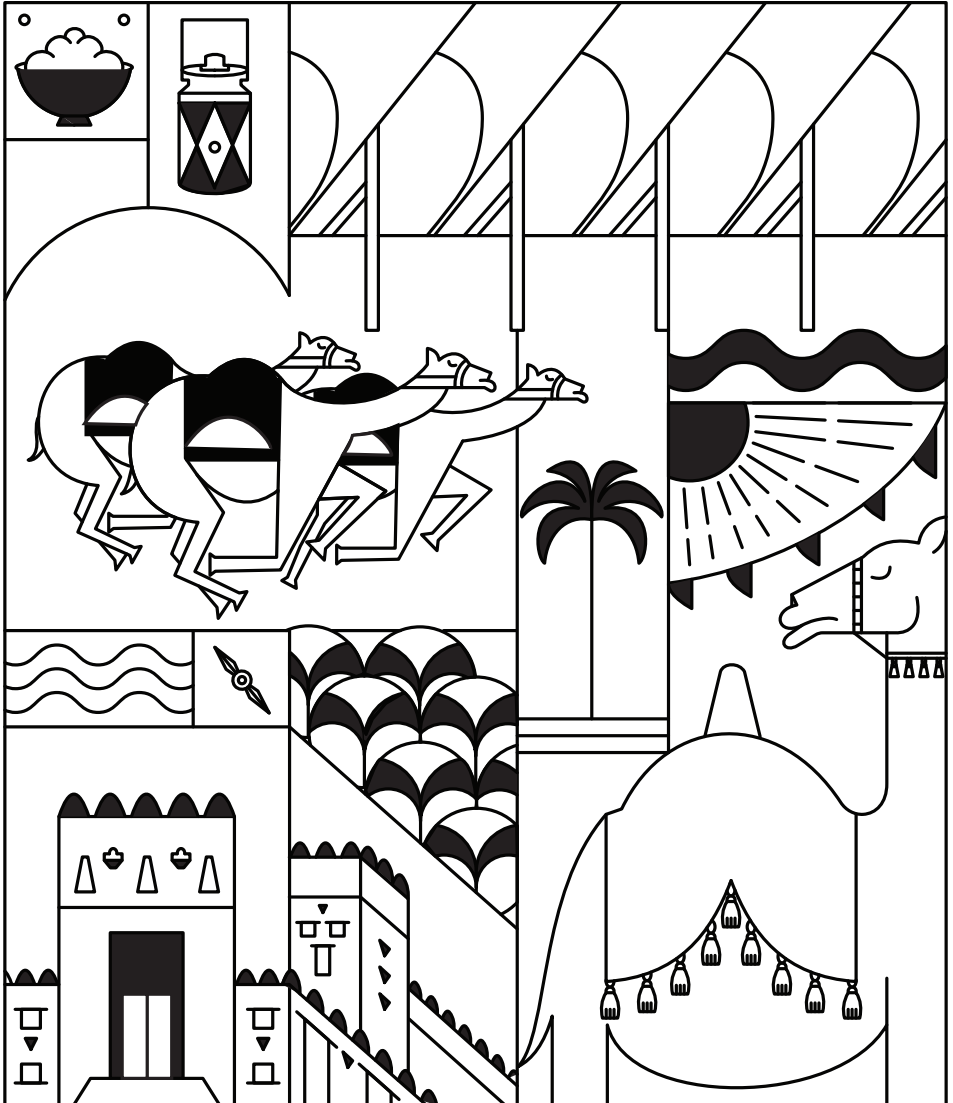


# CAMELS

POTENTIAL FOR CULTURAL, SPORT, & HEALTH TOURISM



DR. EMAD MONSHI & PROF. NOEL SCOTT



# Acknowledgement

We, the authors and editors of “Camel Potentials: Cultural, Sport and Health Tourism,” wholeheartedly thank the Culinary Arts Commission for their support throughout this project. It has been instrumental in exploring the cultural, sporting, and health dimensions of camel tourism, and has allowed us to offer our readers a unique and thorough view of the subject.

This work pays homage to a strong collaboration in uncovering the lesser-known, yet significant aspects of our cultural heritage. We are deeply thankful for the chance to contribute to this area and to share our research and insights. We believe that our book will be a key resource for those in tourism and culture studies and will inspire further interest in the varied and important roles of camels across different cultures.

*We sincerely thank the Culinary Arts Commission for their crucial role in making this project a reality.*

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# 01

# Developing Cultural Experiences



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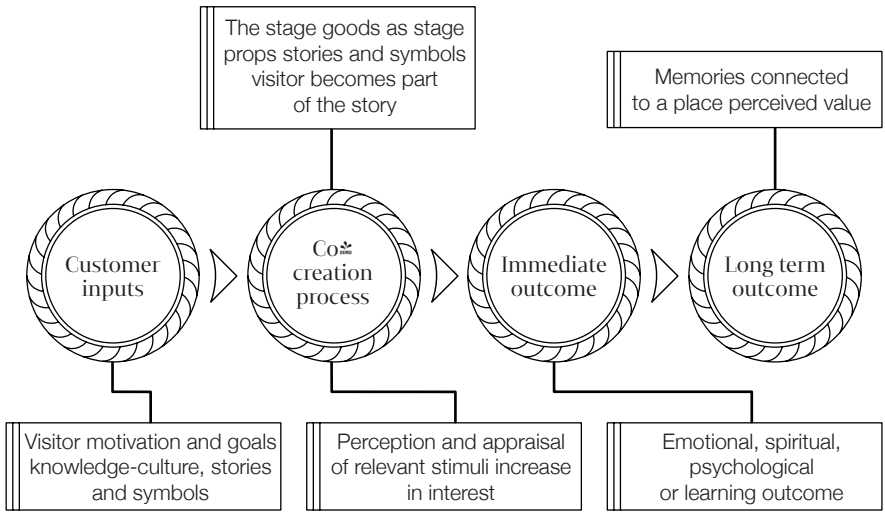
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## Introduction

The culture of a people is their customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits. While heritage technically refers to the inherited, tangible, and intangible practices passed down from previous generations, in this context, we will consider heritage and traditional culture to be similar and related types of experiences. This means that discussion of contemporary culture is not covered in this chapter, although the principles discussed remain the same.

# A Cultural Experience Model

A basic model for use in the design of cultural experiences is provided in Figure 1.1. This model is based upon the idea of increasing involvement and interest in an experience through stories and co-creation. The first step is to have a good understanding of the visitor’s motivations for attending the experience along with their knowledge of the cultural stories and symbols associated with it. The second step is to establish the “stage,” the place where the experience takes place. The stage may be in one location—an auditorium—or at a number of locations connected by a tour or walking path. The key concept here is that the visitor is not passive but actively involved in the experience. The production of the experience may be considered as similar to a play where the visitor is one of the actors. During the experience, the visitor should experience emotions, thus increasing memorability. The immediate outcome is personal, it may be happiness, excitement, satisfaction, and/or learning. The long-term outcome of a well-designed experience are vivid positive memories.



**Figure 1:** Cultural Experience Model (Source: Author).

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## Customer Inputs to an Experience

Visitors have more memorable experiences if they do not passively take part in a cultural site but instead actively interact with it and interpret its context. Understanding the customer and what they bring to the experience, as well as their goal in attending, is a key step in design. Most cultural sites attract a number of visitor segments, each characterised by a different goal.

Some authors have suggested that the motivation for undertaking a cultural experience is based on sociological theory. For example, sociologists may say that people visit a cultural site because the visitor is alienated from society in their daily lives and is in search of authenticity. This may be a general reason for travel, but is not useful in specifying the customer's goals for visiting a site.

Most researchers consider that there are many reasons for visiting a cultural site, ranging from simply to relax or spend time with friends, to achieving social status by visiting famous places, to learning and personal development (Richards, King, & Yeung, 2020). Similarly, the personal importance of a visit to a cultural attraction may range from central to the whole trip to Saudi Arabia to minor importance and casual interest only. Generally, the personal importance of a cultural experience to a visitor is related to the effort that the individual makes to see it. It is reasonable that a birdwatcher who travels to Saudi Arabia for the sole purpose of seeing a particular species of bird must have a strong interest in this activity and possess considerable knowledge about the animal.

It is argued here that popular cultural attractions draw many people whose interest in the site is incidental. These people may have little detailed knowledge of the site, physical object, tradition, building, or intangible practice. Therefore, in order to provide a stimulating and engaging cultural experience, it is necessary to design the visit to interest and involve visitors. However, most experiences are not intentionally designed.

Knowing the goal of a customer visiting a site and its importance to them is vital. The value of a cultural experience depends on its personal relevance. This relevance is a judgement about the experience and whether it helps in achieving a personally important goal. It is the relevance of the experience to some personal goal that leads to its value. As we will see below, achievement of a personally relevant and important goal is associated with excitement and positive emotion. Therefore, we may expect that tourists visiting a museum might display a range of reactions to the various exhibits they see based on their goals. If one had always wanted to see a particular exhibit (i.e., the Mona Lisa painting), then they would be happy and excited after seeing it. On the other hand, if they had not wanted to see this painting, then they may feel indifferent and have no strong emotion after seeing it.



Therefore, presenting a particular experience to an audience will delight an audience to the extent that it fulfils some personally relevant goal. An example comes from research into visitors to a spectacular evening show in Macau. There were two groups of people attending this show: one group consisted of people who had travelled from Hong Kong especially to see the show. The members of the other group were on a package tour and were visiting Macau for other purposes. The first group was excited and delighted after seeing the show, while the other group was calm and satisfied. These two groups saw the same show, but one had a strong and important personal goal to attend it, while the other did not. The difference in goal importance explained their reactions.

### **What Visitors Do vs. Why They Do It**

In tourism, the goal of a visitor is often considered to be the activity they undertake. We may say that a person's motivation is to relax, go to the beach, or go to a museum. The problem here is that there are many reasons why a person may go to the beach or a museum. Similarly, a person may partake in a cultural experience to "relax," but this term is not specific, as the relaxing visit may be undertaken to spend time with friends or family, learn something new, or be entertained. Therefore, it is important to distinguish between the activity and a person's goal for participating in that activity.

Visitors of cultural attractions in Saudi Arabia may be strongly interested in a particular cultural activity. For example, some may visit Saudi Arabia solely to learn about its traditions and culture. However, even for these visitors, it is important to understand why they want to learn about Saudi culture. They may associate the country, for example, with images of deserts, Lawrence of Arabia, and adventure, thus their visits may be motivated by the desire to have similar adventures and to be seen as an adventurous person.

### **Why Do We Have Emotions?**

The reason why identifying goals is important is that they are strongly related to emotional responses during an experience. There is a significant body of knowledge about the importance of emotion during an experience (Alba & Williams, 2013), but there is little discussion of the mechanisms by which a particular emotion is evoked. Indeed, the majority of literature on hedonic experiences suggests such emotions are considered idiosyncratic and essentially unpredictable. However, recent work in psychology and consumer behaviour has found that, based on the cognitive appraisal theory, the particular emotion elicited by a current experience is determined by cognitive appraisals (Ma, Gao, Scott, & Ding, 2013; Yeung, Yee, Ma, & Scott 2014).

In the cognitive appraisal theory, a number of appraisal dimensions (such as goal congruence and importance) influence the particular emotion elicited. Therefore, knowledge of consumer goals, interests, and goal importance, along with the degree of novelty, influences whether a particular emotion, such as delight or satisfaction, is elicited. Therefore, the use of this theory allows a predictive association to be found between experiential stimuli and the emotions elicited.

## **How to Delight Customers**

The cognitive appraisal theory tells us that achieving an important personal goal leads to stronger positive emotions. Experience design is a way to induce an important goal for a customer in the current situation. Essentially, we have to heighten the interest of the visitor and get them to pay attention and actively interact with the attraction they are visiting. This can be done in many ways, such as encouraging co-creation, social interaction, and joining a tour guide that ignites the imagination of the visitor through stories rather than plain facts. These methods aim to focus the visitor's attention to the present and elicit positive emotional responses.

## **Organise the Visit as a Three-Act Play**

Storytelling is an integral aspect of human existence, since culture has been historically passed down from one generation to the next through the spoken word. Effective storytelling involves the use of drama and emotion. Aristotle from ancient Greece, in his *Poetics* (2300 BCE) was one of the first to write about narrative structure. In this important treatise on narrative and drama, he states that narrative has a plot with a beginning, a middle, and an ending. Characters and their motivations create the shape of that narrative. Later, Freytag (1863) discussed the use of the rise and fall of conflict during a story as a way to create interest. There are many techniques for effective storytelling and the use of them can improve the experience outcome for visitors.

To attract the visitor's interest and attention, consider thinking of your cultural attraction as a movie or play with a particular theme. The theme can be romance, action, adventure, or any other theme that is connected to the story of a site. This theme emerges and is identified by reviewing the stories and history associated with a site or a cultural resource.

Once the theme and particular story are identified, the attraction can be structured as a typical play or movie. Many movies and plays use a common structure: three acts tied together around a story with a particular theme. The three-act structure is a narrative model that separates stories into three distinct sections or acts. Act I is the setup or exposition, establishing the main characters and their goals. Act II raises the stakes, culminating in the confrontation between the hero and the villain. Act III resolves the story; the hero returns home, has somehow changed, and this final sequence can serve as a setup for a potential sequel. *This structure is shown in Figure 1.2.*

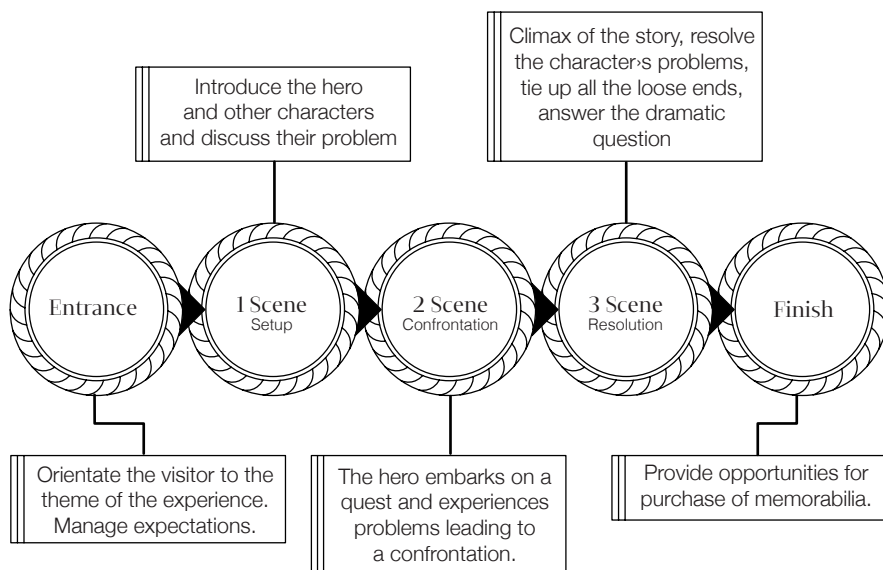


Figure 2: A Cultural Experience organised into Three Acts (Scenes). (Source: Author).

## Develop an Experience Storyboard

A storyboard is a sequence of drawings representing the main scenes planned for a video production. Storyboarding is useful in designing a cultural experience as it outlines how the story flows. A storyboard is useful at the design stage as it allows the overall story to be envisioned and discussed amongst a team. It provides a blueprint for an experience.

### Co-creation

Co-creation and active participation in experience activities are important contributors to enhanced attention. Co-creation involves visitors in an activity, such as involving a visitor in a display of a traditional marriage ceremony. It is interesting to see a display of a marriage, but if a visitor can become the bride or groom and get “married,” then they are more likely to have a memorable experience. Similarly, weaving on a traditional loom is much more memorable than seeing a loom on display; and some museums offer visitors the opportunity to wear traditional clothes and have their photos taken in them. (Campos, Mendes, Oom do Valle, & Scott, 2016).

Food is a useful way to involve visitors. Co-creation-experiences may include helping to cook a meal by buying the ingredients in a market, processing them in a traditional way, and eating the resulting dish. This is often combined with other design elements, such as storytelling and social interaction, as discussed below. Another method of co-creation is to allow visitors to co-design their own cultural experience, focusing on sites of particular interest or allowing them to choose the theme of their experience.

## **Role of the Tour Guide**

Telling a story is like painting a picture with words. Tour guides are not lecturers—they are interpreters of the natural and cultural heritage of an area. They reveal new things to visitors that they weren't expecting or confirm what the visitor is looking for. Storytelling captivates and engages visitors in a way that simply presenting a series of facts and information cannot achieve. Good storytelling ignites a spark in people, leaving them curious to know more. Freeman Tilden (1883-1980), considered the “father of interpretation,” provided a number of tips for better interpretation of a cultural attraction (Tilden, 1977):

- Interpretation should provoke someone to think, react, or be interested: Ethuse, enthral, engage.
- Interpretation should relate to something people already know or understand: Bring it to life; engage them emotionally, “can you imagine what it was like to live here?”
- Interpretation should reveal something new or something that adds to their understanding – something they didn't know before. “Ah, now it makes sense!”
- Interpretation is not information, but all interpretation includes information.
- Interpretation is an art. It can include lots of things – props, song, music, art, legends, descriptions, drama, poetry, etc... Music can be particularly powerful.

In short, good storytelling is a skill that can be developed over time and should be central to the role of a tour guide.

## **Social Interaction**

Tourist experiences typically take place in the presence of other people, or in collaboration/co-creation with them, so they usually entail some level of social interaction. Research suggests that the desire to come into contact with other people is one of the important motivations for travelling. The tourist experience should be viewed as the outcome of interactions between tourists and the physical environment, as well as among tourists themselves and with the local community and service providers.

## Service Basics

It is important to ensure that your experience is not ruined by failing to provide basic services. Delays in entrance ticketing, poor air conditioning, lack of toilets, and other inconveniences can greatly undermine a visitor's experience.

### Organising for Design and Innovation

Most small businesses may not have the skills or time required to develop a cultural experience, and require support for detailed research and thematic story development. Richards (2018) notes that cultural tourism development requires improvement in competencies. Business entrepreneurs designing innovative new experiences may need to work collaboratively with government agencies or academic researchers to develop these competencies (Gardiner & Scott, 2016). They may also need new competencies in the operation and management of visitor attractions that involve display of intangible resources requiring storytelling, demonstration of craft skills, and co-creation of experiences. This can be challenging, especially in targeting international visitors from a variety of cultures (Gardiner, 2019). A checklist of tasks is provided below:

**Define Your Objectives:** Clearly outline the theme and storyline of the cultural experience. Identify the objective your customers are interested in, whether it be education, social interaction, entertainment, and so on.

**Select a Theme or Focus:** Decide on the specific culture, tradition, or aspect you want to highlight. It could be based on a specific country, region, festival, art form, cuisine, or historical period.

**Research and Understand the Culture:** Gain a deep understanding of the culture you're representing. Learn about its history, traditions, language, art, music, cuisine, and social customs. Respect and authenticity are crucial. Identify a suitable story and its characters.

**Engage Local Experts and Community Members:** Collaborate with experts, artists, cultural practitioners, and community members who have firsthand knowledge and experience with the culture you're featuring.

**Create an Immersive Environment:** Design the physical space to reflect the culture. Use decorations, artwork, music, and other elements to create an immersive experience for attendees.

**Incorporate Authentic Experiences:** Provide opportunities for attendees to engage directly with the culture, such as workshops, demonstrations, performances, or hands-on activities.

**Promote Interaction and Participation:** Encourage attendees to actively participate in the experience. This could involve trying traditional foods, learning a dance, or participating in a cultural ritual.

**Offer Educational Components:** Provide informational materials, displays, or guided tours that offer insights into the history, significance, and context of the culture being showcased.

**Facilitate Cultural Exchange:** Create spaces and opportunities for attendees to interact with people from the culture being highlighted. This could be through discussions, Q&A sessions, or informal conversations.

**Respect the Culture and Avoid Stereotypes:** Be sensitive to cultural stereotypes and avoid perpetuating them. Focus on showcasing the depth and diversity within the culture.

**Include Multiple Perspectives:** Highlight different aspects and perspectives within the culture. For example, if featuring a specific country, consider including urban, rural, and indigenous perspectives.

**Provide Opportunities for Reflection:** Offer spaces or activities for attendees to reflect on their experiences and what they've learned. This could be through journaling, group discussions, or guided reflections.

**Document and Share the Experience:** Capture the cultural experience through photos, videos, or written accounts. Share these materials to extend the impact of the event and educate a wider audience.

**Collect Feedback and Evaluate:** Gather feedback from participants to understand what worked well and areas for improvement. Use this information to refine future cultural experiences.

