region had a population of 2,166,983 inhabitants with an 2.1% annual growth rate
- ❖ A significant upcoming youth population entering the workforce and can create a carrier in sustainable tourism
- ❖ Great opportunity for women seeking jobs in the travel and tourism sector
- ❖ Commitment the KSA vision 2030 relating to job creation, trainings and gender empowerment
- ❖ Opportunity for capacity building of the locals in micro enterprises in tour guiding, agritourism, ecotourism etc.

POPULATION IN ASIR REGION BY AGE, GENDERS AND NATIONALITY IN MID 2017



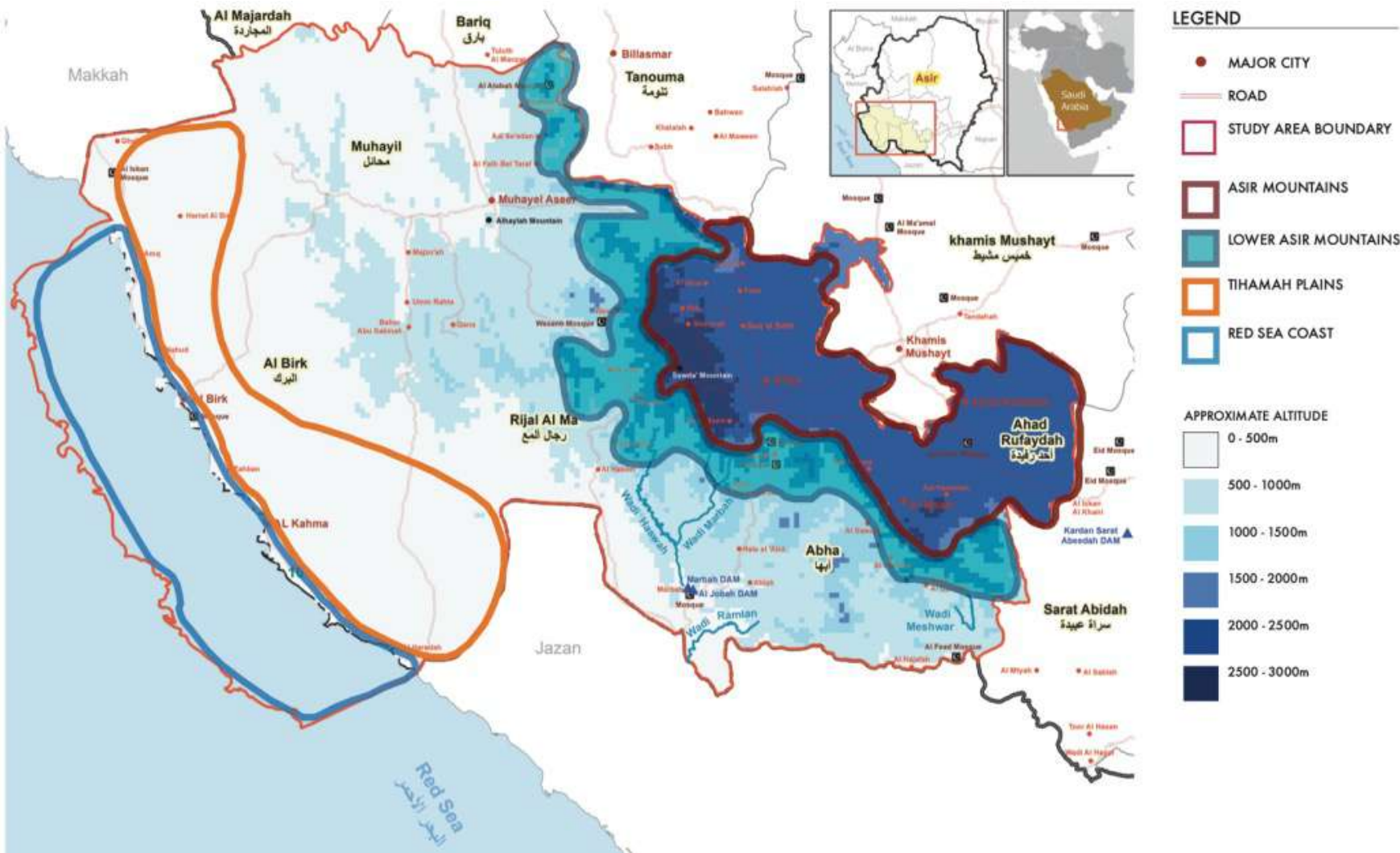
### Investment

- ❖ Strong investments due to availability of multiple financing channels such as the KAFALA programme, Ministry of finance, Social development bank, Agriculture dev. Bank
- ❖ Opportunities for Public-Private partnerships
- ❖ Potential for new investments in ecotourism and agritourism projects to broaden the regions tourism appeal.
- ❖ Some major investment projects have already commenced especially at the Red Sea Coast





## Concept Master Plan for Asir Region study area



- ❖ Concept Master Plan identifies 4 key sub-destinations namely:
  - The higher ranges of Asir mountains near Abha
  - The lower ranges of Asir Mountain, valleys and farms
  - Tihama Plains; and
  - The Red Sea Coast
- ❖ The study recommended a series of transformative ecotourism projects be developed.
- ❖ If implemented, they will highlight the value of the regions natural and cultural features.

