

The FIFA World Cup 2022: Effects on Qatar's Tourism

*Sport Activities and
Qatar Tourism
Sector*

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the impact of the FIFA World Cup 2022 on Qatar's tourism sector, focusing on tourist satisfaction. Using qualitative methods, data were collected from hotel reviews, interviews, and literature reviews. The World Cup significantly boosted short-term tourism, with a notable rise in arrivals as many visitors came specifically for the event and expressed a desire to return due to their positive experiences. Qatar, as the first Arab nation to host such a major sporting event, is expected to celebrate its successful hosting globally, especially within the GCC region. In the long term, Qatar aims to establish itself as a premier sports tourism destination, attracting attention from international sports organizations for future mega-events. The upcoming AFC Asian Cup in early 2024 highlights this ambition. While its tourism development lags behind faster-growing GCC nations like the UAE, Qatar's steady progress indicates potential for growth. Overall, the study concludes that the FIFA World Cup 2022 was a success, with high tourist satisfaction levels laying a strong foundation for Qatar's future tourism opportunities.

Keywords: FIFA World Cup 2022, Tourism Sector, Tourist Satisfaction, Sports Tourism

INTRODUCTION

Qatar is a small Gulf country with a current population of 2.8 million as of 2024. Of that number, only about 313,000 are native Qataris, with the majority of the population consisting of immigrants from various developing countries. Qatar has become the third-largest oil producer globally and has gained prominence as a crucial peace mediator among various groups and actors in the Middle East (Grix et al., 2017). As one of the fastest-growing economies in the world, Qatar has invested heavily in developing its infrastructure and improving the quality of life for its residents, solidifying its status as a developed country on the global stage.

In 2010, Qatar was awarded the right to host the FIFA World Cup 2022. The decision was controversial, yet the country celebrated enthusiastically, with residents holding parades in the streets. With substantial resources at its disposal, the Qatari government quickly began planning and constructing the necessary infrastructure. Qatar aimed to create one of the most memorable World Cups in modern history, offering unforgettable experiences for millions of tourists and fans visiting the country during the tournament.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine Qatar's successful bid to host the FIFA World Cup 2022 and its subsequent impact on the nation's infrastructure, economy, and international standing. This research will explore the relationship between the World Cup's planning and Qatar's broader economic and diplomatic strategies. The hypothesis is that hosting the World Cup has not only bolstered Qatar's global reputation but also significantly accelerated the country's development, both in terms of infrastructure and its role in international diplomacy.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Tourism, a vital global industry, significantly contributes to economies, governments,

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and private sectors. It remains resilient, with consistent growth driven by increasing travel demands. In 2018, the World Tourism Organization reported a staggering \$1.7 trillion generated by tourism, with projections indicating a rise to 1.488 billion tourist arrivals by 2030 (World Tourism Organization, 2019). While the COVID-19 pandemic temporarily halted this growth, the industry has shown signs of recovery post-pandemic.

Defined as a social, cultural, and economic phenomenon, tourism involves people traveling beyond their usual environment for various purposes. The industry encompasses diverse activities and expenditure patterns. Globally, tourism intertwines with sports, offering both mature and emerging destinations opportunities for development. Notable types of tourism include adventure, agrobusiness, sports, cultural, and disaster tourism.

Qatar's Tourism Sector

The tourism industry is arguably one of the most important industries in the world. It is an ever-growing sector due to the rising demand for travel. While Qatar may not be the most popular destination globally, it is certainly one of the most competitive and intriguing places to visit in the Middle East. As of 2019, Qatar's tourism sector ranked 51st out of 140 countries in the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index, reflecting its competitiveness as a tourist destination. Additionally, the sector contributed 9.1% to Qatar's GDP and accounted for 11.8% of total employment in 2019 (World Tourism Organization, 2019). Qatar offers a diverse range of tourism experiences, with cultural tourism being the most popular. The country features numerous cultural sites, such as the traditional market Souq Waqif, Al Zubarah, and the newly renovated National Museum of Qatar, which cost \$434 million USD. It also provides adventurous tourism activities, including the popular Desert Safari Ride in the Middle East (Yap et al., 2022).