### **Promotion of the Cultural Experience**

Visitors to a cultural attraction can become excited and enthusiastic about their experiences by practising mental time travel or prospecting. It is generally understood that our ability to think about the future is a key survival trait that promotes adaptation to our environment—our ability to imagine our future allows us to avoid pain and promote pleasure. Gilbert (2006) argues that we think about the future in order to exercise control over our lives. Recent neuroscience research, and especially brain imaging studies, have significantly improved our knowledge of various cognitive functions, including thinking about the future (D'Argembeau & Mathy, 2011; Eacott & Easton, 2012; Schacter & Addis, 2007; Solnais, Andreu-Perez, Sánchez-Fernández, & Andréu-Abela, 2013; Wilson & Gilbert, 2003). In brief, research indicates that the neural mechanisms for constructing the brain's representation of current experiences are similar, if not identical to, mechanisms for thinking about the past (termed retrospection) and future (prospection). Furthermore, this literature indicates that prospective imagination guides hedonic decision making. Use of stories and evocative imagery in marketing material can help attract visitors and increase their interest in the attraction.

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## Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of a process for designing cultural experiences, and has also provided the psychological basis for how to make these experiences memorable. Instead of focusing on the physical site or tangible exhibits, thinking from a customer's viewpoint and telling a "story" will provide exceptional outcomes for visitors.

# 02 Camels as Cultural Symbols and Tourist Attractions: A Futuristic Approach



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## **Introduction**

The intricate relationship between humans and animals, marked by a spectrum of emotions and meanings, forms a fascinating aspect of our shared history. Animals have played a central role in our survival and cultural narratives since the dawn of human existence. This complex interplay ranges from viewing certain animals as cherished companions to perceiving others as adversaries. Moreover, the role of animals as a vital food source further emphasises their significance in human life. Consequently, animals embody diverse meanings and cultural notions deeply embedded in the fabric of society (Hongping & Shasha, 2018).

One notable animal that has evolved into a symbol central to human culture is the camel, which is believed to have been first domesticated by humans thousands of years ago in the Middle East region, mainly as a means of transportation. Camels are found in two main species: the dromedary (one-humped camel) and the Bactrian camel (two-humped camel). The dromedary is mainly found in the arid and hot areas of the Middle East region and Africa, while the Bactrian camel is found most commonly in China and Central Asia. Camels have played an essential role in the lives of many societies, especially in communities where breeding other livestock is difficult. The biological and anatomical features of camels enable them to adapt to harsh climate conditions. In the contemporary world, there has been a growing interest in using camels for economic purposes, such as consuming milk and meat (Kadim et al., 2014).



In addition to serving as a means of transportation and a source of food, camels have also gained increased prominence as a tourist attraction in recent years. They are employed in a variety of tourism activities, such as camel riding (e.g., in Morocco, Libya, and Algeria), camel racing (e.g., in North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula), and camel shows (in Saudi Arabia) (Devaux et al., 2020).

## Animals as Cultural Symbols

Throughout history, humans have had a close and strong relationship with animals. This relationship has embedded animal-inspired notions and ideas in virtually all human cultures. In some contexts, animals have been used to represent human nature, embodying individual and societal traits. Using animal-inspired symbols as elements of cognition and expression dates back to the earliest days of human civilization. Evidence supporting this assumption is evident in some of humanity’s oldest ritualistic and artistic representations, which bear a resemblance to various animals that inhabited the environments surrounding the locations where those representations were created (Alves & Barboza, 2018).

Culture-specific factors, such as religion, traditions, and myths, often influence the use of animals as cultural symbols. Animal symbols represent meanings expressed through society’s written and oral language. The symbolism ascribed to animals is often based on distinctive attributes that are observed in them. Moreover, the meaning of animal symbols are often understood within a society’s unique historical and cultural contexts (Khakimova, 2023).

Several factors influence the value of animals as cultural symbols as well as the meanings they represent. Table 1 summarises the most significant of these factors.

Factor	Description
<b>Animals’ Biological Traits</b>	An animal’s biological traits significantly influence its cultural symbolism. For example, Mandarin ducks are often found moving and acting in pairs; therefore, in China, it has become a cultural symbol of marital devotion and stability. Another example is the bat. Bats usually inhabit dark caves; and as a result, have been often associated with notions of witchery and evil in the cultures of many societies.
<b>Nature of Interaction with the Society</b>	An animal’s biological traits significantly influence its cultural symbolism. For

<p><b>Nature of Interaction with the Society</b></p>	<p>example, Mandarin ducks are often found moving and acting in pairs; therefore, in China, it has become a cultural symbol of marital devotion and stability. Another example is the bat. Bats usually inhabit dark caves; and as a result, have been often associated with notions of witchery and evil in the cultures of many societies.</p>
<p><b>Culture and Religion</b></p>	<p>Culture and religion influence the way society perceives animals. For example, in Christian theology, lambs are associated with purity and lions are associated with courage. In Aesop's Fables, snakes are portrayed as evil, while foxes are described as sly.</p>

*Table 1. The main factors that influence the value of animals as cultural symbols and the meanings they represent (Zhu & Ilsinger, 200 ,2023).*

## Animals as National Symbols

Using animals as symbols of nations is a common phenomenon in human societies. The selection of a national animal symbol is often influenced by its historical and cultural significance to that particular society (Hammerschlag & Gallagher, 2017).

The symbolism of animals for a nation takes two forms, nation-state animal symbols and national symbols (García, 2020, 892):

**Nation-state animal symbols:** These symbols hold political, cultural, and social significance, and are officially recognized in legal documents that guide how a society operates (e.g., constitution, regulation, etc...). In contemporary nation-states, symbolism can generally be found in the national anthem, flag, and coat of arms. A nation-state often has a singular animal symbol, representing the government and the people, although nation states with decentralised government systems can have several animal symbols on multiple levels. Modern examples of nation-state animal symbols include the lion in the United Kingdom and the bald eagle in the United States of America. However, some nation-states have more than one animal symbol (e.g. India has the elephant, the horse, and the sacred cow).

**National animal symbols:** Although they have sociocultural significance, they do not have the same official legal recognition afforded to nation-state animal symbols. National animal symbols include the British bulldog in the United Kingdom and the French rooster in France. National symbols are often used in imagery in various contexts, such as media propaganda and sports banners. *The transformation of an animal into a national symbol is a multi-stage process. The stages of this process are outlined in Table 2 below.*

Stage	Description
<p><b>From Natural Animal to Constructed Animal</b></p>	<p>Animals are natural beings, but they turn into constructed beings in human conversations and interactions. This construction is driven by humans' natural tendency to make sense of foreign species, including animals, and the use of mentalization to assign human-like imagery to animals. The treatment of foreign species as humans is known as anthropomorphism. There are two levels of anthropomorphism that people practise in daily life. The first is "individual anthropomorphism," which is noticed in pet owners who practise it to understand their pets' thinking. The second and more typical level of anthropomorphism is "collective anthropomorphism," which is the treatment of an entire animal species as a homogenous group with specific common characteristics, such as courage in lions and laziness in pigs.</p>
<p><b>From Constructed Animal to National Animal</b></p>	<p>Constructed animals can become national animals. National animal symbols are representative of their nations. This transformation necessitates that the animal's attributes as a national symbol are similar to those of the socially constructed animal. The incompatibility between an animal's proposed and socially constructed attributes leads to difficulty in turning it into a national symbol.</p>

## From National Animal to National Animal Identity

A national animal can turn from being a mere tangible representation of a particular society into a representation of the national identity of that society. Although anthropomorphism ascribes human traits to animals, the process does not turn these traits into representations of national identity. The transformation into a representation of the national identity is made possible by what is known as “positive animalization,” which is the process of perceiving humans as animals with favourable and desired traits.

*Table 2. Stages of the transformation of an animal into a national symbol (Zhu, 24-23 ,2021).*

## Camels as Cultural Symbols in Saudi Arabia

The long history of the relationship between humans and camels in Saudi Arabia must be understood in conjunction with its broader context within the Arabian Peninsula. Camels have been an integral part of the lives of the inhabitants of the land of Arabia for thousands of years. As a result, camels have become significant to local traditions and cultures in the region. Evidence shows that dromedary camels were first domesticated in southeastern Arabia, with the oldest dromedary bone remains found dating back to approximately 7,000 years ago (*Al-Hammadi et al., 2020*).

With the formation of clans and tribes and the establishment of communities, camels became domesticated on a large scale. Evidence of the pervasive presence of camels in the culture of the people of Arabia is found in “Wusum” (وسوم), which are brands or marks distinguishing camels. Wusum served a wide variety of purposes besides marking camels, such as symbols of clans, marks of ownership depicted on tents, and marks for defining a tribe’s territorial boundaries (*Khan, 2014*).

Camels hold a unique and significant position in the history of Saudi Arabia owing to their remarkable ability to withstand arid and hot climate conditions. They also possess biological characteristics that enable them to live and survive in desert environments. For example, camels can survive in environments where water resources are scarce, in addition to their ability to survive consistent exposure to high temperatures throughout the day (*Hanafy et al., 2016*).

The camel bears significant symbolism in the culture and heritage of Saudi Arabia. It is one of the distinctive and unique symbols of the Bedouin life that

characterises the country's cultural history, as people used camels as the primary means of transportation to cross the desert, moving from one oasis to another. Camel milk and meat were also critical dietary elements for the inhabitants of Arabia. Additionally, they were employed as a valuable resource for wool and materials used in crafting various artefacts (*Monchot, 2014*).

Although modernization has reduced the importance of camels in the daily lives of most Saudis, camels are still widely used for transportation by Bedouins inhabiting remote areas of Saudi Arabia. The majority (53%) of the dromedary population of the Arabian Peninsula, estimated at approximately 1.6 million camels, is in Saudi Arabia (*Mahmoud et al., 2020*).

Due to their historical ties to the Bedouin life, camels continue to occupy a unique and cherished role in modern Saudi Arabian social life. This significance is evident in the fact that many Saudis rear camels for non-economic purposes, and that camel-rearing activities are popular among many Saudi retirees. Many Saudis reside in urban areas and have regular professional lives but still own camels and keep them in urban or desert locations (*Abdallah & Faye, 2013*).

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## The Current Economic Value of Camels

Camels are of significant economic value because they serve many valuable purposes. They are a source of several products, such as meat, milk, and hides. They are also used for various purposes, such as entertainment, transportation, racing competitions, cultural celebrations, and camel pageants. They are an essential resource for people living in arid and semi-arid areas due to their natural capabilities to produce food under harsh environmental conditions under which the survival and productivity of other types of livestock cannot be sustained (*Al-Juboori et al., 2013*).

The growing awareness of the economic value of camels is reflected in the increase in the world population of camels in recent years. The “old world camel” population has significantly increased within the last few decades, growing from 19 million in 1997 to 35 million in 2017, demonstrating a rise of about 82%. This is attributable to the large-scale transition from the use of camels in the nomadic life to intensive production and husbandry of camels, which reflects the growing awareness of the substantial economic potential of camels (*Sazmand et al., 2019*).

Camels hold potential as a food source for combating malnutrition in environments where rearing other types of livestock is difficult, such as arid and semi-arid environments. Camels can be raised with minimal reliance on naturally occurring plants. They also have physiological features that enable them to withstand harsh climate conditions. Moreover, they possess exceptional metabolic features that facilitate efficient protein synthesis, even when feeding on a low-protein diet (*Bediye, 2018*).

Another reason camels are a valuable economic source is the medicinal value of their products. Camel milk is gaining popularity due to its medicinal value and benefits for those with various medical conditions, such as hepatitis, Crohn's disease, allergies, and diabetes. Additionally, camel meat provides unique nutritional benefits that are superior to those found in other types of livestock meat (*Bediye, 2018*).

Camels are also of significant economic value due to their widespread use in camel racing. Camel racing is a competition involving dromedaries (one-humped) rather than Bactrian (two-humped) camels. This type of racing is held at special festivals and social gatherings, representing a tradition that dates back several centuries, particularly in the Arabian Peninsula, which is home to the dromedary. Today, many camels are specifically reared for racing purposes, with breeders using special practices for breeding, nutrition, and training (*Bornstein, 2021*).

The awareness of the economic value of camels is noticeable in Saudi Arabia. The camel population in Saudi Arabia has been growing at a relatively steady annual rate of approximately 5.2% since 1961. Camels represent more than 50% of Saudi Arabia's total livestock wealth, thus contributing to the country's economy and establishing it as a global leader in camel production (*Abdallah & Faye, 2013*).

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## Value-Added Products of Camels

**Milk:** Milk production is a primary focus of dromedary rearing in many countries. The significance of camels as a source of milk is attributed to specific reasons (*Bornstein, 2021*):

1. Camels have a relatively lengthy lactation period, which ranges between 12 and 18 months long. Thus, camels can produce a consistent milk supply during all seasons, including dry seasons.
2. The market for camel milk is witnessing consistent growth, as demand is growing not only in local communities in which camels are reared but also in urban areas and big cities.
3. Peri-urban camel milk production systems are increasingly being integrated into local markets.
4. The growth of entrepreneurs' interest in establishing systems for intensive camel dairy production. Such systems are growing in Saudi Arabia, UAE, the United States, the Netherlands, and Australia.

On average, a camel produces 3–10 kilograms of milk during lactation. Unlike other captive-bred animals, camels need minimal food for survival, thereby generating cost-effectiveness and value-added advantages. While a dairy cow needs to consume an average of 9.1 kilograms of forage to produce one litre of milk, a camel needs only 1.9 kilograms (*Albaba, 2014*). Due to a camel's innate resistance to harsh climate conditions, such as droughts, it can produce milk all

year round, unlike dairy cows. The value of camel milk can be further increased with the improvement of camel milk production facilities as well as improvement of packing, thereby leading to a broader appeal of camel milk among milk consumers, including those who are accustomed to consuming other types of milk (*Isako & Kimindu, 2019*).

**Meat:** Camel meat represents only 0.13% of the global meat production and 0.41% of that of herbivorous animal meat. However, contrary to camel milk production, which mainly focuses on local markets, camel meat production targets local and global markets. Moreover, camels can be sold in the market, including live animals, unproductive older females, and males. Another economic opportunity for camel meat production is the substantial market that can be targeted, as camel meat is strongly demanded in countries of the Arab world. Approximately 170,000 camels are exported to many countries during the period of the Eid-al-Adha (*Bornstein, 2021*).

**Wool:** The characteristics of camel wool (fur) vary depending on the nature of environments camels inhabit. The good quality fur belongs to the camels inhabiting environments where the difference between temperature levels in day and night is significant; such camels have thicker fur to adapt to low temperatures. Camel wool is used for making a variety of products, such as blankets, bags, ropes, carpets, and clothes. An adult camel produces 1-3 kilograms of wool annually (*Bornstein, 2021*).

**Hides:** Camel hides can be used for manufacturing various products, such as sandals, drums, and ropes (*Bornstein, 2021*).

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## Camels as Tourist Attractions

The use of animals as tourist attractions, or what is known as «animal-based tourism» is a rising phenomenon globally. It is characterised by allowing tourists to spectate and even interact with animals. In many animal-based tourism destinations, activities are designed and maintained to link to the livelihoods of local communities (*Pastrana et al., 2020*). Camels have become an element of tourist attraction in recent years, as many countries present camels as part of their tourism activities and events.

Below are a few examples of international locations in which camels are used as elements of tourist attraction (*Seifu et al., 2019*):

**Botswana:** The Tsabong Ecotourism Camel Park is a significant tourist attraction in Kgalagadi District, with camels being the highlight of the park. The local community undertakes the responsibility of rearing camels and providing them with care, while the Botswana Tourism Organization is responsible for supervising the park's operations.

**India:** Camels are a major tourist attraction in the Thar Desert, and are used in safari activities. Camel tourism in the area is vital for the city of Jaisalmer, located in Rajasthan state, as it generates income for several groups, such as tour organisers, the local community, and camel owners.

**Tanzania:** The Maasai community of Mkuru is implementing a cultural tourism initiative to support camel tourism. This has helped generate income and create employment opportunities for the local community.

**Arabian Peninsula:** Camels are widely used as a tourist attraction, particularly in camel racing, which is part of the region's cultural heritage. Al Janadriyyah, Saudi Arabia's most prominent cultural and heritage festival, is held annually in Riyadh and is one of the biggest and most popular cultural festivals in the Middle East. Among the several events held and organised in the festival are camel races, which are considered prominent events that attract many visitors (*Almadani, 2021*).

Not only are camels included in prominent heritage and cultural festivals, but they are also the main theme of specific tourism events held in Saudi Arabia. The most important of such events in the country is the Camel Festival (also known as King Abdulaziz Festival), which has been ongoing since 2000. The month-long festival is a gathering to showcase the highest quality camel breeds in the region. It emphasises the historical significance of camels to people's lives and aims to help preserve the purity of Arab camel breeds.

The festival attracts strong participation, with about two million visitors, mostly from countries of the Gulf Council Cooperation (GCC) region, and about 15,000 camels showcased throughout the festival. Several events are held within the festival, such as displays of local culture, traditional dancing gatherings, camel racing, and the famous and prominent camel pageant. Owners of camels winning the pageant receive 25 million SAR (\$6.6 million) in prize money (*Bieh et al., 2019*).



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## Conclusion

This chapter explores the significance of camels as cultural symbols and tourist attractions, particularly in the context of Saudi Arabia. Animals have long served as cultural symbols, reflecting societal values and beliefs. In some cases, animals become national symbols, representing a society's identity and garnering legal recognition. In Saudi Arabia, the camel holds a special place in the local culture due to its historical importance in transportation and sustenance. Despite modernization, camels continue to play a vital role in the Saudi economy and social life. Therefore, the Ministry of Culture designated the year 2024 as the Year of Camel, appreciating its role in the lives of Saudis.

Camels are not only valuable as cultural and national symbols but also as an economic resource. They provide various value-added products such as milk, meat, wool, and hide. Additionally, camels serve as a major tourist attraction in Saudi Arabia, with activities like camel racing, breed exhibitions, and beauty pageants drawing visitors. Recognizing the potential of camels in promoting tourism, it is crucial to preserve this cultural heritage while aiming to establish Saudi Arabia as a global tourism destination under the Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 initiative. Hence, camels in Saudi Arabia signify both cultural significance and economic value, making them essential elements of tourist attraction.

# 03

# Alheda'a: Oral Traditions of Calling the Camel Flock

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## Introduction

Since their domestication about 3,000–6,000 years ago, Old World camels have played a crucial role in facilitating cross-continental caravans, enabling the transportation of individuals and commodities. This has fostered cultural connections and has eased the provision of essential resources such as milk, meat, wool, and labour (Burger & Ciani, 2019). The camel, with its exceptional qualities, holds particular significance for Saudi Arabia, playing a vital role in socio-economic activities. Notably, the country boasts the highest concentration of dromedaries globally.

The connections between Saudi people and camels are evident in everyday life and encompass a deep understanding, strong emotional attachment, and gastronomic preferences for camel milk and meat. Despite numerous studies discussing the lack of connection between people and mammals, the communication between humans and camels is one of the fascinating things deserving investigation and information. Therefore, this chapter aims to emphasise the skill of calling animals through a comprehensive discussion of the vocal calling technique known as Alheda'a. Prior to delving further into the topic, it is imperative to provide illustrative instances and scenarios that underscore the correlation between vocal communication and the cognitive reaction exhibited by animals. First, we need to define what is meant by oral calling. According to Manteuffel et al., (2004), oral calls are signals that are transmitted with the purpose of notifying distant recipients, maintaining communication with distant group members, or attracting conspecifics across extensive distances. These signals or oral sounds produce different responses in animals which could lead to the acquisition of new knowledge.

The phenomenon of altering the acoustic structure of a vocalisation in response to auditory information is referred to as vocal production learning. According to Janik and Slater (2000), a distinction may be made between the capacity to generate sounds that resemble or deviate from an acoustic model, and contextual learning, which involves utilising a pre-existing signal in a novel situation based on one's

exposure to how other persons employ the signal. One crucial distinction pertains to whether animals merely acquire novel contexts for utilising pre-existing signals or if they actively alter the acoustic features of their vocalisations to become more or less comparable to the sounds they perceive.

There are global instances associated with oral communication, but with some variations from the focus of this chapter. However, it is essential to acknowledge these examples. For instance, avian species that are linked to precipitation, a scarce and vital resource in the arid American southwest, are categorised collectively inside the Pueblo classification system. According to Tyler (1979), there is a perceived association between dove cries and the absence of rainfall. Additionally, the behaviour of swallows, characterised by their dipping and circling movements, is believed to be indicative of impending rain.

Furthermore, the vibrant hues exhibited by hummingbirds are often interpreted as a reflection of both rainbows and the blossoms that flourish as a consequence of precipitation. Another illustration can be found among the Yanyuwa people of Australia, who rely on a specific crow sound, and the related Crow Dreaming stories<sup>1</sup>, to determine when it is time to migrate to their winter grounds (Bradley, 2010). The last example of calling can be found in Northern European cultures. Certain civilizations there employ the resonant vocalisation of the loon, often known as the diver, as a navigational aid for seafarers who find themselves disoriented in inclement weather conditions.

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<sup>1</sup>Many nations generally consider crows in dreams as a symbol or sign of life changes or bad luck

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## **Alheda'a: Oral Traditions of Calling Camel Flocks:**

It is important to acknowledge that the majority of the information presented in the subsequent parts, related to Alheda'a, has been sourced from the nomination file available at The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and submitted by the state parties, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Oman. UNESCO is dedicated to recording and safeguarding the cultural legacy of its 193 member states. Intangible and tangible cultural heritage objects are recorded only after being nominated by experts and subjected to extensive investigation. All inscriptions must adhere to the standards established by UNESCO.