# Ecotourism Activities to apply higher ranges of the Asir mountains

Juniper Forest and botanical gardens



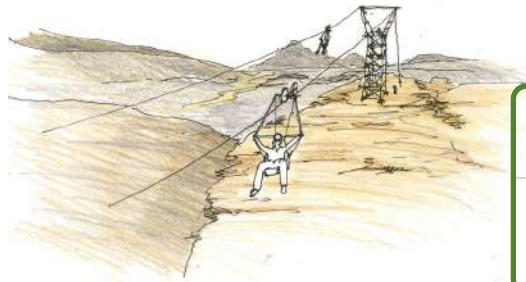
Wing suit gliding



Rock climbing



Zip lining



Cliff walks – Glass floor



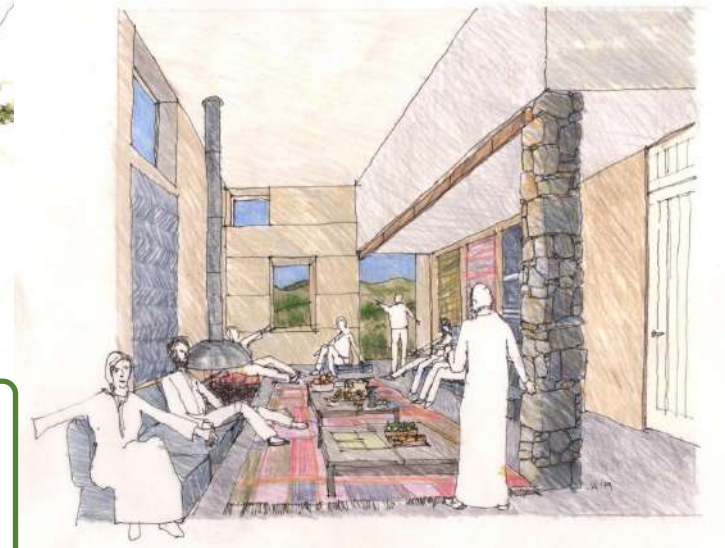
Horse/Camel trails



Cliff Ecolodges



'Alpine' Ecolodges



- ❖ Extreme Adventures
- ❖ Base Jumping
- ❖ Wingsuit gliding
- ❖ Abseiling
- ❖ Cliff edge walks
- ❖ Cliff ecolodges
- ❖ Ziplining
- ❖ Rock climbing

# Ecotourism Activities to apply Lower ranges of the Asir mountains

31

Agritourism Heritage Farms and Attractions

Eco camps and lodges



- ❖ Asir agritourism farms
- ❖ Historic villages
- ❖ Farm and village stays
- ❖ Farmer markets
- ❖ Crafts markets



Heritage villages



Camping and picnic sites



# Ecotourism Activities to apply in Tihama Plains

32 Harrat Discovery centre and Trails

Bedouin Eco-camps



Soft Adventure-Ballooning Tours



Hajj Pilgrim's trail-Interpretive centre



- ❖ Bedouin Camps
- ❖ Volcanic (Harrat) trails and discovery centre
- ❖ Hajj Pilgrim interpretive centre
- ❖ Camel trails
- ❖ Glamping Eco-Resort
- ❖ Ballooning Tours

## Red Sea Marine discovery centre



Tourist Jetty



- ❖ Marine based Tours
- ❖ Diving and snorkelling
- ❖ Beach Eco-Resorts
- ❖ Marine Island safaris
- ❖ Mangrove boardwalks
- ❖ Marine discovery centres
- ❖ Tourist Jetty