Recent events, notably the blockade of Qatar from June 2017 to January 2021 and the global COVID-19 pandemic, have hampered the growth of Qatar's tourism sector. During these challenging times, Qatar adopted a strategic approach by easing visa restrictions and making numerous investments, positioning itself as one of the most visa-open economies in the Middle East (Saleh et al., 2021). Research on the motivations behind why tourists visit Qatar is limited, and further studies are needed to gain a better understanding. The Qatar National Tourism Council (QNTC) aims to increase tourist arrivals from emerging markets in Africa, Asia, and Europe. Most tourists to Qatar tend to be high-income visitors seeking a comprehensive tourist experience, such as luxury shopping, sports adventures, and health tourism. However, Qatar still has a long way to go in attracting more tourists, especially from emerging countries in Asia, Europe, and Africa, as it is often associated with luxury tourism, which not everyone can afford (Giampiccoli & Mtapuri, 2015). To align with the goals of the Qatar National Tourism Council, Qatar must work to convey that it is an affordable destination, not just for the wealthy but also for budget-conscious travelers.

FIFA World Cup 2022 in Qatar

Sports tourism can be defined as travel undertaken for recreational (non-commercial) reasons to participate in or observe sports activities that occur outside one's usual place of residence. The rapid growth of tourism and its lack of planning in the last decades of the twentieth century have caused some tourist destinations to struggle with the consequences of their success, testing their carrying capacity (Seraphin et al., 2019). To avoid these issues, Qatar began planning 12 years in advance to ensure the smooth execution of its sports tourism initiatives. It is well known that sports and tourism are intertwined; sports teams often travel to compete, and fans travel to watch them play. This industry involves everyone in the sporting community and is not just about hosting events; it also includes accommodating guests, leaving a lasting impression, and building a reputation in the world of sports tourism (Ehsani et al., 2017). With the extensive facilities Qatar has built, the substantial investment made, and the workforce available, sports tourism in the country is poised for significant growth (Torrance, 2022).

Hosting a major sports event, however, requires more than just infrastructure; it

requires passion and love for the sport. The people of Qatar are enthusiastic football fans, and their national team is considered one of the most successful in Asia. This passion ensures that Qatar will welcome the FIFA World Cup 2022 with great enthusiasm, creating an unforgettable experience for the millions who will visit Qatar for the tournament (Ahmed, 2020). There are many prestigious sporting events worldwide, such as Wimbledon and the Olympic and Paralympic Games, but the FIFA World Cup is the most famous and prestigious (Ehsani et al., 2017). Many countries vie to host the FIFA World Cup, and the responsibility for the 2022 tournament fell to Qatar, a small Gulf country, in a decision made by FIFA in 2010. This decision was controversial, with widespread criticism within the football industry, and even led to investigations into alleged bribes taken by FIFA from the Qatari government. Former FIFA President Sepp Blatter was quoted as saying, "Giving Qatar the World Cup was a big mistake" (Gibson, n.d.). However, Qatar sees this as an opportunity to showcase what Arab countries can achieve in the modern world, aiming to dispel stereotypes and gain respect from the international community (Ahmed, 2020). With over \$200 billion spent on the FIFA World Cup, Qatar's investment dwarfs that of previous tournaments, such as the 2018 World Cup in Russia, which cost only \$14.2 billion. This expenditure is not just for the World Cup itself but also for building and revitalizing infrastructure that will benefit Qatar's tourism sector long after the event concludes (Torrance, 2022).

(1) The Doha Metro Rail, one of the most sophisticated underground train systems in the world, opened to the public in 2019, costing the Qatari government \$36 billion. (2) Hamad International Airport was revitalized at a cost of \$16 billion. (3) \$6.5 billion was spent on building state-of-the-art stadiums and fan facilities. (4) A significant investment was made in constructing the new city of Lusail. Based on this data, it is clear that Qatar's infrastructure development is not solely for the World Cup but also aimed at the long-term future of the country's tourism sector. Qatar's decision to host the World Cup can be seen as a strategic move to showcase its capabilities to the world and to impress with its accomplishments (Vierhaus, 2018).

National governments often use cultural forms such as sports as integral aspects of their soft power strategies, particularly through hosting events like the Olympics or World Cup finals. In this context, Qatar's government aims to position Qatar as a central power in sports tourism by hosting the FIFA World Cup, demonstrating the country's potential in this field (Ahmed, 2020). Interestingly, the long-term success of Qatar's tourism sector may hinge on the outcome of the FIFA World Cup 2022. With ambitions to host many more sports tourism events, Qatar's future reputation as a sports tourism hub will be shaped by the experiences of the millions of tourists attending the World Cup. If these visitors are satisfied with their experiences, Qatar could become a popular tourist destination in the future (Yap et al., 2022).