For example, the act of preserving a tradition should contribute to the sustained continuation of the practice within the group from which it originates. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, in collaboration with the United Arab Emirates and Oman, officially recognized "Alheda'a" as an intangible practice on UNESCO's Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage on November 30th, 2022. This recognition allows for a detailed exploration of the Alheda'a practice in the following paragraphs.

Alheda'a is a generational oral custom used to summon a group of camels. In antiquity, the use of camels in caravans on desert expeditions was customary. Today, the management and control of the camel herd is facilitated by the utilisation of vocalisations, gestures, and other instruments by the herder.

Alheda'a is a vocal polyphonic expression and form of poetry observed in Saudi Arabia, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates. The act involves producing auditory signals by spoken means, gestures, or musical instruments by those engaged in herding activities. This serves as a method to communicate with their camels, facilitating the delivery of particular messages or instructions aimed at directing and guiding the camels into a desired direction.

Alheda'a is a mode of expression characterised by its unrestricted rhythmic nature, drawing inspiration from both prose and poetry in its auditory forms. Frequently, the practitioner employs a distinct collection of sounds and sentences that the camels are familiar with and have grown accustomed to.

When camel herders commence the process of grazing, they emit vocalisations, engage in hand clapping, employ the waving of a stick, or utilise musical instruments such as the percussion instrument known as «Al-Labid» or a flute. These auditory signals guide groups of camels over arid landscapes or grazing areas, leading them to a designated location for activities such as drinking, feeding, pre-milking preparations, or prompt assembly in the event of imminent threats like sandstorms. In the United Arab Emirates, it is worth noting that the act of milking camels, sometimes accompanied by Alheda'a, has significant recognition. In Saudi Arabia, the practice of utilising Alheda'a is observed for the purpose of training camels in the technique of collecting water from wells, often referred to as Alsawani. This involves instructing the camels to navigate back and forth by means of tugging the ropes associated with the wells.

Herders engage in the training of camels, which are known for their cognitive abilities and perceptiveness, to discern between right and left orientations, respond to commands to open their mouths, and assume a kneeling position for the purpose of being mounted. The dominant male camel within the group, referred to as «Al-Rohoul,» is conditioned to assume the role of guiding the herd over the arid terrain by emitting distinct vocalisations, which aid the shepherd in locating fresh grazing grounds. The subject displays a keen response by promptly adhering to the auditory stimulus. Alheda'a fosters a robust connection between the animals and the practitioner, resulting in a mutual attachment.

There aren't any particular roles or designated groups of people who are responsible for practising and passing on this art. Herders and camel owners engage in alheda'a to train their camels to respond to a call. Owners of camels typically prefer to handle herding duties on their own. However, there are instances, such as when herders are abroad or when a new camel is added to the herd. In such cases, herders who are well-versed in the practice of Alheda'a are employed to assist.



*Image 3.1: An emotional bond. Source: UNESCO (n.d.).*

This practice is not a male-only activity, and women from many different tribes engage in this tradition. Also, participation is not limited by age. Children can also naturally pick up the phonics of Alheda'a and their meanings through exposure to the language at home or by actively participating in guiding the family flock. As they reach an appropriate age, additional responsibilities are entrusted to them, allowing them to exercise the skills and tactics needed to shepherd the herd. In order to communicate with and direct the camels, practitioners are noted for their distinctive, eloquent voices and their ability to compose brief sentences and syllables that are delivered with a quick cadence. Practitioners often use a variety of noises, pitches, and tones that no other flock would understand, allowing them to lead the herd through the dangerous desert. As a result, those who practise Alheda'a are recognized as vital members of the tribe, fulfilling this crucial role. It's important to note that camels require specific attention and care to maintain their health and facilitate breeding. Herders are responsible for providing a safe and healthy environment in which the animals can thrive.

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## **Social and Cultural Aspects of Alheda'a**

It is impossible to herd camels effectively without the use of Alheda'a, which serves as a means of communication with the animals. The herders, who never leave their side and ensure the camels' well-being, command the camels' respect and obedience. Developing a mutually understood language with camels through the use of chanting is compelling proof of the complementary relationship between nature and the environment. This relationship encompasses people, animals, and the myriad of environmental elements that surround them.

A practitioner of Alheda'a teaches the flock how to respond appropriately to a variety of spoken directions. This is achieved by establishing a link between the herder and the herd that is based on an emotional relationship that they both share. The human-camel link is manifested through the practice of giving a unique name to each animal. Additionally, camels can identify the herder's voice, scent, and psychological state, showcasing their ability to recognize their own names.

In addition to this, Alheda'a fosters healthy connections amongst the various herders. When they get together to feed their herds around the pasture, a common practice in the area, they shake hands and share coffee. In traditional Saudi culture, these meetings not only promote the social solidarity of members of the same tribe, but also serve as occasions for practitioners to organise camel tournaments amongst herders called "Albat'h", in which they seek to summon another person's flock of camels using Alheda'a. These competitions are called "Albat'h." The one who is successful in getting the other flock to respond to his or her voice is declared the winner.

Herders often compose songs and poetry about the warm feelings of companionship and nostalgia they have for their camels while they watch their herds graze. The natural world serves as an important source of creativity for Alheda'a practitioners, many of whom are also accomplished poets in their local communities. During camel races in Oman, it is common for poets and academicians to get together and discuss their most recent lyrical works. Moreover, the performance of oral traditions and music of Alheda'a during festive events, like weddings and graduations, serves a social function, reflecting the joy and happiness of the communities. In addition, camel festivals offer Alheda'a practitioners a cultural and social space to come together, showcasing their expertise and knowledge.



**Figure 3.2.** Practising Alheda'a.  
Source: UNESCO (n.d.).



**Figure 3.3.** A woman practising Alheda'a  
Source: UNESCO (n.d.).

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## The Geographical Location of Alheda'a

Desert regions are prevalent in Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Oman; therefore, camel herdsman traverse their respective tribe territories in search of water sources, pasture, and wells. Alheda'a is a widespread practice in desert regions of Saudi Arabia, with particular emphasis on the following areas: the southwestern coastal areas of Jazan, the central areas of Hail and Rumah, certain parts of the Eastern Region including Al-Ahsa and Hafar Albatin, the southeastern region of Al-Rub' al Khali, and the northwestern province of Tabuk. Additionally, it is implemented on rural properties in other areas.

In the context of Oman, Alheda'a is observed in the following provinces: Muscat, Al-Batinah, Al-Buraimi, and Ad-Dakhiliyah in the north; Musandam, Dhahira, and Musandam in the centre; and Dhofar in the south. Furthermore, Alheda'a is observed in desert regions of the United Arab Emirates, specifically the Al Dhafra area in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, and in the Emirates of Ras Al Khaimah, Fujairah, Sharjah, and Dubai. Permanent settlements referred to as "Al-Izab" are established in the semi-arid regions surrounding urban centres. These sites serve various functions, including camel racing and the settlement and reproduction of camels. Finally, Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Qatar, Mauritania, Sudan, Syria, Yemen, and Tunisia are also home to Alheda'a.

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## Communities and Groups Practising Alheda'a

In the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, individuals known as Alheda'a carriers are affiliated with pastoral groups that reside in many regions, including desert landscapes, coastal places like Jazan, and even urban settings that have pastures located on its peripheries. The practice in question is observed among several tribes, including Almutairi, Almurrah, Alabdaly, Alotaibi, Alabeery, Albalawi, Altamimi, Aldosari, Alkhaldi, Alqahtani, Alharbi, and Alshemmary.

In the United Arab Emirates, those who practise Alheda'a are affiliated with tribes engaged in camel rearing activities inside the desert, particularly in the Al Dhafra Region. Notable tribes involved in this practice include AlBaniyas, AlFalahi, AlFalasi, AlHamli, AlMurar, AlMazrouei, AlMuhairbi, AlMuhairi, AlQubaisi, and AlSuwaidi. Camel breeders are also found in hilly regions such as Ras Al-Khaimah and Fujairah. In Dubai, camel owners residing in "Al-Mihdhar," a tiny agricultural town, as well as the populations residing near camel markets and racing fields, also use the practice.

In Oman, the practice of camel breeding takes place in permanent camps known as “izbat.” These camps are owned by various families and tribes across all governorates, such as Izbat Khamis bin Saeed AlSinani, Izbat Hashil Bin AlSaghir AlQuraini, Izbat Hamad Bin Abdullah AlSaeedi, Izbat Sheikh Hammoud Bin Ali AlJahuri, and Izbat Abdullah bin Salem AlBalushi. The Omani Federation for Camels, Hijr AlBashaer, and many other groups play a crucial role in overseeing the breeding and racing activities pertaining to camels.

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## **Preservation Efforts**

In order to ensure the preservation of intangible cultural heritage, it is imperative that it remains pertinent to its respective community, undergoes continual recreation, and is handed from one generation to the next. Several initiatives and endeavours aimed at preserving the practice of Alheda’a have been acknowledged in Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Oman. The initial initiative pertains to the transmission of the practice. The transmission of Alheda’a occurs through informal educational channels, specifically targeting youngsters within communities engaged in camel herding activities. Hence, the participating nations are endeavouring to enhance students’ understanding of the significance of camel herding and the cultural aspects associated with the respective habitats. Public schools in Saudi Arabia often arrange educational excursions to various heritage festivals, including the renowned Al Janadriyah Cultural and Heritage Festival and the esteemed King Abdulaziz Camel Festival. These festivals serve as platforms for showcasing the traditional practice of Alheda’a. The Ministry of Education in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) arranges field trips to Al-Izab, which are permanent camps located in various locations. These trips serve to establish a connection between the academic knowledge imparted in school programs and the cultural traditions associated with camels.

The second aspect related to the practice is the identification, documentation, and research on the subject matter. The involved parties in this practice have provided support to several institutions dedicated to the dissemination of knowledge pertaining to camel culture, arts, and the environmental contexts in which this cultural practice is manifested. For example, the Saudi Society for the Study of Camels is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) that focuses on doing scientific and cultural research related to camels. It was established in 2014 and is affiliated with King Saud University.



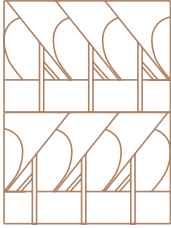
In 1986, Qassim University established a Camels Research Center under the College of Agriculture and Veterinary Studies. This centre focuses on conducting research and producing scholarly publications in several subjects relating to camels, notably Alheda'a. Furthermore, two initiatives were undertaken by the Omani Ministry of Heritage and Culture, with the aim of gathering historical information pertaining to intangible cultural heritage and documenting oral traditions associated with desert life. The publication titled "Ardhat Alkhail wal Alebil" explores the cultural legacy associated with camels and is available in both Arabic and English.

The third aspect here is promotion and enhancement. The government of all state parties provided support for the efforts of the relevant communities, leading to the establishment of events such as the King Abdulaziz Camel Festival, which is a recurring cultural event that seeks to promote and preserve the tradition of camels. It has received sponsorship from the Saudi Camel Federation since the year 2018. The 2018 festival reported a total attendance of 600,000 guests over a span of three days, with a budget allocation of 30 million USD. Various initiatives were undertaken in different localities, including the Hail Camel Festival, the Crown Prince Camel Festival in Taif, and the Jazan Camel Forum.

During the Omani Culture Festival in 2019, a photography and video competition was held in Oman to showcase the intangible cultural legacy of the oral tradition. This event encompassed several aspects of Omani culture, including Alheda'a. In the United Arab Emirates (UAE), there is an annual tradition of organising competitions centred around camel races. These events serve to honour the rich legacy of camels and provide assistance to those involved in the practice of camel racing. One notable illustration of such a tournament is Al Dhafra, held by the Department of Culture and Tourism in Abu Dhabi.

Finally, The establishment of the Camel Club in 2017 serves to underscore the significance of camels in the historical and cultural context of Saudi Arabia. The primary objective is to ensure the preservation of cultural practices associated with camel breeding and provide assistance to those engaged in these activities. This example pertains to the concept of the fourth aspect in relation to preservation and protection.

# 04



## Exploring the Success Factors of King Abdulaziz Camel Festival's Design

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### Introduction

In the English translation of surah Al-Ghashiyah, verse 17: “Do they not ever reflect on camels - how they were ‘masterfully’ created.” (The Quran, 88:17). Camels are mentioned 15 times in the Qur’an, often highlighting the wonders of Allah’s artistry. Arabs hold a deep affection for camels, considering them a symbol of hardship and strength capable of traversing vast, drought-ridden territories. Their relationship with camels goes beyond just transportation; they rely on them for food, milk, clothing, physical currency, and take immense pride in them. Nevertheless, camel cavalry played a significant role in desert warfare throughout Arab history, owing to the animal’s remarkable adaptability in arid environments, surpassing the suitability of conventional cavalry horses.

In Saudi Arabia, camels continue to be a source of pride and a sign of wealth. Between 1902 and 1932, King Abdulaziz Al Saud used horses and camels to unite most of the Arabian Peninsula to form the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which strengthened the camel’s link to the Kingdom’s history and pride. In 2000, King Abdulaziz Festival was inaugurated as a beauty pageant specifically for camels, and has since evolved dramatically to incorporate over 25 events and initiatives. This chapter provides a detailed background of the King Abdulaziz Camel Festival (KACF) examining its success factors in festival design and offering recommendations for further developments.

## Core Values of Event Design

Event design is crucial for the success of events, as it contributes to the enhancement of every aspect of the event (Brown & James, 2004). While event management encompasses planning, production, evaluation, as well as marketing, financial, and risk management, event design stands out as a critical element that integrates all these aspects. Core values form the central components of event design (Brown & James, 2004). Goldblatt (1997) outlined five fundamental questions as core values in event design that designers should address before undertaking any event: Why? Who? What? When? Where? Brown and James (2004) acknowledged the importance of the first three questions/ core values (Why? Who? What?). However, they diverged on the significance of “when” and “where” during the planning stage and introduced a new core value – the question of “want” (Table 1). To enhance experiences for both participants and visitors, event designers should also engage the five senses and apply design principles using suitable techniques (Table 1). This chapter contends that analysing the core values, principles, and techniques of KACF design can contribute to its further development.

Core Values	
Why? Who? What? Want? When? Where?	
Five Senses	
Sight, Sound, Touch, Taste and Smell	
Design Principles	Design Techniques
<b>Scale</b>	Venue match event, close-up, using multiples, using sound systems, 2D for 3D
<b>Focus</b>	Human eyes' working process, arc of vision, physiological & psychological responses, visual effects (colour & movement, difference & change, blocking & shapes)
<b>Shape</b>	Sight lines, clean lines, symmetry, uncluttered, narrow, obstruction, starting from right or left, height
<b>Timing</b>	Event time vs. real time, tight program, realistic time, fat time, contract, influence of audience on real time
<b>Event Curve</b>	Over event's duration, not all activities at last minute

**Table 1.** *Event Design Core Values, Principles and Techniques*  
**Source:** *Adapted from Brown (2010) and Goldblatt (1997)*

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## The Event Design Core Value of “Why” and KACF’s Aim

The core value of “why” refers to the compelling reason for an event: why it must be held (Goldblatt, 1997) or why it is being staged, if it is already underway (Brown, 2010). In cases where such a reason does not exist or is not clear in the mind of the designer, Brown and James (2004) suggest that it should not proceed or, if already ongoing, should be halted. There are two issues with research related to the “why” core value. First, the research seems to be of a theoretical nature, providing explanation and meaning of a problem by defining it theoretically. In other words, more research with applied nature to demonstrate the practical use of theoretical knowledge is needed, which should be conducted through field work and visits to the problematic situation.

In the case of the “why,” any event designer can provide a reason which - from their perspective - seems compelling, persuasive and convincing for an event to be staged for the first time or kept going if it is already underway. In Saudi Arabia, for example, every province and major city hosts one of the three types of events: national day celebration, sport event, food or animal festival. However, if theoretically there is still room for more events of all three types to be staged around the Kingdom, what compelling and persuasive reasoning event designers can provide? The second issue within the current literature is that it does not provide the process of answering this question. This chapter argues that providing event designers with the features or factors of what makes the reasoning behind an event compelling, and a practical manual to come up with such persuasive reasoning, are two issues that can help further develop KACF and enrich event studies.

KACF is an annual cultural, economic, sports and entertainment festival in Saudi Arabia under royal patronage. It aims to consolidate and strengthen the camel heritage in the Saudi, Arab, and Islamic culture, and provide a cultural, tourist, sports, leisure, and economic centre around camels and their heritage. Recently, the Saudi Camel Club became the organising authority of the festival. To achieve the ambitious objective of turning the event into a tourism destination, the club provided an integrated economic system in terms of auctions, supplies and industries related to camels, and developed the traditions of the community.

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## The Event Design Core Value of “Who” and the KACF Audience

The core value of “why” refers to the compelling reason for an event: why it must be held (Goldblatt, 1997) or why it is being staged, if it is already underway (Brown, 2010) and an event’s target market which includes participants, stakeholders, and the event management team (Brown & James, 2004). In this area, there is abundant research from the perspective of event studies, showing the importance of competing over a certain event audience (Getz, 2002), as

well as other perspectives like event participants (*Sweeney & Goldblatt, 2016*) and stakeholders (*Smith, Pitts, Wang & Mack, 2015*). While event studies have identified the audience and their associated expectations (*Mackellar, 2013*) through market orientation—a widely adopted management philosophy (*Mehmetoglu & Ellingsen, 2005*)—there still needs to be an exploration of the suitability to target an audience. More importantly, alternative methods to answer this question beyond market orientation should be considered.

Moscardo and Norris (2004), for example, argue that little research has been done beyond identifying an event audience based on their ability to afford ticket prices. Further research is needed similar to Kolb's (1997) study, which pinpointed students as an event audience and examined their willingness to pay for arts events. Therefore, exploring additional facets of event audiences and identifying practical tools and methods for event designers to answer the “who” core value is necessary.

Since KACF targets national and international participants and visitors, the questions to be asked are: 1) What are characteristics of the targeted audience in terms of age, sex, social status, physical condition, level of education, hometown, nationality and religion? 2) Is the target audience willing to invest effort and time to travel to KACF's location in Al-Sayahid (120 km north of Riyadh) between December 1, 2023, and January 15, 2024? Answering these two questions is essential for the festival's success in attracting the target numbers of participants, visitors, and tourists. For future editions of KACF, a third question should be asked: will the current audience continue attending in the future? In other words, the “who” event design core value/question should be revisited annually.

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## The Event Design Core Value of “What” and the KACF Content

The question of “what” pertains to determining the event product (*Goldblatt, 1997*) or the broad features that define an event category—a festival, celebration, or another category (*Brown & James, 2004*). In other words, the “what” core value is about what will happen at an event (*Brown, 2010*). The definition of event products has long been a focal point in event studies, given its profound impact on effective event planning and management (*Getz, 1989*). Even recent research has defined the event product to identify what makes a sport event enjoyable from the spectators' perspective (*Sequeira Couto, Sio Lai Tang & Boyce, 2016*), and to pinpoint factors contributing to the sustainability of business events from the viewpoint of the event organisations (*Hallak, McCabe, Brown & Assaker, 2016*).

Current events in Saudi Arabia and around the world show a trend of organising sport events packaged in festivals, giving rise to what is now known as festival sport events or fun runs, such as Hail Rally. This trend, in particular, shows the need for more investigation on “what” determines the event product or what will

happen at an event from the designers' perspective. Additionally, more research is required to explore the process employed by designers in determining a product with competitive elements aimed solely at attracting professional athletes for a sport event, as opposed to a product with more festive elements designed to attract both professional and amateur participants for fun run events.

The eighth KACF kicked off in December 2023, taking "Glory to its People" as its slogan. For this edition, the Saudi Camel Club developed four sections:

The first section of the village included Al-Mazayen Square, which is 264,000 square metres and includes 85 barns, the main area, which accommodates 450 people, and the VIP stands, accommodating 312 people (Arab News, 2023). The section also includes 5,760 square metres for visitor stands, which can hold up to 6,000 chairs, and over 1 million square metres for the auction area, which includes 145 barns, a sorting area, registration offices, locations for suppliers and brokers, and a 5 km camel track linking the inspection and sorting areas to Al-Mazayen Square.

The second section is for accommodation, with a total area estimated at 1.1 million square metres, divided into three categories (Arab News, 2023). The third section is Al-Dahna Market located to the east of the festival, 6 km away from its centre, and 2 km long. The village centre and the desert park are located in the fourth section. They hold areas for recreational and cultural activities and events, and an area for selling folk products, foods, and crafts.

The festival also holds cultural and traditional activities for all ages (Arab News, 2023). This year's festival includes more than 20 activities across 18 locations in Al-Sayahid area, featuring competitions, exhibitions, and performances suitable for all age groups. It also features more than 320 competitive rounds, such as camel beauty pageant competitions (Mazayen), purebred camels, camel racing without jockeys (Hajjij), and traditional racing. Punters can ride camels and get to know, milk, feed, nurture, and cuddle the animals, in addition to taking souvenir pictures with them. The festival also includes Al-Oqailat Museum, the dialogue poetry event, the falcon area, and the folk market, which includes antique and traditional collectibles and goods, such as crafts, camping tools, camel supplies, traditional seats, spices, supplies for coffee producing families, and traditional food.