## Red Sea Mangrove Board Walk Trails

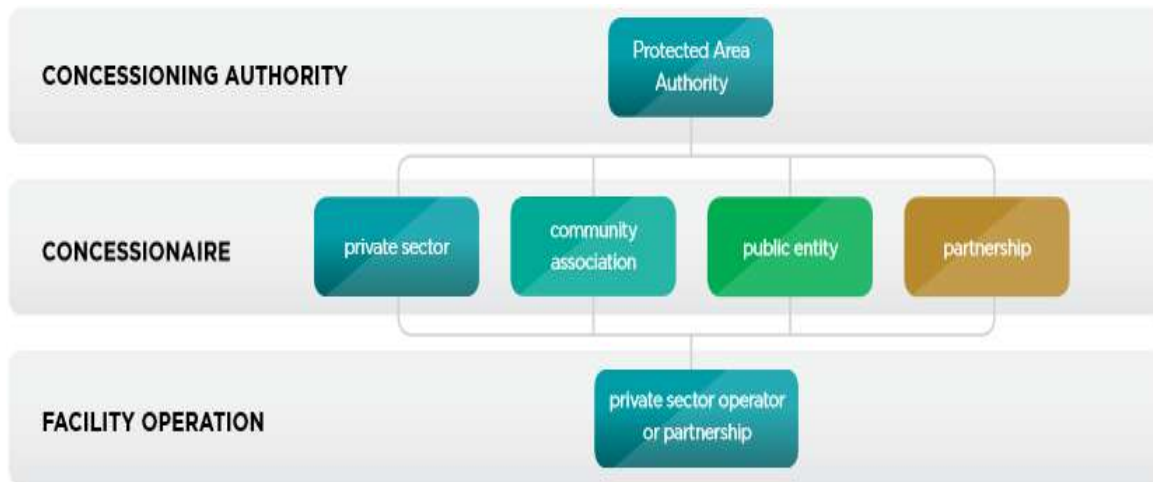




❖ Several models exist (concession, leases, management contracts etc.)

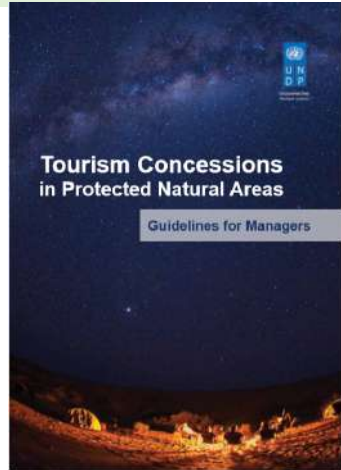
❖ **Concession model** is preferred worldwide

❖ Services-camping, ecolodges, guided tours, hotels, restaurants, recreation, education, retailing and interpretive services



Source: World Bank, 2016

## Components of a Successful Concession System



Source: UNDP Tourism Concession in Protected Natural Areas Guidelines- 2014



### Policy and Planning

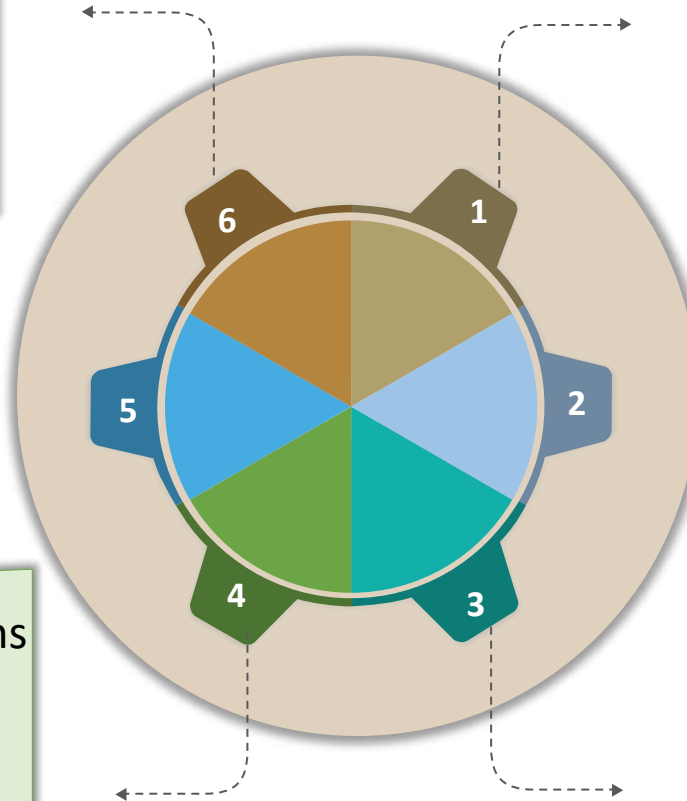
- ◆ Ecotourism Investment Policy
- ◆ Site Ecotourism Master Plans
- ◆ Visitor Management Plans

### Sustainability

- ◆ Waste Management Plans
- ◆ Energy Management Plans

### Natural Resource Protection and Management

- ◆ National Parks Management Plans
- ◆ Sustainable tourism monitoring System
- ◆ Climate Change Action Plan



- ◆ Business & Marketing Plan

- ◆ Communication, Information & Interpretation Plan

### Visitor Engagement

- ◆ Socio-Economic Development Plan
- ◆ SME and Local Product Support Program

### Economic Development

- ◆ Ethical Code of Conduct
- ◆ Health and Safety Plan
- ◆ Risk and Emergency Response Plan
- ◆ Ecotourism Certification and Support Program

### Standard and Safety



Food and Agriculture Organization  
of the United Nations



المركز الوطني  
لتنمية الغطاء النباتي ومكافحة التصحر  
National Center for Vegetation Cover Development & Combating Desertification

المملكة العربية السعودية

# Thank You