Customer satisfaction in tourism is a crucial factor that drives the industry forward. The more satisfied customers are with a destination, the more popular it becomes. Conversely, if customers are dissatisfied, the destination's popularity declines. Therefore, prioritizing customer satisfaction is essential in the tourism industry (Huh, 2017). Generally, customer satisfaction is the feeling of pleasure or disappointment experienced after comparing the actual performance of a product or service with the expected performance. If the experience falls short of expectations, customers become dissatisfied. However, if the experience meets or exceeds expectations, customers are satisfied or even delighted (Hannan et al., 2017). Given its significant role in determining the success and sustainability of tourism businesses, customer satisfaction is a frequently researched area in tourism studies. High standards of service are vital to ensure that customers receive the satisfaction they deserve, necessitating continual improvements in tourism quality. The quality of tourism is perceived as the outcome of a process that satisfies legitimate needs for products and services, meets user expectations, and offers value for money (Atabeb, 2019).

Gaining customer trust is paramount, achievable only by delivering the satisfaction customers seek. However, as satisfaction levels vary from person to person, each tourism destination must strive to provide a universally satisfactory service. This goal requires meticulous planning and strategy implementation, including building infrastructure, training human resources, and sometimes overhauling existing systems (Li et al., 2020). Satisfied tourists contribute to higher retention rates through loyalty and repeated patronage, which, in turn, supports economic goals like increased tourist numbers and revenue. The essence of tourism growth lies in customer satisfaction, as tourists seek unique experiences and pleasure that they can't find elsewhere. Once tourists experience satisfaction and enjoyment, they leave with lasting positive impressions, creating unforgettable memories (Atabeb, 2019). Tourist satisfaction is a key factor in maintaining competitiveness in the tourism sector, influencing destination choices, consumption of products and services, and decisions to revisit (Saleh et al., 2021). Customer loyalty, a critical element for a company's success, is reflected in the intention of buyers to maintain relationships with service providers. Loyal customers are valuable because they are less sensitive to price changes and more likely to repurchase products (Matibiri & Sandada, 2016). Thus, we can conclude that customer satisfaction is the primary reason tourists return to a destination. When a customer becomes a repeat visitor, it indicates that the destination has achieved high levels of satisfaction, surpassing other destinations. This outcome demonstrates that the destination has effectively implemented strategies to meet guests' expectations (Atabeb, 2019).

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research method, which focuses on understanding the meanings, experiences, and perceptions of participants through descriptive data, often in their own words. Unlike quantitative research, which seeks to explain through measurement, qualitative research aims to explore "how" and "why" a phenomenon occurs, providing a deeper understanding of context and experiences. In this research, qualitative methods are used to examine the impact of the 2022 FIFA World Cup on Qatar's tourism sector.

Data for this study will be collected through hotel reviews and interviews. The collected data will then be analyzed using Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA), which identifies and examines patterns and themes to better understand the effects of the World Cup. By focusing on insider perspectives, the qualitative approach allows for a rich exploration of the tourism sector's responses to the event, offering insights into its impact.

Interviews are used to gather information through face-to-face communication. For this study, semi-structured interviews will be conducted with individuals who stayed in Qatar during the FIFA World Cup 2022. This method allows for open-ended questions tailored to the interviewee's experiences, while staying on topic. Interviewees will be selected from stadiums on match days and hotel guests who stayed for more than three days to ensure relevant and insightful responses.

Data will also be collected from hotel reviews submitted by guests after their stay, via an automated email link sent by the hotel. These reviews reflect tourists' true experiences, particularly those who traveled to Qatar for the World Cup. As the writer works at a hotel frequented by World Cup attendees, the reviews provide reliable and accurate feedback on both the event and the quality of service.

After the data is compiled, it will be processed using a qualitative approach. The raw data will be reduced by selecting and simplifying relevant information. The processed data will then be organized for analysis, using thematic analysis to identify key patterns and themes. Finally, a conclusion will be drawn based on the analyzed data.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The hotel where the writer was employed sent out approximately 1,000 emails to tourists who had stayed at the hotel. Out of these, the writer received 200 valid reviews,

representing a 20% response rate. These reviews were carefully filtered to ensure they met the respondent criteria set by the writer.

The tourists who participated in the review represented various nationalities. The writer identified 20 different nationalities from the 178 reviews that could be categorized. The majority of respondents were from Latin America, known for its passionate football fans. The country contributing the highest number of reviews was Saudi Arabia, with 30 reviews.