The abundant content at KACF enables it to attract a diverse range of audience. As the literature suggested, two issues within the "what" core value are to be investigated, the first being the nature of every single component of the event product and the role it plays in satisfying the target audience; while the other is to ask the festival designers how they determined each element within the event product. Analysing the answers of both issues can help enhance the

event content. Nevertheless, the sum of all components of the event content along with practices used by the festival designers to activate the five senses and applications of the design principles techniques (Table 1), sets the event's atmosphere and the overall event experience. Finally, annual developments, through festival entrepreneurial design practices, are needed to maintain satisfying current audiences and attract new ones (Monshi, 2019).

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## **The Event Design Core Value of “Want” and the Camel Club Objective**

The core value of “want” refers to the objective of staging an event (Brown & James, 2004), and it is the designers' responsibility to define what they want to achieve (Brown, 2010). The “want” core value is about establishing measurable indicators for the projected objectives, and evaluating them during the planning, operation and evaluation stages (McIlvena & Brown, 2001). This event design core value is a new addition made by Brown and James (2004) as it is not part of the original list developed by Goldblatt (1997). More research is needed in this area to distinguish between an event's objective, which is represented by the “want” core value, and the establishment of indicators for the projected objectives, which is represented by the “want” core value. The definition by Goldblatt (1997) of the “why” core value (i.e. compelling reason for staging an event), and the definition by Brown and James (2004) of the “want” core value (i.e. the objective of staging an event), seem to be similar. In other words, it is expected that any compelling reason behind staging an event has some sort of indicators to be assessed during planning, operation and evaluation stages.

Since the definitions of the two core values of “why” and “want” seem to have the same meaning, more research is needed to either accept or reject the new addition made by Brown and James (2004) to the event design core value list. This research may help distinguish between the expected associated indicators for the compelling reason, and the established measurable indicators for the projected objectives. If the two definitions or the two sets of indicators differ, then it is acceptable to have the two distinct core values – the “why” and the “want.”

Based on the literature, the question to be asked is: Is the objective/ compelling reason behind staging KACF (i.e. “why” core value) the same as the objective of the Camel Club (i.e. “want” core value)? If the answer is “yes,” then it is possible to reject the addition made by Brown and James (2004) of the “want” core value, and vice versa. However, if the answer is “no,” then a new question arises: would the two different objectives of the festival and the festival designer (the Camel Club) affect achieving KACF objectives? Based

on the information available on the festival website and club website (Table 2), the festival aims to become a destination, while the club aims to be a leader in the camel world, nature, and the development of the camel sector. Therefore, the case study of KACF would support the acceptance of Brown and James (2004) addition of the “want” core value.

<b>King Abdulaziz Camel Festival</b>	
<b>Objective</b>	To consolidate and strengthen the camel heritage in the Saudi, Arab, and Islamic culture and provide a cultural, tourist, sports, leisure, and economic destination for camels and their heritage.
<b>Camel Club Festival Organiser</b>	
<b>Vision</b>	To be the leaders of the camel world at the regional and international levels, and to be a historical, cultural and economic reference in all scientific and practical matters relating to the camel.
<b>Mission</b>	To nurture and develop the camel sector, creating and developing investment opportunities related to it, establishing interest in the camel in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as an authentic part of its heritage, cooperating in spreading and promoting this culture worldwide, and keeping pace with Saudi Vision 2030 in order to achieve some of its important goals in this regard.
<b>Strategic objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To serve and regulate the camel sector, and raise it to the highest levels in all related fields, combining the maintenance of authenticity with openness to trends in contemporary civilization.</li> <li>• To spread awareness and knowledge of the camel, the culture it has given rise to, and its links to the Saudi heritage.</li> <li>• To develop the economics of camels and their future.</li> <li>• To strengthen and promote partnerships with relevant international organisations.</li> </ul>

**Table 2:** King Abdulaziz Camel Festival aim vs. Camel Club’s vision, mission and strategic objectives  
**Source:** Camel Club (2023)



Other issues that have attracted limited attention in the literature from an event design perspective include the nature and strategic aspects of objectives, differentiation between types of designers, and types of evaluations. While Shone and Parry (2004) define events as non-routine occasions with personal, leisure, cultural or organisational objectives, Brown (2014) stated that events can have a single or a combination of objectives related to their outcomes. These objectives include celebratory, ceremonial, promotional, commercial, destination marketing, or objectives related to their operational management and the use of resources.

Brown (2014) also believes that successful events are those where design and management can align outcomes with vision, aims and objectives. Due to the nature of event objectives, their designers can range from a single individual to a group of event enthusiasts, an organisation, or even an entire community (Brown, 2014). Furthermore, evaluation of such objectives can be approached from an organisational strategic perspective as well as from the customers' satisfaction perspective (Tum, Norton & Wright, 2006). Therefore, applied research is needed in this area to explore the nature of the "want" core value and/or the nature of the measurable indicators, the process of developing such indicators, and the procedures for using these indicators to evaluate projected objectives at the planning, operation, and evaluation stages.

It is anticipated that various entities, including individuals, groups, the Camel Club as an organisation, and its stakeholders including the Saudi Camel Sport are behind the design of KACF and all its main and side events. However, there is no indication of what the measurable indicators are, the process of developing them, the process of using them to evaluate projected objectives at the planning, operation and evaluation stages. A review of these measurable indicators, if they exist, would aid in evaluating the "want" core value and in enhancing the festival to better align with the vision, mission, and strategic objectives of the Camel Club. For example, if the Camel Club intends to facilitate the mediation of Allah's creatures (i.e. camels) as it is one of the greatest types of worship with the greatest reward according to Muslim scholars, what would be the measurable indicator of this objective?

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## **The Event Design Core Values of "When and Where" and the KACF Date and Location**

The last two core values of "when" and "where" have sparked a debate about when to address them. While Goldblatt (1997) believes that they should be determined during the planning stage, Brown and James (2004) oppose this view, believing that answering these two core values should not be at the same time as the planning stage of other core values. This chapter argues that all six event design core values have to be tackled and answered at the same time, during the design phase of the planning stage, as they are interrelated elements of the

same product. Aiming to stage a food festival, or a national day celebration, for example, requires a designer to answer the “why,” “who,” and “what,” as both sides believed. Additionally, they must consider the “when” factor because it must coincide with the harvest season or with the national day; and the “where” factor, which should be close to farming sites or major city venues capable of hosting a large number of visitors for that particular reason.

These examples illustrate that decisions regarding the celebration of the harvest of a food product or a national day (the “why” core value), aiming to attract farmers, potential buyers and celebrators (the “who” core value), must also answer the “when” and “where” core values, which have to be suitable to or matching the “why” and “who” core values. Getz (2002), after all, believes that deciding on the time and location of an event is directly and immediately related to deciding on an event’s target market, and that it is a contributing factor to its success.

In the case of KACF, the designers must decide on all six core values at the planning stage as they affect each other. Being an outdoor event in Saudi Arabia, it is essential to schedule it during the winter season between November and December (i.e. the “when”) to ensure optimal participation and attendance. Without a substantial number of national and international participants and tens of thousands of visitors and tourists, the festival cannot achieve its objective of consolidating and strengthening the camel heritage in the Saudi, Arab, and Islamic cultures, and providing a cultural, tourist, sports, leisure, and economic destination for camels and their heritage. Similarly, selecting a location on the north or east of Saudi Arabia could result in reduced attendance. Choosing to host this event in close proximity to Riyadh city addresses the requirements of drawing in a substantial number of visitors from Riyadh province, which constitutes one third of the Saudi population. Additionally, it appeals to national visitors due to its central location within the Kingdom, and also attracts visitors from the Arabian Gulf states. By selecting this location, the management of KACF can achieve its objective of establishing the Saudi Camel Village in Mazayen Al-Ibl, the first and most important site in the world for camels.

On a micro-scale, the festival brings back life to the Dahna desert, once an area connecting trade routes from the east to the west of the Arabian Peninsula (Arab News, 2023). It has now become a revived tourist destination, with accommodation and shops scattered all over. The site was not only chosen for its proximity to the capital city and for being in the centre of the Kingdom, but also for its historical depth and national significance. Besides hosting merchants and pilgrims, it served as a gathering point for the armies of the founding King, Abdulaziz Al Saud, during the process of unifying the country.

Pegg and Gleeson (2004) also believe that deciding on the event type (the “what” core value), the demographics and number of attendees (the “who” core value), has to be done at the same time as deciding on the venue location and its characteristics (the “when” core value). According to Pegg, Patterson and

Axelsen (2011), answering these three core values—what, who, and when—is part of a proactive approach of risk management, as event designers can no longer rely on insurance coverage or legal immunities for their protection. Hence, there is a need for further applied research to delve into the essence of all six core values, understanding how and when to address and incorporate them. This will not only advance event design practices but also enhance the field of event studies. In essence, beyond accepting the importance of event design to all aspects of event management and the importance of identifying/answering its critical questions (Brown & James, 2004), there is a need for more research to identify features of all six core values from the perspectives of different type of events, and the methods or approaches to identify and answer each core value. The KACF could be used as a case study to develop festival design practices and reduce associated hazards.

In relation to event design core values, the literature explored the importance of understanding the five human senses. Maximising the engagement of an event's audience, which is the objective of event designers (Getz & Page, 2016), requires understanding the human senses (i.e. sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell), and their applications when designing events and applying event principles (Table 1). The human brain responds strongly to visual information like colour, shape, and movement, which event designers should leverage to create and stage sensory experiences. Similarly, designers can tap into humans' appreciation of music (Mithen, Morley, Wray, Tallerman & Gamble, 2006) and create different pleasant auditory atmospheres suitable to the varying contents of events (Brown, 2010). In relation to the touch and taste senses, designers can use padded covered chairs instead of plastic stackable chairs, and delicious slow food options rather than fast food, to create the impression and experience of an upmarket corporate event. Similarly, designers can use a particular aroma at a specific moment to engage their event audience, where that smell promotes a sense of presence (Coren, Ward & Enns, 2004). Human senses and their applications provide a bridge between event design core values and principles. While the literature highlights their applications and impacts from event visitors' perspectives (Mithen et al., 2006), a comprehensive understanding of developing such applications, implementing, and evaluating them from the event designers' perspective requires more attention.

Designers of KACF can take advantage of the camels' big size, four colours, different shapes and movements to create and stage sensational experiences. They can also use the "shilat," a type of tribal lyrics and sounds with no instrumental music, to add an authentic auditory atmosphere suitable to the varying contents of the festival. Nevertheless, touching sands, camels, and tents, as well as tasting camel milk and meat can be used by the designers to create unique experiences that cannot be found anywhere else. On the other hand, the festival may suffer from the smell of sweat, camel droppings, and car exhaust, and designers should consider solutions to minimise visitors' discomfort from these elements. In short, appreciating or understanding the power of the human senses can help the festival designers create better experiences for its audience.

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## **Conclusion and Recommendations for Further Developments of King Abdulaziz Camel Festival (KACF)**

A deep understanding of the festival design core values, principles and techniques can help the designers of KACF reach new notable levels of success. The two most important recommendations related to each of the festival's six design core values are listed below, with a total of 12 recommendations to further develop KACF:

### **In relation to KACF design core value of “why”:**

1. KACF designers should ask themselves how each component of the festival serves the compelling reason behind staging it to ensure quality content.
2. KACF designers may ask current participants and visitors what they like and dislike, and what would make them come again next year, to create better content and a loyal audience.

### **In relation to KACF design core value of “who”:**

3. KACF designers should investigate the characteristics of the targeted audience and their needs to better attract and satisfy them.
4. KACF designers should also investigate the reasons stopping other potential audiences from participating and visiting the festival's main and side events.

### **In relation to KACF design core value of “what”:**

5. KACF designers should not only ask themselves what to include in the festival, but also what not to include that might divert both participants and visitors from the festivals' objectives.
6. In addition to focusing on the main components of the festival, KACF designers should also focus on secondary ones, such as food and toilets, to enhance the overall experiences of participants and visitors'.

### **In relation to KACF design core value of “want”:**

7. The Camel Club should strike a balance between its ambitious vision and challenging objectives while considering the festival objective, ensuring not to overestimate the capabilities of the festival.
8. The Camel Club can achieve most of its strategic objectives if KACF is designed in a smart and comprehensive manner, which is not incompatible with the previous recommendation.

### **In relation to KACF design core value of “when”:**

9. KACF designers should investigate the possibility of both increasing or decreasing the duration of the festival to better serve its objectives.
10. KACF designers should investigate the chances of enriching night experiences, as most of the festival content is related to the day experiences.

### **In relation to KACF design core value of “where”:**

11. KACF designers could benefit from implementing camel riding as a way of travelling from nearby cities to the festival location to help achieve the festival objectives, or use driverless electrical vehicles to reduce the carbon footprint of traditional modes of transportation.
12. KACF designers can stage some events in nearby cities during the festival season to help attract more

# 05

# Camel Racing as a Heritage Sports Event: An Overview



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## Introduction

Camel racing is a cherished sport that is deeply rooted in a country's history and culture, most commonly Arab countries in the Middle East. This rich and time-honoured tradition has become an integral part of a destination's identity. The sport has long been an integral feature of the nomadic lifestyle, even inspiring poetic and melodic expressions. The significance and enduring nature of camels is intrinsically linked to the pivotal role they play within the desert ecosystem. This chapter provides an overview of camel racing and related festivals as one of the heritage attractions in tourist destinations. It also discusses how countries successfully maintain camel racing as part of their traditions.

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## Camel Racing History

Camels have been historically used as military vehicles from as early as 1200 BCE, and their usage has been closely linked to the regions of the Near East and the Arabian Peninsula (*Al-Hammadi, Exell, & El-Menshawy, 2020*). Camels, sometimes known as the “ships of the desert,” have had a historically crucial position in the area, exerting influence on all facets of everyday life for millennia (*Al-Shorepy, 2011*). The Arabian Peninsula, renowned for its remarkable landscapes, has a legacy in traditional camel racing with origins that trace back to several centuries. The camel is deeply assimilated into the local cultural and social fabric, and the practice of camel racing has garnered immense admiration across the region.

Camels continue to have significant value in the culture and lives of contemporary Bedouins. They serve as a crucial source of animal protein, dairy products, and raw materials. Additionally, camels function as an efficient means of transportation in desert environments and are often seen as a symbol of wealth (*Al-Hammadi, Exell, & El-Menshawy, 2020*). According to Zarei Yam and Khomeiri (2015), camels possess remarkable physiological adaptations that enable them to endure extended periods of dehydration in challenging desert environments with limited water availability, which highlights the resilience of camels among their other notable characteristics. They added that these include the ability to store heat in their bodies during the daytime, the desaturation of exhaled air in their nasal passages, a highly efficient water metabolism, a remarkable tolerance to dehydration, the storage of water in various body parts, and the capacity to consume large quantities of water within a short time frame following dehydration. According to the Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme Report (2023), the worldwide population of camels is around 20 million. However, due to the majority of camels being owned by nomadic individuals, this figure is only an estimate. The cultural customs associated with the possession of camels, the allocation of grazing areas, and the provision of water have been firmly ingrained in the customs of many nomadic societies (*Gast, et al., 1969; Hartley, 1979; Mares, 1954 as cited in Zarei Yam & Khomeiri, 2015*).

People living in the desert knew the camel as a multifunctional creature and the major source of food and transport in desert and semiarid areas where there was an extreme lack of water. The camel was known for adapting to different environmental conditions, which led pastoralists and ranchers residing in dry regions to rely on camels to fulfil their needs (*Fesseha & Desta, 2020*). According to Zarei Yam and Khomeiri (2015), camels possess the remarkable ability to withstand diseases, endure drought conditions, exhibit ease of domestication, and demonstrate efficiency in converting food and water into valuable resources such as meat and milk. One of the main uses of camels in several regions across the Middle East is for sports, specifically camel racing.

Camels are extensively bred in several countries around the Arabian Peninsula due to the socioeconomic benefits of camel racing, giving rise to a burgeoning industry (Zarei Yam & Khomeiri, 2015). The Arabian Peninsula is famous for its esteemed camel racing events, attracting competitors and spectators from many locations around the globe. Camel racing is an ancient sport that has been an integral part of Middle Eastern culture since Mediaeval times. The roots of this game may be traced back to the 7th century CE when it was regarded as a customary pastime often practised at social gatherings and festivals in the Arabian Peninsula (Britannica, 2021). Camel races are encouraged to enhance the understanding of the historical and cultural dimensions of traditional camel racing, the importance of trainers and jockeys in these races, and the integration of camel races within traditional communities.

Camel racing was also present in North Africa and other parts of the Middle East in ancient times (Al-Shorepy, 2011). This practice of casual competition persisted in Arabia and other regions until the final three decades of the 20th century, at which point those with a vested interest in the activity started to systematise camel racing into a structured sport, akin to the established framework for horse racing (Britannica, 2021). Camel racing has gained significant popularity in several countries, including Kenya, Sudan, Egypt, India, and Australia. However, it has notably flourished in the Arab nations of the Middle East, such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, and Qatar.

Previous studies have highlighted factors that can influence the racing performance of camels, much like that of horses, which can be a combination of genetic and environmental variables (Ekiz et al., 2005; Orhan and Kaygisiz, 2010 as cited in Al-Shorepy, 2011). Mota, Abrahão, and Oliveira (2005) identified many environmental elements that may influence the pace of camels during races, including the variables of sex, age, breed, racing distance, time of race, and the number of competing camels. The sport's widespread popularity has led to the development of dedicated businesses focused on training and breeding of camels, as well as conducting research relevant to the sport (Britannica, 2021). The preparation for camel racing involves meticulous steps, including the selection of camels based on classification, origin, and age, as well as providing the camels with a specialised diet. The sport itself takes place on specially-built fields dedicated solely to camel racing. These events are overseen by committees of individuals with specialised knowledge and expertise in the sport. The races and community activities are governed by established community traditions, customs, and principles, with a preparatory committee responsible for verifying the camels' provenance.

As countries progressed economically and sought to regulate camel racing, they implemented varying regulations specific to this activity, including factors such as distance and demographic characteristics like gender and age. The length of the racing track depends on the characteristics of each camel. For instance, the younger camels engage in a running activity covering a distance of four kilometres, while the older camels participate in the same activity but

cover a distance of 10 kilometres or more. According to the Saudi Camel Racing Federation, the categories for camel racing, grouped by the camel's age and distance of the track, are: Mafarid (age one to two, distance 1,200m to 2,000m), Haqaiq (age two to three, distance 2,000m to 4,000m), Leqaia (age three to four, distance: 3,000m to 5,000m), Judhae (age four to five, distance 4,000m to 6,000m), Thanaya (age five to six, distance 4,000m to 6,000m), and Hil/Zumul (age six and above, distance 6,000m to 8,000m).

In addition to country-specific regulations, there are also overarching requirements for camel racing. For instance, specific participation dates and restrictions on children riding camels are enforced based on guidelines set forth by international organisations focusing on human rights and children's rights. Moreover, participation is limited to adults or individuals utilising robot camel jockeys. This emerging robot camel jockey technology is widely recognized as a leading innovation in the field of camel racing, effectively replacing human jockeys. Its primary objective is to improve the sport and mitigate the occurrence of accidents and physical hazards that may befall human participants. In order to replace the juvenile jockeys who formerly performed the perilous task, individuals now operate little robot jockeys positioned on the backs of camels while driving alongside the track, facilitating an increase in pace. This contemporary innovation has been introduced as a means of controlling camels during the race.

The sport of camel racing has gained recognition as a significant worldwide athletic endeavour, and is particularly appealing for tourists. The collaborative efforts of community leaders, government institutions, specialist centres, and the federation of races and clubs facilitate the dissemination of information and skills around camel racing. Moreover, camel races and related festivals benefit local communities as they raise awareness about camels and the importance of preserving this heritage through observation, simulation, and verbal communication between pastoralists and camels. Consequently, camel racing is an integral aspect of the nomadic lifestyle, serving as a wellspring of inspiration for poetic and musical expressions. Additionally, the significance and enduring presence of camels in the culture of these regions are intrinsically linked to their pivotal role within the desert ecosystem.

Events attract participants from across the globe, and winners are given generous rewards, including substantial monetary grants. Furthermore, throughout the Arab nations that actively engage in this sport, these events serve as a manifestation of the cultural heritage inherent to the local community. The events showcase traditional attire and ceremonial practices that recall the cultural traditions of the local population. These communal events play a vital role in preserving the indigenous traditions and culture of a destination, particularly amidst rapid generational shifts. The following section provides an overview of preserving culture and heritage through events and festivals, and offers examples of efforts in preserving camel racing as a heritage attraction for tourists.



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## A Way to Preserve Heritage Attraction

Camels have been historically used as military vehicles from as early as 1200. Tourism is a booming industry, and based on the United Nations World Tourism Organisation's (UNWTO) World Tourism Barometer and Statistical Annex (2024), there were 1.3 billion international travellers in 2023. The number has increased by 34 % compared with 2022, reflecting the demand for tourist destinations in many aspects. Also, certain cultural attributes of tourist destinations have attracted a growing number of visitors (Arumugam & Senthil Kumar, & Subramaniam, 2023).

Therefore, destinations seek to distinguish themselves from others by promoting their unique culture and traditions. According to the UNWTO, Cultural Tourism is defined as:

*“a type of tourism activity in which the visitor’s essential motivation is to learn, discover, experience and consume the tangible and intangible cultural attractions/products in a tourism destination. These attractions/products relate to a set of distinctive material, intellectual, spiritual and emotional features of a society that encompasses arts and architecture, historical and cultural heritage, culinary heritage, literature, music, creative industries and the living cultures with their lifestyles, value systems, beliefs and traditions.” (UNWTO, n.d.)*

It is increasingly pivotal to incorporate historical monuments, architecture, and collective memory in the design of cultural heritage tourism strategies, which in turn helps foster sustainable urban development (Kuo & Wu, 2013). Specifically, UNESCO highlighted the importance of leveraging intangible cultural assets in tourist destinations as compared to architectural structures, and as a result, some destinations focus on heritage tourism, which centres on the historical, natural, and cultural significance of a particular area (Boyd, 2002).

Cultural and historical tourism have distinct characteristics that influence tourists (Bonn et al., 2007). Metelka (1990) has defined a tourist attraction as a distinctive attribute, either physical or cultural, of a given location that individual travellers or tourists see as having the potential to fulfil one or more of their special recreational requirements. Cultural attractions, including heritage and related events, have become significant features of a destination. To attract tourists, it is important to show the beauty and attractiveness of a destination, whether tangible or intangible. Incorporating attributes pertaining to history and tradition plays a pivotal role in formulating the marketing for a particular destination (Arumugam et al., 2023).

In the highly competitive tourist industry, it is expected that any destination or attraction will actively seek strategies to distinguish its offerings and services from those of its primary rivals (Bonn, 2007). Tourists seek to have a unique experience

when they visit a destination, such as visiting attractions, attending events and festivals, and engaging in activities. Events that cultivate a distinct identity and contribute to establishing a recognizable brand increase the overall good perception of the country's image (Çelik Uğuz & Gacnik, 2015). Festivals have a significant role in attracting both local and international visitors, contributing to social and economic objectives and the development of new urban images besides fostering creativity, promoting social cohesion, and serving as a platform for showcasing public identity (Çelik Uğuz & Gacnik, 2015).

Heritage sport activities are associated with preserving intangible heritage activities and promoting tourism. Sports heritage has been recognized as a potential motivation for tourism, which raised the concept of sports heritage attractions (Pinson, 2017). Those attractions, via events and activities, could motivate tourists to visit a destination. For instance, equestrian tourism sports activities featured in the tourist agenda are widely regarded as significant events that directly contribute to the revitalization and conservation of cultural heritage (Eyada, Ismaiel, & Elemam, 2022).

Chappelet (2015) highlighted the concept of legacy sports events from previous studies. First and foremost, these events must be associated with a particular location and occur there on a regular basis, often annually or sometimes biennially, with rare exceptions made only in extraordinary situations. The event must be organised by a local entity, often a nonprofit group or a local council, rather than an international organisation. Hence, there is no need to submit a proposal for hosting the event. This facilitates the use of the necessary knowledge to organise the event by using local abilities that are gradually developed and refined with each subsequent iteration.

Typically, there is a significant connection between an event and the location where it takes place, either via the venue itself (despite the possibility of venue changes) or the remembrance of a historical occurrence. The more ancient an event is, the more ingrained it becomes in the local tradition and the more powerful its economic appeal. However, it is not necessary for an event to be enormous or significant worldwide. Indeed, it is of greater significance for it to be well-suited to the specific location where it is being presented.

A prior study suggests the need to disseminate the sports tourist culture and safeguard the historical traditions of equestrian and camel racing, and it emphasised the importance of promoting sports festivals, fostering international ties, and extending invitations to many nations to participate in these events (Eyada, Ismaiel, & Elemam, 2022). Today, several nations throughout the globe provide a range of events that showcase the distinctive powers and characteristics of certain animals, while also including traditional aspects (Çalışkan, 2016). The use of camels and engagement in camel-related pursuits have gradually transformed into a significant emblem of cultural legacy for nations in the Gulf region (Williams, 2021). The global events pertaining to camels mostly consist of camel races and camel wrestling competitions (Çalışkan, 2016). Races involving dromedary camels, known for their superior speed compared to Asian camels, enjoy significant popularity (Çalışkan, 2016). Several countries have garnered renown for their notable dedication to the practice of camel farming (Çalışkan, 2016). Furthermore, camel racing has become recognized by international organisations as a heritage symbol of countries.

In 2003, UNESCO adopted the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, which indicates that cultural heritage extends beyond mere monuments and collections of artefacts. Cultural heritage encompasses the customs and practices that have been handed down from our forebears to future generations, which allowed for the inclusion of sporting events on UNESCO's list. Therefore, several countries have inscribed events as intangible cultural heritage, such as the Dragon Boat festival, which includes sporting events like boat races. In 2020, camel racing was inscribed by UNESCO as a social practice and festive heritage associated with camels on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The file was proposed by the United Arab Emirates and Oman. This recognition enriches the preservation of this tradition for countries that are hosting events related to camel racing.

Furthermore, camel racing and related festivals have become cultural events in several countries, especially in the Arabian Gulf States. According to Çalışkan (2016), the United Arab Emirates attracts tourists through hosting of a nine-day “camel festival” and the widespread occurrence of camel racing. The primary objective for the creation of this festival was to commemorate and protect the cultural legacy of the United Arab Emirates pertaining to the practice of camel trading. In addition to the competitive races involving over 10,000 camels and a collective prize pool of \$9.5 million, the festival also encompasses a camel pageant that showcases the selection of the most aesthetically pleasing camels.

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## Camel Racing in Saudi Arabia

Camel racing is considered to be a sport and heritage event in Saudi Arabia. In light of Vision 2030, the country seeks to preserve and promote intangible heritage resources and activities like camel racing as heritage attractions. There are specific organisations that play a role in preserving the heritage of camel racing, such as The Camel Club and The Saudi Camel Racing Federation. Each organisation has its own responsibilities to arrange events, which include camel racing competitions and related events, such as beauty pageants, that contribute to this authentic heritage. There are several camel racing events in Saudi Arabia, such as the King Abdulaziz Camel Festival, AlUla Camel Cup, and the Saudi Camel Racing Federation contests. The King Abdulaziz Camel Festival, organised by the Camel Club, takes place annually. This kind of event plays a role in preserving the Saudi national identity, familiarising younger generations with their country's heritage, and showcasing how this historical practice evolved into a cultural and economic phenomenon. The primary objective of this festival is to foster enthusiasm for the camel as a cultural symbol in Saudi Arabia. Additionally, it seeks to support the conservation and advancement of exceptional camel lineages and characteristics. The festival has evolved into a prominent cultural, tourist, athletic, entertainment, and economic event. It is renowned for its grand camel races and the other programs and festivities surrounding it. The festival attracts diverse attendees, from various age ranges, including locals and visitors from around the world.

Despite the importance of camel racing as a heritage attraction, there is a lack of scientific research that focuses on the effects of local cultural events, such as camel racing. Previous studies found that local culture was a factor that influenced the tourist experience (Kim, Ritchie, & McCormick, 2012). Expanding cultural and historical tourism is key in growing the tourist industry, contributing to an increase in visitors, stimulating economic development, and elevating residents' quality of life. (Arumugam et al., 2023). Thus, promoting sports events like camel racing helps raise awareness about this tradition and preserves its role as part of the country's intangible cultural heritage. Future studies should look at the impact of sports heritage events like camel racing on tourist destinations and tourists' experiences.

# 06

# Camels and Sports Tourism



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## Introduction

Tourism is an industry that relies on natural resources and cultural assets to attract visitors. In recent decades, there has been a growing fascination among individuals with local cultures other than their own, in addition to a desire to explore ancient civilizations or cultures (Öcal & Altuner, 2014). Over time, there has been an increased importance in traditional local events and this growth has led to the transformation of many events into festival-like gatherings that appeal to different visitors. As a result, these events have become attractive to specific tourist markets and have emerged as integral components of cultural tourism (Smith & Forest, 2006).

Today, many events and festivals across the globe spotlight attributes and characteristics of certain animals. One widely recognised example is that of bullfights, which are generally linked to Spain and Mexico, but variations of this practice may also be seen in nations such as Japan and Turkey (Shubert, 2001). Another example is camel-related activities that take place globally and mostly include camel racing and camel wrestling (Çalışkan, 2009). The races, in which Arabian camels exhibit superior speed compared to their Asian counterparts, are organised throughout several Arab nations, with a special focus on the United Arab Emirates and Qatar. In addition to Afghanistan and Pakistan, where camel wrestling contests are few and sporadic, Turkey is renowned for hosting the most extensive and prevalent camel wrestling events.

Camels, widely recognized as the “ship of the desert,” have significantly influenced the historical and cultural discourse of Saudi Arabia. They serve as a symbol of tenacity, adaptability, and a profound attachment to the dry terrains that characterise the area. This chapter examines the progression of camel-related activities into contemporary sports, their connection to sports tourism, and the significance of camel sports in the preservation of cultural heritage. The following sections provide further details on activities linked to camels in Saudi Arabia and the Middle East, subsequently discussing the obstacles and potential future developments in camel sports tourism.

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## Evolution of Camel-Related Activities into Modern Sports Tourism

The evolution of camel-related activities in Saudi Arabia is a fascinating journey from traditional practices deeply rooted in nomadic lifestyles to dynamic modern sports. Historically, camels were indispensable companions in the daily lives of Bedouin communities, serving as reliable means of transportation and essential providers of sustenance in harsh desert environments. The bond between humans and camels, forged over centuries of coexistence, was not merely utilitarian but also held cultural and social significance.

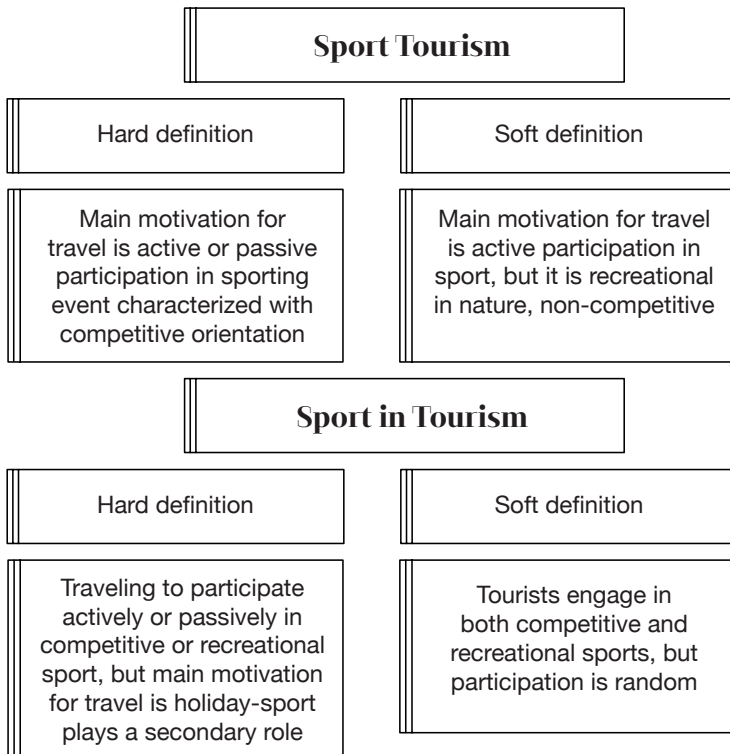
As societal structures evolved and urbanisation took hold, the role of camels in daily life underwent a transformation. However, rather than fading into obscurity, these magnificent creatures found a new purpose in the realm of organised sports. The transition from utilitarian functions to sporting events marked a shift in perception, as camels became celebrated not only for their practical contributions but also for their athletic prowess and aesthetic qualities.

The evolution of camel-related activities into modern sports and sports tourism not only preserves the cultural heritage associated with these animals but also transforms them into ambassadors of Saudi Arabian identity on a global stage. Through these sporting events, the enduring connection between the people of Saudi Arabia and their camels is not only maintained but also celebrated, creating a narrative that bridges the past with the present and propels these majestic creatures into the future as symbols of strength, beauty, and cultural continuity.

Sports tourism has recently emerged as a prominent sector within the tourist industry. Mousavi et. al (2012) noted the important role that sports tourism plays in the economy of several nations. Mousavi et. al (2012) noted the important role that sports tourism plays in the economies of several nations, due to its significant contributions towards enhancing economic, political, and social circumstances. This sector plays a crucial role in promoting job opportunities, augmenting income levels, and fostering infrastructure development (*Higham & Hinch, 2006*).

Sports tourism may be defined as a form of travel when individuals purposefully deviate from their customary surroundings in order to engage in active sports participation, observe sporting events, or visit sports-related and tourist destinations. It differs from the concept of sport in tourism, where the main intention for travel is not active or passive participation in a sporting event. According to Gammon and Ramshaw (2013), the concept of sports tourism may be defined using either “hard” or “soft” definitions, which differ in terms of one’s motivation for travel and engagement in the sporting event (see Figure 1 below). Hard sports tourism involves physically demanding activities or sports that typically require specialised equipment and training, such as camel racing and

camel wrestling. On the other hand, soft sports tourism involves less physically demanding or competitive activities that are still sports-related but are more accessible to a broader range of travellers, such as desert safari activities like camel riding. The concept of sports tourism encompasses those who engage in recreational activities, such as hiking or kayaking, while travelling for leisure purposes. The strict interpretation includes those who engage in competitive activities, such as the FIFA World Cup, F1 Grand Prix, and Olympic Games, among others. Gibson (2003) proposes another categorisation of sports tourism, grouping it into three distinct types. The first type is active sports tourism, which involves individuals travelling to engage in sports activities. The second type is event sports tourism, which entails individuals travelling to spectate and witness sports events. Lastly, nostalgia sports tourism refers to individuals visiting sports-related attractions such as halls of fame, renowned stadiums, or sports-themed cruises. Camel sports activities may be classified as using either hard or soft definitions, based on the travel motives and activities of the participants.



*Figure 6.1: Sports Tourism and Sports in Tourism*  
 Source: Gammon and Robinson (2013)

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## Camel Sports in Preserving Cultural Heritage

The tourist business is now witnessing a significant growth in the number of individuals who engage in visiting cultural and historical resources. This particular sector has emerged as one of the largest and most prevalent segments within the industry, experiencing rapid expansion. Cultural heritage tourism is experiencing a more rapid growth rate compared to other types of tourism, and is hence being recognized as a significant instrument for fostering future community economic development. Tourist destinations are actively engaged in the development and promotion of cultural assets in order to attract and enhance the overall experience of visitors. This phenomenon may be attributed to the use of cultural and heritage tourism as a strategic instrument for stimulating the local economy, hence presenting the opportunity to facilitate the diversification of tourism across different seasons and geographical locations (Long & Perdue, 1990). Furthermore, festivals and sporting events play a crucial role in facilitating dynamic tourism experiences, promoting the dissemination of a nation's culture on a global scale, and safeguarding, revitalising, and perpetuating cultural heritage. Therefore, as the recognition of the favourable effects of these activities grew—particularly on the tourist sector—several nations adopted the strategy of integrating sporting activities with festivals, sporting activities, and tourism in recent years.

The significance of camels in Saudi Arabian culture is deeply rooted in the historical fabric of the Arabian Peninsula. Nomadic Bedouin communities, traversing vast stretches of desert in search of sustenance and opportunity, found in camels not just reliable companions but also the key to survival. These majestic creatures provided transportation, carried goods, and served as a source of nourishment through their milk and meat. The enduring bond forged between the Bedouins and their camels became a testament to the symbiotic relationship between humans and animals, shaping a cultural identity that reveres these creatures.

The transformation in the function of camels in Saudi Arabia has occurred alongside the country's evolution into a modern nation. The camel, which was formerly an essential element of everyday existence, has now evolved into a powerful symbol of Saudi Arabia's cultural legacy, effectively connecting the nation's rich history with its vibrant contemporary society. The endurance, power, and resilience exhibited by camels are emblematic of the Saudi populace, symbolising the country's transition from age-old customs to a modern culture that embraces advancement, all while valuing its cultural heritage.



In recent times, this prominent cultural symbol has been revived in the field of camel sports, specifically in the domains of racing, beauty pageants, and endurance events. These competitions not only demonstrate the physical prowess and elegance of these remarkable beings, but also contribute to the growing field of sports tourism in Saudi Arabia. As the country opens up to the world and invites visitors to witness the spectacle of camel sports, it is simultaneously offering them a unique opportunity to experience firsthand the deep cultural ties that bind the Saudi people to their beloved camels.

Moreover, it is evident that camel sports activities have a significant role in shaping a distinct, communal way of life, particularly among Saudi Arabia's rural population. The local population convenes, engages in social activities, acquires social skills, generates income, and is involved in production and consumption, all within the context of this event, which takes place periodically throughout the year. Tümertekin and Özgüç (1997) contend that the visual representation of nutrition, clothes, and entertainment in the spatial context of the events reflects their significance to mankind. Additionally, they suggest that the geographic environment is a mirror of the culture it relates to.

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## **Camel-Related Activities in Saudi Arabia and the Middle East**

The following section highlights the characteristics of various camel-related sports and recreational activities.

### **Camel Racing**

Camel racing in the Middle East is an historic sport that took place in an informal manner for millennia until it was formalised in the early 1970s. It is widely regarded as a popular sporting activity with strong cultural roots, attracting significant attention from both locals and tourists. Significant financial resources are allocated to the care and support of animals as well as the organisation and execution of races. Over the past two decades, there has been a notable development of specialised tracks and the establishment of regulations pertaining to participation and behaviour. Camel racing facilitates the gathering and cultural connection of individuals from many regions and various locations across the Arabian Peninsula, particularly those belonging to tribal communities. In recent years, the sport of camel racing witnessed a significant surge in popularity, resulting in a substantial number of individuals deriving their livelihoods either directly or indirectly from this activity. The demand for individuals skilled in tending and riding camels has led to the influx of individuals from adjacent states, including Sudan and Somalia.

Typically, camel-related events are scheduled throughout the entire year. In some countries, the months of May to August are rest periods for racing camels while the newly acquired, two-year-old cohort begins its initial training and assessment,

which focuses on short-distance exercises. As camels progress in age, the initiation of competitive racing often takes place at a distance of five miles. This distance expands over the season, which ends with the majority of events being conducted over a distance greater than eight kilometres. Historically, juvenile slaves were frequently employed in the role of camel jockeys. In preparation for the camel races, youngsters abstained from consuming food for a duration of one week. This practice was not intended as a punitive measure, but rather as a means to reduce their body weight, enhancing the speed of the camels during the races. Today, camels engage in high-speed races on specifically designed tracks, accompanied by enthusiastic spectators and directed by proficient riders. The practice of employing young slaves as jockeys is no longer present in modern times. Recent technological advancements have resulted in the use of robotic jockeys, reflecting the marriage of time-honoured customs with innovative approaches. It is important to note that the activities of camel riding and handling have inherent risks and pose significant dangers, hence resulting in a high incidence of accidents associated with camel racing.

Riyadh, Taif, and Sharurah are considered to be optimal locations within Saudi Arabia for observing the impressive spectacle of high-quality camel races. During a typical racing event, over 100 camels partake in the races, traversing a circuit spanning a distance of 6–10 kilometres. With the assistance of jockeys mounted on their backs and a convoy of accompanying jeeps, the camels are capable of attaining remarkable velocities of up to 40 kilometres per hour. These creatures exhibit a captivating spectacle as they engage in high-speed races. According to the website Zamzam.com (2022), the best way for travellers to fully immerse themselves in camel-related events is opting for an organised tour group. Saudi Arabia organises two significant camel festivals annually, namely The King Abdul-Aziz Camel Festival in Riyadh and The Crown Prince Camel Festival in Taif (see Image 6.1).



*Image 6.1: Camels race at the Crown Prince Camel Festival in Taif, Saudi Arabia. Source: Xinhua, 2021.*

## Camel Wrestling

Camel wrestling is a competitive activity when two male Tülü camels<sup>2</sup> engage in physical combat, usually triggered by the presence of a female camel in an estrous cycle being presented before them. The technique is predominantly seen in the Aegean area of Turkey, however, it is also prevalent in several other regions of the Middle East and South Asia. The practice of camel combat may be traced back to more than a millennium ago, originating within ancient Turkic tribes (Kinzer, 2000). Camels engage in wrestling activities in their natural habitat, indicating that this practice predates its formalisation by nomadic communities. During the 1920s, the Turkish National Aviation League organised camel battles as fundraising events with the aim of acquiring aircrafts for the Government of Turkey. The Turkish government initiated efforts to discourage the practice in the 1920s, considering it as regressive. During the 1980s however, the newly established Turkish government initiated a policy of promoting competition, which was seen as a means of preserving Turkey's longstanding cultural heritage (Parkinson, 2011).