Table 1. Nationality and Review Percentage.

Nationality	Review	Percentage
Saudi Arabia	30	15%
Ecuador	22	11%
Brazil	22	11%
Argentina	19	9.5%
Mexico	15	7.5%
United States	11	5.5%
England	9	4.5%
Croatia	7	3.5%
Tunisia	6	3%
India	6	3%
Israel	4	2%
Germany	4	2%
Australia	4	2%
South Korea	4	2%
Tanzania	4	2%
Singapore	3	1.5%
Poland	3	1.5%
Netherland	2	1%
Canada	2	1%
Japan	1	0.5%

Out of the 200 reviews, 189 are positive, representing 94.5%. There are also 7 neutral reviews and 4 negative reviews. This data clearly demonstrates that the majority of tourists were satisfied with their.

Table2. Result of Review

Positive Review	Neutral Review	Negative Review
189 Review (94.5%)	7 Review (3.5%)	4 Review (2%)

There are no significant differences between long-stay and short-stay tourists, as almost all reviews are positive. Tourists from South America gave a perfect 100% positive review, while European tourists were slightly more critical. Specifically, there were 2 neutral reviews each from Germany, England, and Poland, as well as 1 neutral review from Japan. Additionally, there were 2 negative reviews each from Saudi Arabia and India.

Among the 189 positive reviews, 24 mentioned the great and reliable transportation system, 87 expressed a desire to return, 156 highlighted memorable experiences, and 187 felt that the World Cup was a success.

Table 3. Positive Factor Mentioned in Percentage

Positive Factor Mentioned	Percentage
Good Transportation	12.69%
Will return to Qatar	46.03%
Memorable Memories	82.05%
Successful World Cup	98.94%

The table above reveals a concerning trend: a significant number of respondents did not comment on transportation, and only 46.03% indicated they would return to Qatar. The writer was intrigued by these findings and conducted a deeper investigation to understand the reasons. Despite Qatar's modern, free transportation system, which offers a comfortable and hassle-free experience, several issues emerged, including congestion and overcrowded trains and stations. This was particularly problematic during major matches, where queues at stations could extend up to half an hour, negatively impacting the tourist experience. Notably, congestion at Lusail Station during the final lasted nearly two hours. Analysis showed that many respondents who did not mention transportation issues had attended major matches, including the final. In contrast, those who provided positive feedback about transportation had typically attended games featuring smaller nations.

From the writer's perspective, the transportation system in Qatar, especially in Doha, is generally adequate for tourists and supports the tourism sector. However, as with any new development, it will take time to fully address these challenges. Adding over a million visitors to a city with a population of half a million inevitably leads to some strain. It is the writer's opinion that tourists who have had a positive vacation experience tend to remember the destination and activities more than the logistics of their travel.

The relatively low percentage of respondents (46.03%) who expressed an interest in returning to Qatar is particularly intriguing, given that most reviews were positive. This hesitation may stem from the fact that many tourists came specifically for the World Cup and may not be considering a return solely for tourism. Nonetheless, 46.03% represents a substantial number, translating to around 644,000 potential repeat visitors from the 1.4 million World Cup attendees. The writer believes the actual number of returning tourists is likely higher. Drawing from the experience of South Africa, where tourism steadily improved after the 2010 World Cup, Qatar has a strong foundation to maintain momentum, as it has already established itself on the global tourism map. Based on the thoroughly filtered reviews, it can be concluded that the FIFA World Cup 2022 was a significant success for Qatar. Most tourists left with positive, memorable experiences and many expressed a desire to return in the future. To understand what contributed to their satisfaction, the writer conducted interviews with willing tourists, and their responses will be detailed below.

Table 4. Detail of Interviewed Respondent

Respondent	Gender and Age	Country of Residence
Respondent 1	Male / 28	England
Respondent 2	Male / 37	England
Respondent 3	Male / 68	England
Respondent 4	Male / 25	Australia
Respondent 5	Male / 49	Germany
Respondent 6	Female / 24	Tunisia
Respondent 7	Male / 22	Pakistan
Respondent 8	Male / 29	Canada
Respondent 9	Male / 27	Canada
Respondent 10	Female / 55	France

The first question the writer asked was, "Why did you come to Qatar? Which national team do you support?" The purpose of this question was to understand the reasons behind their visit to Qatar and their support for a particular team during the World Cup.