The events have historically been held during mating season and the camels fight by using their necks as leverage to force their opponent to fall down (see Image 6.2). Despite the absence of codified regulations, the rules governing wrestling remain consistent throughout all regions. The initial set of regulations addresses some measures aimed at safeguarding the well-being and preserving the physical condition of camels. Over time, there was a modification in the regulations aimed at mitigating aggression and safeguarding the welfare of animals (Çalışkan, 2009). A camel is declared the winner if his competitor falls to the ground or flees from the fight. Most fighting camels are bred in Iran or Afghanistan and a lucrative camel is capable of fetching exorbitant prices when sold.

<sup>2</sup>The Tulu camel, also known as the Kharai camel, is a breed native to the coastal regions of Karnataka, India. Adapted to the saline environments of coastal mangrove forests, it possesses the remarkable ability to swim in saltwater. Tulu camels are integral to the livelihoods of coastal communities, notably for transportation, fishing, and salt production.



Image 6.2: Two handlers watch over camels wrestling in Selçuk, Izmir, Turkey. Source: Yildirim, 2022.

Aegean Turkey has over 30 yearly festivals spanning from November to March. Approximately 100 combat-ready camels participate in these contests, with each individual camel engaging in approximately 10 matches. Towards the conclusion of the season, it is customary to organise a tournament of champions wherein the most exceptional camels partake in a competition (Christie-Miller, 2011). The events in Western Anatolia attract a significant number of international tourists, playing a crucial role in the region's tourist sector. However, it is important to note that the occurrences may pose a potential risk to onlookers in the event that the camels make an attempt to escape within the gathering. Instances have been documented where conflicts arise among camel proprietors. The technique has been subject to criticism by several animal rights organisations, who have characterised it as an act of cruelty towards animals.

### **Camel Beauty Pageants**

Camel beauty pageants have emerged as a celebration of the aesthetic qualities that have long been admired in these creatures. The judging criteria extend beyond mere physical attributes to encompass elements deeply ingrained in Arabian culture, creating a unique intersection of tradition and modernity. Camel beauty contests showcase the elegance and grace of these animals, elevating them from practical assets to cultural icons. The King Abdulaziz Camel Festival in Riyadh hosts a notable camel beauty contest that showcases the Al-Mughateer camels. This particular breed holds significance among the indigenous population of the Arabian Peninsula (see Image 6.3). The Al-Mughateer camels are categorised into many colours, spanning from pale white to vibrant yellow and red hues, by the Bedouin tribes. Each distinct coloration is assigned a specific name (Jambi, 2022). In its sixth iteration in 2023, the festival facilitated the inclusion of women, granting them the opportunity to participate and exhibit their camels for the first time. The inclusion of women in the festival is an initial step in the organisational strategy to enhance female representation in camel-related activities.



*Image 6.3: Camels are showcased during the 6th King Abdulaziz Camel Festival in Riyadh.  
Source: Nureldine, 2022.*

## Camel Recreational Activities

In addition to the primary natural and man-made attractions at a destination, desert safari activities such as camel riding, dune bashing, and sand boarding are extensively promoted and regarded as essential components of the tourism experience. It is worth noting that camels continue to be prominently featured in certain wedding celebrations, with the occasional occurrence of a bride being conveyed to the wedding ceremony atop a camel (Stephenson, 2014). It is very common for tour operators in Saudi Arabia to recognise the appeal of camel riding and incorporate it into tailored tour packages. These packages may include guided camel rides through designated routes, incorporating stops at key cultural and historical sites. Camel riding can be part of a broader itinerary especially in Umrah (pilgrimage to Makkah) packages, allowing tourists to combine the traditional activity with other attractions, creating a holistic and enriching travel experience.

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## Challenges and Future Prospects in Camel Sports Tourism

Despite the growing popularity and significance of camel sports in Saudi Arabia, there are inherent challenges that the sector faces in its journey towards becoming a thriving component of sports tourism. One of the primary challenges lies in striking a balance between tradition and modernisation. While camel sports have embraced technological advancements, there is a risk of diluting the authenticity and historical roots that make these events culturally significant. Many scholars have argued the rise of tourism and tourist demands inevitably leads to a process of cultural commodification, resulting from the reduced aesthetic quality of cultural products and traditions. (Shepherd, 2002). Thus, striving for modernisation without eroding the essence of tradition poses a continual challenge for organisers and stakeholders.

The ethical treatment of animals, specifically in the context of camel racing, is another challenge. Various studies have sought to examine the pattern and attributes of injuries connected to camels and camel racing. The escalating worry stems from the rising number of fatalities and injuries associated with camels. According to a study conducted in Saudi Arabia, it was shown that incidents involving camels were more frequently linked to injuries compared to other types of accidents. Furthermore, an examination of the underlying reasons revealed that a majority of these injuries were avoidable (Wong et al., 2002).

Benet et al. (2005) offers valuable insights into the characteristics and prevalence of injuries sustained by children and adolescents participating in camel racing in Qatar. Injuries associated with camel racing have been found to have a notable impact on both the length of hospitalisation and the severity of the injuries sustained. The emergence of significant financial rewards led to the initiation of an immoral trade involving immigrant Bangladeshi children, who were transported to Qatar to work as camel jockeys, replacing local youths. These vulnerable children



were subjected to unethical treatment, including the administration of hormones to stunt their growth, thereby ensuring their lightweight status. Tragically, many children suffered injuries or even lost their lives due to falls from camels or lack of adequate nutrition. The continued exploitation of children in this manner persisted for an extended period until global outrage prompted the implementation of a ban on the use of child jockeys in 2005 (Carbonell, 2021). The use of robotic jockeys has also mitigated some concerns related to the weight-bearing burden on camels, yet issues such as overtraining and ensuring the well-being of the animals persist. Meanwhile, Saudi authorities conducted their largest ever crackdown on camel beauty contestants who received Botox injections and other artificial touch-ups, with over 40 camels disqualified from the annual pageant in 2021 (CBS News, 2021). Thus, stricter regulations and ethical standards are crucial to address these concerns, fostering an environment where camel sports are not only entertaining but also ethically responsible.

In another development, the promotion of camel sports on the international stage faces hurdles related to cultural understanding and perception. To attract a diverse global audience, there is a need for effective communication and education about the historical and cultural significance of camel-related activities. Overcoming stereotypes and fostering a deeper appreciation for the cultural context surrounding camel sports is an ongoing challenge in positioning these events as international attractions.

Despite these challenges, the future prospects for camel sports tourism in Saudi Arabia are promising and multifaceted. The integration of camel sports into the broader framework of Saudi Arabian tourism offers a unique selling point for the country, attracting visitors intrigued by the rich cultural tapestry these events represent. Investments in infrastructure, such as state-of-the-art racing tracks and spectator facilities, signal a commitment to creating a world-class experience for tourists. As technology continues to play a pivotal role in enhancing the spectator experience, virtual and augmented reality applications could further propel camel sports into the global tourism spotlight. These innovations not only cater to a tech-savvy audience but also offer a means of bringing the beauty and excitement of camel racing and beauty contests to individuals who may not be physically present at the events.

Furthermore, strategic partnerships with international tourism agencies and collaborations with other nations hosting camel sports events can contribute to the global appeal of Saudi Arabian camel sports. This interconnected approach can facilitate cultural exchange, attracting a diverse array of tourists eager to witness and engage with the unique traditions and festivities surrounding camel sports. It is pertinent to highlight that an International Camel Organization (ICO) was established on March 22, 2019, with the main goal of promoting camel culture and heritage and developing international relations in the fields of culture, science, agriculture and sports (Faraz, 2019).

The challenges faced by camel sports tourism in Saudi Arabia serve as opportunities for growth and improvement. By navigating the delicate balance between tradition and modernisation, addressing ethical concerns, and fostering a global understanding of their cultural significance, camel sports are poised to become a dynamic and integral component of Saudi Arabian tourism, offering an authentic and captivating experience for visitors from around the world.

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## Conclusion

The camel emerges as a cultural icon in Saudi Arabia's sports tourism landscape, weaving together tradition and modernity. This chapter discussed the dynamic development of camel-related activities that have turned into key attractions for tourists. The desert landscapes, once traversed by nomadic Bedouins and their faithful camels, have now become the stage for thrilling camel races, elegant beauty pageants, and endurance tests that captivate the imagination of visitors from around the globe. It is evident that camel sports tourism in Saudi Arabia is not just a spectacle; it is a living testament to the nation's historical resilience and adaptability. The significance of camels goes beyond their utilitarian roles; they have become symbolic ambassadors, carrying the essence of Saudi Arabian identity to a global audience.

The economic impact of this transformation is palpable, with camel sports contributing not only to tourism revenues but also to fostering employment and infrastructure development. The integration of technology and the careful balance between tradition and modernisation ensure that camel-related events continue to captivate audiences while respecting the cultural heritage they represent. In fact, the events have pushed many innovative research on genetics, biotechnology and physiology and contributed to a better understanding of camel biology.

Looking forward, the camel's journey from the heart of Bedouin life to the centre stage of sports tourism is poised to evolve even further. As Saudi Arabia continues to position itself as a premier destination for cultural and sports enthusiasts alike, the camel stands as a powerful symbol, inviting visitors to partake in an experience that transcends the ordinary. The allure of camel sports, with its blend of heritage, athleticism, and cultural resonance, promises to leave an indelible mark on the landscape of sports tourism in Saudi Arabia, promising an exciting and enduring chapter in the nation's tourism narrative.

# 07

# Existing Camel Experiences



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## Introduction

It is of particular importance to discuss camels and their contribution to Saudi Arabian culture and heritage now as the United Nations has designated 2024 as the International Year of Camelids to highlight their important role in communities. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimated the world's total population of camels to be 22 million in 2010 (Rosen & Saidel, 2010) and more recent estimates indicate there will be 35 million head in 2020 (Faye, 2020). This growth indicates a possible global population of 40 million in 2025. The global populations of camels are increasing and in many non-traditional camel countries. One result of this is that camel experiences for tourists is increasingly common in many countries (Australia, USA, etc.). For this reason, Saudi Arabia as a historical home of camel culture, needs to further develop its distinctive advantage as the home of the camel.

This chapter is in three parts. Firstly, it discusses several reasons for the importance of camels in Saudi Arabia. Next it discusses how camel-related products are currently used in the tourism sector in Saudi. Finally, it discusses some intangible cultural resources that can be further developed to improve the tourist experience. Overall, the chapter proposes that the camel is central to the culture and heritage of Saudi Arabia but that much of this significance is not communicated to international visitors. Thus, Saudi Arabia is not using some of its attractive potential for tourists.



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## Importance of Camels in Saudi Arabia

The camel is a symbol of the desert and the Middle East, and in the eyes of many Arabs, is a creature of great beauty. The camel has played a central role in the historical development of Arabic society. Indeed, Saudi anthropologist Saad Al-Suwaiyan who specialises in Bedouin oral history, dedicated the sixth volume of his series “Traditional Culture of Saudi Arabia,” to this animal and its significance in the Saudi culture on different levels, including language, culture, art and singing.

Although it is difficult to pinpoint precisely when the camel was domesticated, some evidence suggests it began in the Persian Gulf region sometime in the late third or early second millennium BC. Strong evidence for the adoption of domestic dromedaries and their integration into Near Eastern societies and economies is present only in the early first millennium BC. At this time, camels were common and used as pack animals. By the middle of this millennium, they were commonly ridden and had been adopted into nomadic tribal societies.

Traditionally, Bedouins depended on semi-nomadic pastoralism for their livelihood and were able to use camels to enhance their lives. Camels were used as pack animals, for transportation, and for ploughing. Bedouin tribes raised camels, sheep, and goats for cash, barter, and traditional slaughter, milk and milk products mainly for home consumption, wool and hair for weaving carpets and tents, and faeces for fuel (Degen, Benjamin, & Hoorweg, 2000). Camel breeders were regarded as the noblest Bedouin tribes (Al-Oun & Al-Homoud, 2008).

Northern Arabia was historically the predominant camel rearing location. The people were camel breeding societies, and their status, power, and prestige depended upon their great camel herds and means of maintaining them at full strength (Sweet, 1965). To obtain camels, camel-raiding was a traditionally frequent feature of the activities of camel nomads and such a powerful factor in shaping their value system. Raiding is at once an effective means of replenishing one's own herds and of weakening one's opponents. Under such circumstances, tribal ethics accept camel-raiding as an honourable pastime, and welcome the pursuits necessary to sustain such activity as those most worthy of men laying claim to noble descent.

Within Bedouin society, however, camels were not bought and sold. In Bedouin society camels were distributed by kinship mechanisms, and never by commercial mechanisms. Instead, they were bridal gifts, blood vengeance compensation, the zakat or tribesman's contribution to the chief, recompense in kind to herdsmen at the end of a year's work, incidental gifts to kinsmen and

friends, inheritance, sharing by proportional assessment one's animals with a fellow tribesman who has lost his herd through raid or other misfortune, chiefly exercise of customs of hospitality and generosity. Bedouin brides were brought to wedding ceremonies on camels and Bedouin often used camels for the traditional bride price.

Nowadays, the economic motivation for raising camels has changed, with the focus on producing racing camels to compete for prize money at festivals and other events sponsored by wealthy sheikhs and organisations. The owner of a competitive racing camel who sells it can expect to receive a considerable sum of money. For grand feasts at weddings and especially at funerals, one or more camels are slaughtered and form a central part of the celebratory meal. Because of this, the camel is a central part of Arab traditions (Al-Mansoori, 2004). In pre-Islamic and classical Arabic poetry, the robust camel was a reference to patience, strength, obedience, and endurance.

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## Ancient Trade Routes

Camels arguably facilitated the development of early long-distance trade. They were used extensively along ancient trade routes such as the Silk Road in Central Asia and the Incense Route in the Arabian Peninsula, connecting civilizations and facilitating the exchange of goods, ideas, and culture. In Africa, the Trans-Saharan trade routes were navigated by camel caravans, linking North Africa with sub-Saharan regions. Nomad-bred camels were essential to the caravan traffic of the Saudi Peninsula and the lands just to the north of it, ferrying incense, gold, spices and other products from South Arabian Indian Ocean ports to Mesopotamia and Syria, and weapons, cloth, iron, and grains southward to Arabia. These routes were long and dangerous, suitable only for camels. The Bedouins specialised in breeding camels for the caravans and in controlling the routes, and raised camels and horses that were given names according to their colour, number, age, and character. They are iconic of Bedouin heritage, continuity, pride, identity, and dignity.

The threat of raids and need for protection against them led to the formation of caravans. These were led by nomad guides who often doubled as mediators in the negotiations between local tribal leaders and caravans wishing to pass their lands unmolested. Such convoys were guarded by nomad warrior escorts and for safety tended to be quite large, 1,200 to 2,000 camels and 1,000 or even several thousand men were not unusual. Over time, a sophisticated infrastructure developed to support such caravans, including navigation towers and resting stops called caravanserai. A caravan bringing exotic goods from distant lands remains a powerful and evocative image for many people today.

The special status of a camel in the Bedouin community is justified by a few verses in the Quran and the hadith. One of the verses says, “In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful, will they regard the camels how they are created” (Surah al Ghashiya, verse 17), meaning that if one doubts the Almighty, one should look at a camel, an extraordinary creature and all the doubts will disappear. In other words, camels are perceived as a reason to believe in God.

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## Hajj and Camel for Transport

By leading the “Farewell Pilgrimage” in March of 632 AD, not long before his death, the Prophet fixed the rites of Hajj, and established a precedent: leading the Hajj would henceforth be the duty of the guide of the Muslim Ummah with obligations, notably the protection and security of pilgrims who were prey to thirst, hunger and attacks of Bedouin tribes along the way.

A series of Hajj routes developed and thrived in different historic moments, adapting to the evolving political conditions and the rise and fall of successive Islamic empires. Early Muslim historians and geographers give details of major roads, linking Makkah with Yemen, Oman, Syria, Egypt, and Iraq. These follow well-established trade routes which were co-opted by Muslim pilgrims undertaking long distance journeys to reach the Holy City of Makkah. In calling Muslims to perform the Hajj, the Quran says, “Proclaim to men the pilgrimage: they will come to thee on foot and on every lean camel, coming from every remote path.” (Surah Al-Hajj, verse 27).

The rulers of Islamic countries had the obligation to facilitate the pilgrimage, and this led to a number of traditional routes. The Egyptian Route (Darb al-Misr) led across Sinai and along the Gulf of Aqaba. The route between Cairo and Mecca is around 1,600 kilometres long and took 35 days, an average of around 45 kilometres per day. Travel at this pace was only possible by camel. The other main routes were the Syrian route (Darb al-Shami) and the Iraqi Route across the Arabian Desert (Darb Zubayda) (Dauphin, Ben Jeddou, & Castex, 2015). While typical commercial caravans numbered in the hundreds of camels, the Hajj caravans could number in the tens of thousands of pilgrims. Thus, the Hajj land routes leading to Makkah from the neighbouring countries build on a centuries-old and deeply rooted cultural and religious tradition and constitute one of the most important material vestiges of the Islamic civilization in Saudi Arabia. The pilgrimage routes were also vital arteries of communication for the soldiers, administrators, and tax collectors of the Muslim states.

At completion of Hajj, pilgrims give thanks for the blessing, and acceptance, of Hajj, marking the end of the pilgrimage by sacrificing an animal and distributing the sacrificial meat to the poor. Hence, in the final four days of Hajj, millions of Muslims must sacrifice livestock in memory of the Prophet’s unwavering faith. The camel is therefore central to traditional Bedouin culture, to the development of hajj and is noted in Islamic scripture.

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## Camels and Tourism

This central importance of the camel in Saudi Arabia is seen in chapters in this volume on various types of camel experiences. Different chapters discuss camels as part of the Saudi Arabian culture, their use for food (camel milk), and transport, their celebration in festivals, and use in sport. These chapters identify the camel as a multi-dimensional physical resource with important symbolic value. In addition, camels are used in tourism. A number of countries in the Middle East and North Africa, like Egypt, Morocco, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia, among others, have leveraged their desert landscapes and cultural heritage to attract tourists interested in experiencing camel rides and desert safaris. These experiences provide visitors with a taste of traditional nomadic lifestyles and the vast beauty of desert landscapes. However, the camel is also used in other countries. In Australia, feral camels introduced in the 19th century are used for camel trekking tours. These have become popular in remote and arid regions, offering visitors the opportunity to explore the vast and remote Australian wilderness on camelback. Similarly, in parts of Rajasthan, India, camels have been a traditional mode of transportation for centuries. Today, tourists flock to cities like Jaisalmer to take camel safaris into the Thar Desert, experiencing the rich cultural heritage and breathtaking landscapes.

### Types of Experiences

The camel is used in many types of tourist activity. Short camel rides take participants on an introductory activity through terrains, such as deserts, beaches, or countryside. These tours usually take around one to two hours but offer a unique perspective on the landscape. An example in Saudi Arabia is the opportunity to use camels to visit the dunes and rocks of Al Thumama desert north of Riyadh. Thumamah National Park is one of Riyadh's most popular outdoor escapes, and with good reason. This sprawling desert is situated just north of the city and is one of the best places to rent quad bikes and roar through the rolling dunes. It is also a great place to enjoy camel and horse rides. Thumamah National Park does not officially offer camel and horse rides as an activity, but tourists are welcome to approach area farmers who rent out their local livestock for treks around the park. Visitors can negotiate prices for individual rides. Such short camel rides are found in many parts of the world such as Egypt, or on Cable Beach in Broome, Australia. In Broome, the sunset ride is the most popular and the camels wear tail lights attached to their tails to prevent a beach collision with a 4-wheel drive (4WD) after dark.

Camel experiences are often combined with camp experiences. The camps are located in natural area where several activities can be performed including camels riding, as well as Dune Bashing by 4WD vehicles, dinner under the stars, sandboarding, quad biking, Bedouin folkloric music, serving typical dishes, sunrise and sunset watching in the desert, guided desert tours and discovering the local community by visiting Bedouin houses.

**Camel Safaris (treks)** are immersive experiences that often take place in desert regions. The length of the trip may be anything from a single day to several weeks, and the standard of service, from very basic to ultra luxurious. A typical safari would not cover more than 20km per day, and many would do considerably less (Shackley, 1996). They allow participants to explore remote and beautiful landscapes while experiencing traditional desert life. They offer participants a chance to cover significant distances and experience the diverse terrain of regions like deserts, mountains, or other natural landscapes (Al-Oun & Al-Homoud, 2008). Some operators offer a package (to include the cost of the camel, driver, guide, tent based accommodation and food) whereas others offer a low price based simply on the hire of camel and guide with everything else being optional.

Generally, each tourist on a camel safari employs two or three camels, one for personal use, one for the use of the guide and one as a pack animal, although this number is reduced for very short trips, larger parties or where supplies are ferried to evening campsites by jeep, a common practice among larger operators. A number of trekking locations are available. Wadi Rum in Jordan provides desert scenery and a traditional Bedouin camp. In Morocco's Atlas Mountains, camels are used to explore the Berber villages and enjoy scenic views. Camel Safari in the Thar Desert, Rajasthan, India transverse sand dunes and showcase the unique culture of the desert-dwelling communities. A trek to Petra, Jordan follows a trading route through the mountains combining history and adventure, while riding a camel. The Wahiba Sands and other desert regions in Oman offer excellent camel trekking opportunities, with the chance to experience Bedouin culture and explore the stunning desert scenery. Camels can also be used to explore the arid landscapes of Baja California. These may be combined with photography offering opportunities to capture stunning images of landscapes, wildlife, and local cultures from a unique vantage point.

Some of these tours incorporate cultural elements, allowing participants to learn about the history, traditions, and way of life of the people who have relied on camels for centuries. This might include visits to nomadic communities or heritage sites. This broadens the camel trek experience and creates opportunities for memorable authentic interactions with local people. In certain places, specially designed carriages or sleds are attached to camels, providing a different mode of transportation and a leisurely way to explore areas like oases, beaches, or urban centres. **Camel Farms** provide tours so tourists can learn about camel husbandry, breeding, and care. This type of experience provides insight into the daily life of the animals and the efforts taken to ensure their well-being. This may include camel milk tasting. Camel farms also offer **educational experiences**, especially for younger school children. More advanced educational programs or workshops may focus on camel biology, behaviour, and their significance in various cultures and ecosystems.

A number of camel **sporting activities** are available. For example, camel polo in Rajasthan, India uses camels instead of horses as in traditional sport. Camel races are often held in specially designed tracks and can be a thrilling experience to watch.

The **camel festivals** and races in Saudi Arabia date back to the 7th century. The races have been part of the Saudi Arabian culture for centuries. In the beginning, the races were conducted by the Bedouin tribe as a means of entertainment. However, later, it signified the great economic progression that the tribes have achieved by making camels the main means of transport in the extremely challenging terrains of the desert.

The first official camel racing event was held in 1964 as part of the Heritage Festival (Medium, 2023). By 1975, camel racing became a fully-fledged professional sporting event (The Emirates Times, 2023). Now, the rulers conduct huge festivals and events that carry hefty prize money and other attractive rewards. Saudi Arabia hosts many camel festivals annually, including the King Abdulaziz Camel Festival and the Crown Prince Camel Festival.

In some countries, camel festivals are associated with traditional camel markets. The Pushkar Camel Fair, India is an annual event in Rajasthan and one of the world's largest camel fairs. It's a vibrant, colourful celebration featuring camel races, cultural performances, and a bustling market. A number of festivals in Saudi Arabia allow visitors to experience the ancient Saudi history as well modern interpretations of it. The Janadriyah National Festival held each year near Riyadh is a celebration of Arabian culture and heritage. The flagship event in the festival, is a camel race that takes place over a 12-mile-long track and may involve over 2,000 camels. It also includes a number of activities such as performance of local music and dancing.

A variety of other types of camel experiences are available. For example, yoga and meditation retreats are natural settings, with participants seated on camel blankets or atop saddled camels.

### **Experiential Cultural Resources**

While there are many types of camel experiences available, for international visitors who have seen the film "Lawrence of Arabia," the camel and the Arabian Peninsula represent adventure and excitement. The film depicts T. E. Lawrence (1888 – 1935) and his experiences in the Ottoman provinces of Hejaz and Greater Syria during the First World War, in particular his attacks on Aqaba and Damascus. This film romanticises the Bedouin lifestyle and makes it an attractive symbol for many viewers. The film shows the Hashemite forces consisting of Bedouin guerrillas, riding camels across the desert and into battle. This links the camel to many of the attractive features of Bedouin life. As a result, the central location of the camel in the Bedouin culture offer many opportunities to embellish

camel experiences. These include Bedouin Legends that relate to the camel. The camel was loved by every Bedouin and was considered as the most valuable possession of his, and there are hundreds of legends including the camel (Khan, 2022). These form an invaluable resource for tourism.

One example that has been recognised is Ghna'a Al-Rukban, the music of the camel riders in Arabia. This is one of the oldest musical genres in Arabia and is proposed for UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Heritage of Humanity (Obaid, 2020). There are a variety of stories related to Ghna'a Al-Rukban and its origin. Alheda'a is said to date back to a time where a camel driver fell from his camel and broke his arm. The story goes that when he shouted "Oh my hand! Oh my hand!" His voice made the camels surround him and follow him without effort. The drivers realised the effect of singing on camels, that it was an easier and kinder way to lead their herds. This led to the exclusion of other coercive measures such as hitting or poking on the animal's stomach.

Some history books said the man in the story who became the first "hadi" was the Prophet Mohammad's 17th great grandfather, Mudhar bin Nizar (MacDonald, 1901). Arabs inherited the tradition later on; it began with using usually incomprehensible words to lead the herd of camels, but it evolved with time as a form of poetry structured on the "rajaz" metre in a rhythmical beat which the camels loved. The camels would put down their heads, stretch their necks out and with a lengthened pace shuffle forward musingly while the song lasted. It is said that the rhythm used conforms to the lifting and lowering of the camel's feet. Furthermore, the art form was mentioned in many important texts by Arab and Muslim writers. For instance, in his book "The Revival on Religious Sciences," the Muslim scholar Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali mentioned Alheda'a tradition to argue for the permissibility of music and defend the instinctive experience of ecstasy related to it (MacDonald, 1901).

Al-Ghazali wrote,

*"And the camel, in spite of his stupidity in nature, feels the effect of the driving-song to such a degree that, hearing it, he counts heavy loads light, and, in the strength of his alacrity through listening to it, holds long distances short; such an alacrity is aroused in him as intoxicates and distracts him. Then, as the desert grow long to them and fatigue and weariness under the loads and burdens seize upon them, whenever they hear someone striking up the drinking-song you will see how they extend their necks and pay attention to the singer with ears erect, and hasten in their pace till the loads and burdens shake them up; and often they kill themselves from the force of the pace and the weight of the burdens, while they do not perceive it through alacrity."*

## Poetry

Joseph Freiherr von Hammer-Purgstall (1774 –1856), an Austrian orientalist, historian and diplomat wrote that Arabic poetry distinguishes five major uses to which the camel is put, illustrating the central role of camel husbandry in the culture of the Arabs: milch camel-, pack camel, distinction being drawn between the water bearing camel, the food carrying camel, and the general pack camel of the caravans; the camel bearing the women's litter, including the one bearing the girl carrying the tribal fetish as a standard in battle; or the marriage camel carrying the bride litter; the riding camel, including the "thelul" — the racing, the battle camel, and the "rahila," the camel ridden during travel; and finally the meat camel, including the guest camel, butchered as part of the hospitality offered to a guest, the sacrificial camel, used in both pre-Islamic and Islamic ritual, and the funeral camel (Krotkoff, 1992).

The "Mu'allaqa" of Tarafa. Tarafa occupies an honoured place within the Arabic tradition. Jarir ibn Atiyah al-Khatfi Al-Tamimi (around 650 –728 CE) placed him first among the early poets while Abū Aqīl Labīd ibn Rabī'a ibn Mālik al-Āmirī (around 505– 661 CE) and al-Akhṭal (around 640-710 CE) put him second.' But his Mu'allaqa, especially prized by Arab poets and critics, has been less of a favourite in the West. Camel imagery dominates not only the famous "naqa" scene but the rest of the ode as well, imagery that epitomises the difficulty of translating Bedouin culture into a modern language. (Tarafa & Sells, 1986) In addition, King Abdulaziz Al-Saud himself, Saudi Arabia's first ruler, was a poet and wrote many poems in Alheda'a style, where he told stories and expressed the thoughts and feelings he experienced through his battles uniting the country, poems which remain a living source of this country's oral history.

## Modern developments

Many contemporary artists perform songs celebrate this Arabic heritage, such as the collaboration between the late Tunisian singer Thekra and Libyan artist Mohamed Hassan, where they tried to document the desert singing through modern musical means, most famously in the song "Heda'a Al-Ebel." Other artists also featured this tradition in their songs: "Ya Jammal" by the late Palestinian singer Rim Banna, the Lebanese musician Marcel Khalifah singing "Ya Hadi Al Eys," a poem by Mahmoud Darwish, or Syrian singer Sabah Fakhri performing Mohammed Abul-Qasim's poem "Ya Had Al Eys."



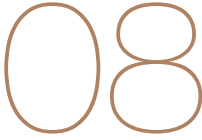
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## Conclusion

This chapter has provided a brief description of the importance of the camel to Saudi culture and heritage and how it is currently being used in tourism. Importantly, it has also suggested that the camel experience can be further developed by linking camel activities to the stories, myths and legends that are part of the oral traditions of the nation's people.

Including these intangible elements into tourism products however has implications for the skills of tour guides. Tour guides need well developed language and storytelling skills as well as in-depth knowledge of the material itself. Further, in order to attract tourists, these elements need to be built into the marketing material provided to tourists. The manner with which this heritage message is integrated with the image of Saudi Arabia as a modern country needs careful consideration.

One other important issue needs further consideration. With the growth of tourism involving camels, there has been increasing attention on the welfare and treatment of these animals. Responsible tourism practices, including ethical treatment and care for camels, have become important considerations for tour operators and travellers. There have been serious concerns raised about the ethical treatment of elephants in Thailand (Laws, Scott, Font, & Koldowski, 2021). It will be important to ensure that tourists are certain that the camels they ride are well treated.



# Marketing Camel Milk: Availability and Nutritional Benefits



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## Introduction

Camel milk, historically consumed in various cultures, has gained attention globally due to its nutritional benefits and cultural significance (*Arain et al., 2023*). The marketing of camel milk involves understanding its availability, promoting its nutritional advantages, and exploring its potential for a futuristic approach in cultural tourism (*El-Khadrawy et al., 2022*). This chapter will delve into the marketing of camel milk, focusing on availability, nutritional benefits, and its role in the burgeoning cultural tourism industry.

In recent years, the global market has witnessed a growing interest in alternative and sustainable sources of nutrition, spotlighting unconventional yet highly nutritious products. One such intriguing and promising contender is camel milk (*Sahoo and Sawal, 2021*). Rooted in ancient traditions and becoming a modern-day success, camel milk has gained recognition for its exceptional nutritional benefits, environmental sustainability, and its potential to revolutionise the market. This chapter explores the untapped potential of camels, and the futuristic approach of integrating camel-related activities into cultural tourism (*Profeta et al., 2022*).

Traditionally a staple in arid regions of Africa, the Middle East, and parts of Asia, camel milk is steadily expanding across the globe. As a result of advancements in production, transportation, and global awareness, camel milk is now more accessible in various markets across the globe. With the establishment of camel farms and innovative distribution methods, this dairy product is finding its way onto supermarket shelves and gaining traction as a sought-after health beverage (*Ho et al., 2022*).

Renowned for its rich nutritional profile, camel milk boasts numerous health benefits. It is notably lower in lactose and higher in certain vitamins and minerals compared to cow's milk. With high levels of proteins, calcium, and vitamin C, camel milk is considered beneficial for individuals with lactose intolerance, diabetes, and certain autoimmune disorders. Studies also suggest its potential in improving the immune system and aiding in neurological development (*Faraz, 2020*).

Camels, often revered for their adaptability to harsh environments, offer more than just milk. Their unique abilities to thrive in arid conditions with minimal resources hold vast potential for sustainable agriculture, transportation, and even therapeutic interventions. With their low environmental impact and ability to produce milk in harsh conditions, camels present a compelling case for sustainable and eco-friendly farming practices (*Mohan et al., 2020*). Looking ahead, a fascinating opportunity arises for integrating camel-related activities within cultural tourism. Beyond the economic prospects of this union, camel-based experiences offer a gateway into the cultural heritage of many societies. From camel safaris to cultural interactions, the display of traditional camel-related practices can enrich the tourism industry. This innovative approach not only preserves cultural heritage but also fosters a deeper understanding and appreciation for the historical significance of camels in various cultures (*Singh et al., 2019*).

The market for camel milk has witnessed significant growth due to increased consumer awareness of its health benefits. We explore the dynamics of this market, considering factors such as consumer demographics, geographical preferences, and the role of marketing strategies in promoting camel milk as a viable alternative in the dairy industry (*Nori, 2023*). The exploration and promotion of camel milk, its nutritional benefits, the untapped potential of camels, and the integration of camel-based activities into cultural tourism present an exciting frontier. This comprehensive approach not only contributes to the diversification of the market but also promises a sustainable and enriching experience for both consumers and enthusiasts exploring the world of camel-related products and activities (*Narayanan, 2023*).

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## Marketing Camel Milk

### Growing Demand for Camel Milk

In the past, camel milk was primarily consumed in arid regions where camels were domesticated (Nori, 2023). However, recent years have seen a surge in its popularity across the world. This growing demand can be attributed to its unique nutritional profile and potential health benefits. In recent years, there has been a remarkable upswing in the popularity and consumption of camel milk, and for several good reasons (Izadi et al., 2019). In addition to its aforementioned nutritional superiority and health benefits, this surge in demand can be attributed to two more factors:

- **Ethical and Environmental factors.** The increasing awareness of the ecological footprint of the dairy industry has prompted individuals to seek alternatives. Camel milk is perceived as a more sustainable option, as camels are well-adapted to arid environments and require less water and food compared to traditional dairy cattle (Narayanan, 2023).
- **Diversification in Products.** Beyond liquid milk, there is a rising trend in using camel milk as a base for various dairy products like cheese and ice cream, as well as skincare products due to its unique chemical makeup (Sani et al., 2019).

### Marketing Strategies

In this section, we will explore and dissect the essential marketing tactics applied to this specialised market segment, focusing on the distinct dynamics associated with camel milk, including product positioning strategies, branding approaches, and the role of online social media marketing within this niche (Gebremichael et al., 2019). Here are some of the key marketing strategies:

- **Product Positioning.** Effective marketing of camel milk involves positioning it as a premium and health-conscious beverage. Highlighting its unique selling points, including its low-fat content, high protein, and potential benefits for lactose intolerant individuals is essential.
- **Branding.** Developing a compelling brand story and packaging that conveys the product's natural and exotic attributes is crucial. Imagery and branding should emphasise the camel's association with deserts and pristine landscapes.
- **Health Claims.** Emphasising the nutritional benefits and health claims of camel milk, such as its potential to boost the immune system and alleviate certain health conditions, can be a key marketing strategy (Muthukumaran et al., 2023).

- **Targeting Niche Markets.** Focus on niche markets, such as health-conscious consumers, lactose-intolerant individuals, and those interested in exotic or unique food and beverages.
  - **Online and Social Media Marketing.** Utilise digital marketing channels to reach a wider audience. Share user testimonials, educational content, and recipes featuring camel milk.
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## Availability of Camel Milk

Once a niche product in specific regions, the availability of camel milk has expanded to reach a broader market due to growing awareness of its unique properties. Here are some of the key availability sources:

- **Local Source.** Traditionally, camel milk was primarily accessible in regions where camels are prevalent, such as the Middle East, Africa, and parts of Asia. Local markets and nomadic communities often serve as the primary sources of fresh camel milk. However, the availability of fresh camel milk has expanded in recent years due to growing interest and innovations in production and distribution (Narayanan, 2023).
- **Global Market Expansion.** As the health benefits of camel milk gain recognition, there has been a surge in the availability of camel milk products worldwide. Companies are producing and distributing pasteurised, powdered, and flavoured camel milk, making it accessible through online retailers, health food stores, and specialised markets. The expansion of camel milk availability extends its reach to diverse consumer demographics seeking alternative, nutrient-rich options (Oselu et al., 2022).
- **Innovative Distribution Channels.** Innovations in distribution channels are also shaping the availability of camel milk. Some farms and cooperatives offer subscription-based services, delivering fresh camel milk directly to consumers' doorsteps. Additionally, partnerships with supermarkets and collaborations with health-focused cafes and restaurants contribute to making camel milk more accessible and visible to consumers (Mohan et al., 2020).

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## Nutritional Benefits of Camel Milk

Camel milk, although less common in many parts of the world compared to cow's milk, offers several nutritional benefits that make it a valuable food source for certain populations (Muthukumaran et al., 2023).

- **Lower Fat Content.** Camel milk contains less fat than cow's milk, making it a healthier option for those looking to reduce their saturated fat intake. It's a good choice for individuals who are trying to manage their weight or cholesterol levels.
- **Rich in Protein.** Camel milk is a good source of high-quality protein, which is essential for muscle growth, repair, and overall body function. It provides a similar protein content to cow's milk and is suitable for those seeking to meet their protein requirements.
- **High Mineral Content.** Camel milk is a rich source of various essential minerals such as calcium, phosphorus, and iron. These minerals are important for maintaining strong bones, teeth, and overall health. The calcium content in camel milk can be particularly beneficial for those at risk of osteoporosis.
- **Lower Allergenic Potential.** Camel milk is often considered a hypoallergenic alternative to cow's milk. It contains different types of proteins, and some individuals who are lactose intolerant or allergic to cow's milk may find camel milk easier to digest.
- **Vitamins and Antioxidants.** Camel milk contains various vitamins, including B vitamins (such as B1, B2, and B12), vitamin C, and vitamin D. These vitamins play essential roles in various bodily functions, including immune support and energy metabolism. Additionally, camel milk contains antioxidants that can help protect cells from oxidative stress (Muthukumaran et al., 2023).
- **Immunological Benefits.** Research suggests that camel milk may have immunological properties that could be beneficial for people with certain health conditions. It has been studied for its potential to boost the immune system, making it an interesting option for individuals with autoimmune diseases.
- **Anti-Inflammatory Properties.** Some studies have indicated that camel milk may have anti-inflammatory properties, which can be valuable for individuals dealing with inflammatory conditions or allergies.

It is important to note that the nutritional composition of camel milk can vary depending on factors such as the camel's diet, breed, and environmental conditions (Benmeziane – Derradji, 2021). While camel milk offers various benefits, it is not widely available in many regions, which can make it more expensive and less accessible compared to cow's milk (Mustafa et al., 2023).

Overall, camel milk can be a nutritious alternative for those who are looking for a lower-fat, protein-rich, and potentially hypoallergenic milk option. However, more research is needed to fully understand its health benefits and to assess its practicality as a widespread dietary staple (Izadi et al., 2019).

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## Camel Potential and Cultural Tourism

### Growing Demand for Camel Milk

Camels play a significant role in various cultures worldwide and have substantial potential in cultural tourism due to their historical, economic, and symbolic importance. These remarkable animals have been integral to the livelihoods, traditions, and daily lives of numerous societies across the globe. Exploring their potentials in cultural tourism involves delving into their historical significance, cultural connections, and their role in various tourism experiences (Tiberghien et al., 2020).

### The Historical Significance of the Camel

Camels have played a vital role in the history and culture of many societies, particularly in arid regions. They were historically used for transportation, trade, and as a source of food and materials (Wynne-Hughes, 2021). Their presence has left a significant mark on the cultural and historical landscapes.

- **Transport and Trade.** Camels have historically been vital for transportation across arid regions, facilitating trade routes and enabling connectivity between civilizations, such as along the Silk Road and Trans-Saharan trade routes.
- **Nomadic Lifestyles.** Nomadic cultures worldwide have relied on camels for their survival in harsh environments, showcasing the deep interdependence between these cultures and these animals.
- **Agriculture and Lifestyles.** Camels have been used in agricultural work, milk and meat production, and as a means of sustenance in diverse cultures.

### Cultural Connection of the Camel

The camel holds a deep cultural connection in various parts of the world, particularly in regions where it has been an integral part of daily life for centuries. This unique animal is not just a mode of transportation or a source of milk and meat; it holds a profound cultural significance that is woven into the tapestry of many societies (Sheehan, 2022).

- **Festival and celebrations.** Many cultures celebrate camels through festivals and events, showcasing their significance in local traditions. These celebrations often feature camel races, beauty contests, and displays of traditional camel husbandry skills.
- **Folklore and Mythology.** Camels often feature prominently in the folklore and mythology of various cultures, representing resilience, endurance, and strength.
- **Art and Crafts.** Camels are often depicted in indigenous art, crafts, and cultural artefacts, representing cultural identity and heritage.

## Cultural Tourism and Camels

Cultural tourism refers to the exploration of the cultural aspects of a destination, including its history, traditions, customs, arts, and lifestyle. This type of tourism involves travellers seeking authentic and enriching experiences that allow them to immerse themselves in the local culture. Camels are often associated with cultural tourism, especially in the Middle East where these animals have played a significant historical and cultural role.

- **Perseveration of Heritage.** Cultural tourism centred around camels can contribute to the preservation and promotion of traditional practices and knowledge associated with these animals, safeguarding intangible cultural heritage.
- **Economic Opportunities.** Tourism activities involving camels can create economic opportunities for local communities, promoting sustainable tourism and supporting livelihoods.
- **Education and awareness.** Cultural tourism focusing on camels serves as an educational platform, raising awareness about the historical, social, and economic importance of these animals in various cultures.

## Potential Tourism Experiences

A future approach to cultural tourism can leverage the cultural and historical significance of camels. Camel tourism offers a unique and adventurous travel experience for those looking to explore arid and landscapes, deserts, and remote regions. Below are some potential tourism experiences for camel tourism (Tiberghien et al., 2020).

- **Camel Safaris.** Offer camel safaris in regions with historical camel trade routes, such as the Silk Road or the Arabian Peninsula. These safaris can provide tourists with a unique and immersive experience.
  - **Cultural Festivals.** Organise cultural festivals that celebrate the role of camels in local heritage. These events can include camel races, camel beauty contests, and exhibitions about camel-related traditions.
  - **Educational Tours.** Develop educational tours that introduce tourists to the cultural significance of camels, their historical role, and their importance in today's society.
  - **Camel Milk Tasting.** Include camel milk tastings as part of cultural tours to educate tourists about the local culinary traditions.
- Travellers are increasingly seeking more responsible and sustainable tourism experiences, which has led to a shift in focus towards eco-friendly and ethical tourism practices (El-Khadrawy et al., 2022).

As a result, the future of camel tourism may involve a more responsible and sustainable approach, with a greater emphasis on animal welfare, cultural education, and eco-conscious practices. This could involve stricter regulations, better enforcement of existing standards, and a stronger emphasis on the well-being of the animals involved (Iglesias et al., 2022).



While camel tourism has a unique charm and cultural value, it needs to evolve to meet the changing ethical, environmental, and social demands of the modern world. Balancing the preservation of cultural heritage with responsible and ethical treatment of animals will be pivotal in shaping the future of this form of tourism. By embracing sustainable practices and ensuring the welfare of the animals involved, camel tourism can continue to offer enriching experiences for travellers while respecting both the cultural heritage and the well-being of these magnificent creatures.

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## A Futuristic Approach for Cultural Tourism

### Sustainable Tourism

To ensure the enduring presence of camel-based cultural tourism, promoting sustainable practices is imperative. Camels have been integral to various cultural traditions and tourism experiences across many regions. Embracing sustainability not only safeguards these traditions but also preserves the environment and supports local communities. Here are key strategies to ensure the longevity of camel-based cultural tourism through sustainable practices such as conservation efforts, animal wellbeing, cultural sensitivity, community involvement, promotion of eco-friendly tourism practices, educational programs, as well as ongoing research and innovation. To ensure the longevity of camel-based cultural tourism, it is essential to promote sustainable practices (Iglesias et al., 2022).

### Integration of Technology

The integration of technology can significantly enhance the tourism experience related to camel milk production and the broader tourism industry.

Information Dissemination. Technology plays a pivotal role in disseminating information. For camel milk tourism, utilising websites, mobile apps, and social media platforms can educate and attract tourists by showcasing the benefits of camel milk, the process of its production, and its cultural significance (Nayyar et al., 2018). Such platforms can offer virtual tours, videos, and interactive content to educate tourists even before they arrive.

- **Online Booking and Reservation Systems.** Implementing user-friendly online booking systems for camel milk farm tours or camel-based experiences streamlines the process for tourists. This tech feature can enable visitors to plan their visits, book experiences, and make payments conveniently (Oselu et al., 2022).
- **Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR).** Incorporating AR and VR experiences can offer immersive encounters with camels and their habitats, providing tourists with a realistic and interactive experience before they physically visit a camel farm or dairy (Nayyar et al., 2018). This technology can showcase milking processes, camel rearing, and the overall environment, enhancing the anticipation and understanding of the visit.

- **Mobile application for on-sites Guidance.** Developing mobile apps that offer on-site guidance during the tour can provide real-time information about the camels, their history, and the milk production process. Additionally, these apps could offer translation features for tourists who speak different languages (Mohan et al., 2020).

The integration of technology in camel milk tourism and the broader tourism industry not only improves the visitor experience but also contributes to sustainability, education, and the preservation of cultural practices. Embracing technological advancements can elevate the tourism experience, ensuring it is both enriching for tourists and sustainable for the environment and local communities involved.

### **Collaboration and Partnerships**

Collaboration among local governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and the private sector stands as a pivotal framework in fostering a flourishing camel tourism industry. Through a concerted effort, these entities can amalgamate their unique strengths to lay the foundation for a sustainable and impactful camel tourism landscape (Tiberghien et al., 2020).

Local governments play a central role by providing regulatory frameworks, infrastructure development, and policy support. They can create conducive environments through effective governance, ensuring the implementation of responsible and eco-friendly tourism practices. Their involvement in licensing, land management, and crafting supportive policies is fundamental for the smooth operation of camel tourism.

NGOs, with their expertise in conservation and community engagement, can significantly contribute to the sustainable development of camel tourism. They can aid in preserving the natural habitats of camels, promoting ethical treatment of animals, and facilitating community-based tourism initiatives. Additionally, NGOs can empower local communities by providing training in hospitality, guiding, and other necessary skills, thereby fostering socio-economic growth (Wynne-Hughes, 2021).

The private sector, including tour operators, hospitality businesses, and investors, can inject innovation and investment into the camel tourism industry. Collaborating with local communities and NGOs, private enterprises can develop diverse and ethical tourism experiences, ranging from camel safaris to cultural immersions, ensuring authenticity and quality services. Furthermore, private sector involvement can generate employment opportunities, bolstering local economies and fostering sustainable livelihoods.

Overall, the synergy between local governments, NGOs, and the private sector is essential for creating a vibrant and sustainable camel tourism industry. Their collaborative efforts can pave the way for a model that balances economic prosperity with environmental and social responsibility, ensuring a thriving and ethically managed sector that benefits both tourists and local communities alike (El-Khadrawy et al., 2022).

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## Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter examined aspects of leveraging camel-related products and experiences for economic and cultural growth in the region. The exploration of camel milk, its availability, and nutritional benefits highlights the untapped potential of this unique commodity. With its rich nutritional profile, camel milk emerges not only as a viable alternative to traditional dairy but also as a source of economic empowerment for communities engaged in camel husbandry. The chapter underscores the importance of effective marketing strategies to promote camel milk, considering both its health benefits and the cultural significance attached to camel rearing.

Moreover, future approaches to camel-related activities in the cultural tourism industry opens new avenues for economic development in the Middle East. The chapter emphasises the need for innovative tourism initiatives that showcase the cultural heritage surrounding camel husbandry. By creating immersive experiences and promoting camel-related activities, the region can attract tourists seeking authentic and unique encounters. This approach not only fosters economic growth but also contributes to the preservation of cultural traditions associated with camel rearing.

In summary, the chapter underscores the dual benefits of marketing camel milk for its nutritional advantages and promoting camels as cultural assets for tourism. By intertwining economic opportunities with cultural preservation, the Middle East can position itself as a pioneer in sustainable and culturally enriched tourism. As we look to the future, the integration of camel-related products into mainstream markets and the development of camel-centric tourism experiences hold the potential to redefine the region's economic landscape and global cultural influence.

# 09

# Desert Economy: The Role of Camels in Saudi Arabia's Cultural Tourism and Commerce



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## Introduction

Since the launch of Saudi Vision 2030, Saudi Arabia has experienced major development in several fields, including those of culture and tourism. Vision 2030 views cultural assets as enablers to achieve its three strategic objectives: an ambitious nation, thriving economy and vibrant society (Abuhjeeleh, 2019). Over the last few years, Saudi Arabia registered a total of 17 cultural elements in UNESCO's World tangible and intangible heritage list. These cultural elements provide strong opportunities for cultural tourism development and economic growth.

In the vast, sun-drenched deserts of Saudi Arabia, the camel stands not just as a resilient inhabitant of harsh terrains but as a symbol of enduring cultural heritage and a key player in the nation's economy. This book embarked on a journey to unravel the multifaceted role of camels, tracing their evolution from ancient trade facilitators and nomadic companions to modern icons of cultural tourism and commercial value. At the heart of its discussion is an exploration of the camel's historical significance, deeply rooted in the survival and prosperity of various cultures. These animals, integral to folklore, art, and traditions, emerge as cultural icons, their narratives intricately woven into the collective memory of societies. The economic transformation of camels is also a focal point, highlighting their transition from traditional pastoral assets to valuable commodities in contemporary markets, especially in the burgeoning sector of health foods and dairy alternatives.

The narrative extends to the realm of cultural tourism, where the ethical and sustainable use of camels is examined. The book introduced innovative concepts like the Cultural Experience Model, emphasising visitor involvement through storytelling and co-creation. This approach underscores the importance of emotional engagement in crafting memorable cultural encounters.

In sports tourism, camel racing was presented as a heritage event, reflecting the deep cultural roots and social significance of these animals in the Arabian Peninsula. The unique technique of *Alheda'a*<sup>4</sup>, recognized by UNESCO as part of the intangible cultural heritage, illustrates the intricate communication between humans and camels, further emphasising their cultural importance.

The book also delved into the impact of camel festivals in Saudi Arabia, underscoring their role in cultural exchange, community building, and economic development. These festivals not only celebrate the historical and cultural significance of camels but also examine their evolving economic relevance and potential in shaping a sustainable and culturally rich future.

Through this comprehensive exploration, the book offered a nuanced understanding of the camel's role in Saudi Arabia's desert economy, highlighting its significance in cultural tourism and commerce and its enduring legacy in the nation's heritage. This chapter focuses on the economics of camels and how they can contribute to achieving the three strategic objectives of Vision 2030.

<sup>4</sup> *Alheda'a is an oral polyphonic expression accompanied by gestures or musical instruments played by herders to communicate with their camels (UNESCO, 2022).*

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## The Perception of Camel Products

Saudi Arabia shares with its neighbouring Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries a strong respect for camels due to their role in the Arab's life in both ancient and modern times. The perception of camel products in Saudi society is deeply rooted in historical traditions, yet it is also evolving to embrace modern health and lifestyle trends. Historically, camels have been integral to Saudi life, especially in Bedouin culture. They were essential for survival in the harsh desert environment, providing transportation, milk, meat, and even companionship. Camel milk, in particular, has always been cherished for its nutritional value and medicinal properties. It is traditionally consumed for its benefits in boosting immunity and overall health. This historical reverence has imbued camel products with a sense of authenticity and purity in the Saudi perception.

In contemporary Saudi society, this traditional view of camel products is merging with modern health and lifestyle trends. Camel milk, once a staple of Bedouin diet, is now being marketed as a superfood, appealing to health-conscious consumers globally (Faye, et al., 2014; Mustafa, et al., 2023). Its low lactose content and high mineral and vitamin profile make it a sought-after alternative to traditional dairy products. Similarly, camel meat, known for its lean quality and rich flavour, is being re-evaluated as a healthier meat option, aligning with the growing global demand for sustainable and nutritious food sources (Kadim, et al., 2008).

Moreover, Saudi government initiatives, like Vision 2030, have played a significant role in rebranding camel products. These initiatives aim to preserve cultural heritage while promoting sustainable and innovative economic growth. Camel festivals, races, and tourism activities not only celebrate the cultural significance of camels but also create new economic opportunities around camel products.

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## The Camel Industry as a Contributor to Vision 2030

Recently, a brand called Noug was established by the Saudi Public Investment Fund to focus on expanding traditional industry based on camel milk products. The establishment of Noug<sup>5</sup> aligns with Saudi Arabia's broader economic diversification goals under Vision 2030, which aims to reduce the Kingdom's dependence on oil, diversify its economy, and develop public service sectors such as health, education, and tourism (SaudiVision, 2023). The primary objective of Noug is to capitalise on the unique properties and benefits of camel milk, positioning it as a premium product in both domestic and international markets. The brand is only one example of how Saudi Arabia capitalises on all potential opportunities to maximise use of traditional items and re-engage them in the modern economy of the country.

<sup>5</sup>Noug is a camel milk products brand owned by Sawani, a PIF company (Sawani, 2024). For further information, visit <https://sawani.com/en>.

Another example of how Saudi Arabia capitalises on camels is the diversity of camel-related events that take place annually. Prior to Vision 2030 and its tourism strategies, camels sport and cultural events were organised only for local enjoyment. However, recent years have seen camel festivals, such as the King Abdulaziz Camel Festival, transcend mere entertainment, serving as cultural spectacles that celebrate history and tradition. These festivals are melting pots of art, poetry, and music, drawing people from diverse backgrounds, fostering a sense of community and national pride. They are not just showcases of the past but dynamic events where tradition meets contemporary creativity, contributing to a culturally rich and diverse society (Abdelazim & Alajlani, 2016).

The economic diversification brought about by the camel industry helps the Kingdom move beyond the traditional oil-based economy. This industry also offers new avenues for employment and entrepreneurship. From dairy production to tourism, and from artisan crafts to modern marketing, it is creating a plethora of opportunities, particularly for the youth. This economic diversification is not only about creating jobs, but also about energising Saudi society with new ideas, innovations, and a spirit of entrepreneurship (Euchi, et al., 2018).



**Figure 9.1.** Traditional camel milking.  
**Source:** Aleqtasadiya Newspaper, 2019.



**Figure 9.2:** Modern packaging.  
**Source:** Sawani.com, 2023.

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## **Tourism: A Value-Added Sector to the Camel Industry**

Tourism is known to increase demand for products and services at the tourist destination. Therefore, integrating tourism into the camel industry presents a transformative approach to enhancing both the economic and cultural value of camels. This symbiosis not only elevates the market appeal of camel products and services but also provides educational and entertainment opportunities for tourists, fostering a sustainable economic model. Among these products, which previous chapters have outlined, are milk, meat, wool, and hide.

Known for their lengthy lactation periods and resilience in arid conditions, camels are consistent milk producers. The expanding market for camel milk, now reaching urban and international consumers, presents a unique opportunity (El-Agamy, 2017). Today, camel milk is produced in commercial quantities, and tourism introduces its health benefits and unique qualities to a broader audience, potentially boosting its demand and market value. Additionally, while camel meat occupies a smaller segment of the global meat market, it is highly sought after in Arab countries. Tourism can play a pivotal role in increasing awareness and appreciation of camel meat, potentially expanding its market reach. Similarly, camel wool and hide, used in various products like blankets, bags, and sandals, represent a significant aspect of the camel industry. Tourists seeking authentic, locally made products can substantially contribute to the demand for these items, providing an economic boost to local communities.

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## **Camel Culture and Heritage**

Events like the Camel Festival in Saudi Arabia are not just celebrations of the camel's cultural significance; they are also platforms for showcasing camel products, thereby increasing their market exposure. These festivals attract tourists interested in authentic cultural experiences, creating a direct link between tourism and the camel industry. Many of these events include educational aspects. This involves tourists engaging in learning experiences about camels, their care, and the production of camel-based products. Such initiatives can be particularly appealing to families and school groups, where children can learn about sustainable practices and the importance of camels in certain cultures. Activities like camel riding and safaris offer tourists a unique way to explore landscapes and experience traditional modes of transportation. This not only adds to the tourist's experience but also creates a market for camel-based services.



A unique example for such activities is the “sesame camel” which involves blindfolded camels walking with heavy weight to grind sesame seeds and produce its oil (Moeid, 2009). While this practice has been prohibited and replaced by modern machines, it remains part of cultural heritage related to camels. Tourists have long considered this as a cultural practice that they enjoyed watching as well as an educational aspect to learn how traditional sesame oil is manufactured.



*Figure 10.3. Blindfolded camel grinding sesame. Source: Alayam Newspaper, 2009.*

The integration of tourism into the camel industry can lead to significant economic benefits. It creates job opportunities, from camel caretakers to tour operators, and stimulates local economies through increased demand for camel products. Moreover, it diversifies income sources for communities that traditionally depend on camels, reducing their vulnerability to economic fluctuations (Hassan, et al., 2022).

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## Challenges Facing the Camel Industry

The involvement of animals in tourist activities, while offering unique experiences to visitors, can potentially lead to harmful consequences for the animals involved. This concern has prompted international organisations to advocate for the protection of animals, such as elephants, from exploitation in tourism. For example, certain practices, as depicted in image 10.2, have been identified as detrimental to animal welfare and consequently prohibited in Saudi Arabia. The ethical considerations in camel-related tourism activities are extensive, going beyond basic animal welfare to include a broader spectrum of ethical responsibilities towards the animals, the environment, and local communities.

Ethical tourism necessitates a deep understanding and respect for the physical and psychological boundaries of camels. This understanding should translate into setting realistic limits on the duration and frequency of their involvement in tourism activities, ensuring they have sufficient rest periods. It is imperative to avoid overburdening camels, whether through excessive loads or prolonged working hours. Furthermore, the methods employed in training and handling camels should be humane and free from cruelty. This approach involves eschewing harsh physical discipline in favour of positive reinforcement techniques. Handlers and guides must be proficiently trained in ethical animal care and management, with a comprehensive understanding of camel behaviour and needs.

According to Fennell (2013), animals used for entertainment often suffer from suboptimal living conditions. Echoing this concern, the Animals Asia Foundation in 2012 highlighted the ethical dilemma of using animals for public entertainment or sports, especially when it compromises their health or welfare. This issue, traditionally linked to zoo and circus animals, also extends to other species, including camels, which may face similar adverse conditions. Therefore, the use of camels in tourist activities requires a rigorous ethical approach. While camels are not typically found in zoos or circuses, their use in tourism should be carefully managed to avoid removing them from their natural habitats. It is also vital to establish and adhere to reasonable work durations for these animals, ensuring their well-being is not jeopardised by excessive labour (Von Essen, et al., 2020). In addition to these considerations, it is essential to incorporate environmental sustainability into camel-related tourism. Activities should be planned and executed in a manner that minimises ecological impact, preserving the natural habitats of camels and maintaining the balance of local ecosystems. This approach includes responsible waste management and ensuring that tourist activities do not lead to habitat degradation or pollution.

Community involvement and empowerment are also key aspects of ethical camel tourism. Engaging local communities in the planning and execution of tourism activities ensures that their knowledge, traditions, and expertise are respected and utilised. This involvement can also empower communities economically and socially, fostering a sense of ownership and pride in their cultural heritage and natural resources (Giampiccoli, et al., 2020)

Moreover, tourists themselves play a crucial role in ethical camel tourism. They should be educated about the importance of camel conservation, ethical treatment, and the cultural significance of these animals. This education can foster a more respectful and informed interaction between tourists and camels, enhancing the overall quality of the experience while safeguarding the welfare of the animals (Shani and Pizam, 2008).

Ethical considerations in camel-related tourism are multifaceted and require a comprehensive approach that encompasses animal welfare, environmental sustainability, cultural respect, community involvement, and tourist education. By adhering to these principles, the camel tourism industry can ensure a harmonious balance between offering unique tourist experiences and maintaining the well-being of camels, the integrity of local cultures, and the health of the environment.

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## **Future Perspectives on the Camel's Economic Role**

The economic role of camels, traditionally limited to transportation and basic sustenance in arid regions, is experiencing a significant transformation. As we progress into the future, the camel's economic potential is broadening, influenced by global trends in sustainability, health consciousness, and cultural tourism. Camels, in the context of climate change and environmental sustainability, are becoming increasingly important in sustainable agriculture (Ismail, et al., 2023). Their remarkable ability to adapt to harsh, arid environments with minimal water and food makes them a viable solution to food security challenges in desert regions. As the world grapples with the impacts of climate change, future agricultural practices are likely to increasingly incorporate camels for milk and meat production. This shift is significant, considering that camels have a lower ecological footprint compared to traditional livestock (Faye, 2020). The nutritional benefits of camel milk, which is rich in vitamins, minerals, and immunoglobulins, are gaining global recognition. This growing awareness could lead to a surge in demand, potentially revolutionising dairy farming practices and making camel dairy more common.

Moreover, recent advancements in research have highlighted the potential of camelid antibodies in medicinal research. These unique antibodies, smaller and more resilient than their human counterparts, open up exciting possibilities in developing new medical treatments and diagnostic tools (Yadav, et al., 2015; Mohammadabadi, 2020). As the biomedical industry delves deeper into these prospects, the breeding and management of camels for antibody production could emerge as a highly profitable sector. This development not only diversifies the economic role of camels but also positions them within the high-value biotech industry, bridging traditional uses with modern scientific applications.

The cultural significance of camels, especially in regions like the Middle East and North Africa, offers immense opportunities in the realm of cultural tourism. In an era where global tourism is increasingly seeking authentic and sustainable experiences, camels are set to play a pivotal role in this search. Activities such as camel festivals, races, and safaris provide unique cultural insights and experiences that attract tourists interested in immersing themselves in local traditions. The promotion of these activities not only stimulates local economies but also contributes to the preservation of cultural heritage. Initiatives like Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 highlight the role of camels in branding and marketing cultural tourism, showcasing them as symbols of national identity and heritage.

Furthermore, the integration of camels in eco-tourism and adventure travel is gaining traction. Camel treks and desert safaris are becoming popular ways for tourists to explore remote landscapes while minimising their environmental impact. This form of tourism promotes a deeper understanding and appreciation of the natural environment and the traditional ways of life that have coexisted with camels for centuries.

In addition, the potential for camel-based products extends beyond food and medicine to include textiles and artisan crafts. Camel wool, known for its durability and insulation properties, is being used in high-quality textiles and fashion, adding another dimension to the economic value of camels (Kazakov, et al., 2021). Artisan communities that traditionally rely on camels are finding new markets for their crafts, further integrating the economic role of camels into the global market.

In summary, the evolving economic role of camels is a testament to their adaptability and the growing recognition of their value in a changing world. From sustainable agriculture and medical research to cultural tourism and eco-friendly textiles, camels are proving to be versatile and valuable assets in various sectors, aligning with contemporary global trends and needs.

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