The writer interviewed Respondent 1, Respondent 2, and Respondent 3 at the Lusail Metro Station before the match between England and France. Respondent 1 stated, "Because football is coming home this year! We want to watch it when it happens." Respondent 3 provided a more detailed response: "We support England. We came here

not only to enjoy the football but also to explore the city. This is our first time experiencing such a warm welcome from an Arab country.”

As highlighted by these responses, the primary motivation for many visitors to Qatar during the World Cup was to support their favourite national team. Unfortunately for Respondent 1, Respondent 2, and Respondent 3, their team, England, was defeated by France 2-1 in the Quarter-Final.

The second question asked was, “What do you think about Qatar so far?” Respondents 8 and 9 from Canada shared their thoughts. They were staying at the hotel where the writer worked, providing the writer with an opportunity to interview them during their free time. Respondent 8 replied, “Oh, it’s a lot better than we expected. Smooth and cheap transportation, the magical Hayya card, alcohol availability, nice people, and a beautiful city too. Exceeding my expectations.” Respondent 9 added, “One of the best countries so far. This is the first time Canada has played in the World Cup since God knows how long, so this is special for us. Qatar made it even more special with everything running smoothly and perfectly.”

The third question that was asked was, “Do you find any difficulty during your stay so far?” for this question, respondent 4 and respondent 6 offered their answer. Respondent 4 answered with *“Not at all! Everything went smoothly! The transportation itself is a wonder, driverless metro? Sounds like a science fiction movie! The transportation system is well connected from buses to metro, getting around the city of Doha is as easy as it can get.”* While respondent 6 answered with *“There is no difficulty. Everything is very well made and thought off. Wonderful job they’ve done.”* Both of the answer intrigued the writer. Qatar spent billions of dollars to build the metro and revitalize its buses system, and it proves highly successful. The writer himself experienced the beauty of Doha public transportation, literally takes you anywhere in Doha with a cheap price or for free for Hayya Card holder (Hayya card is an access card that the tourist get when they bought a World Cup match ticket, it offers free transportation as well as a Visa to enter the country).

The fourth and final question was “How do you rate your journey here in Qatar? Is there any chance to come back?” for this question, respondent 5, respondent 7 and respondent 10 offered a very convincing answer. Respondent 5 said *“It’s 10 out of 10, nothing to complain of whatsoever. The people are great, the city is amazing, Will definitely come back in the future.”* Respondent 7 answered with *“It’s a solid 9/10, everything is great, cheap prices, lots of activities to do. I think Qatar has done a very great job. I would love to be back one day.”* And respondent 10 with *“It’s 10/10! I’ve been following France in several World Cup. Compare this to Russia and South Africa, Qatar won by a lot. In Russia and South Africa, the transportation was bad, in Russia you literally had to take plane to others stadium! Here? Wow, Doha is fantastic, you can go to every stadium with metro! Easy and practical. Warm weather too, everything is perfect. Would definitely visit again!”*

According to the data outlined above, the writer can develop an analysis based on the theoretical framework previously established. Thematic analysis will be employed as it is considered the most suitable method. Thematic analysis focuses on individual perceptions, and since the writer has set up preconceived themes (theoretical framework) that are expected to be reflected in the data, a deductive approach will be utilized. The deductive approach aims to validate or refute the theoretical framework.

The process will begin with identifying coded data from the collected information. Coded data refers to words with similar meanings that recur across the interviews. Following this, themes will be generated from the coded data to enhance understanding. This theme generation will involve reviewing the data to ensure that the themes are a valid representation of the information collected. The code and themes that the writer had identify can be find below:

Table 5. Analysis of Code and Themes

Code	Themes
Warm Welcome Great Job	Hospitality

Great Hospitality	
Easy Practical Smooth Operation	Smooth Operation
Fantastic Will Come Back Everything is Great	Tourist Satisfaction
Easy Transportation Good Metro Sometimes Too Crowded	Decent Transportation System

Based on the codes and themes identified, the writer is able to draw conclusions from the data. The data were collected from various sources and locations. All review data were obtained through the writer's role as an employee in a hotel in Doha, offering accurate insights into satisfaction levels within the hospitality sector. Interview data were gathered using a semi-structured format, with pre-set questions and respondents selected based on the situation. The writer ensures that the data are reliable, as all entrants to Qatar were exclusively World Cup ticket holders due to closed entry points.

During the analysis, the writer observed that most feedback from interviews was positive. Words like "warm welcome" emerged frequently, indicating that tourists felt warmly received, which contributed to their overall satisfaction. Hospitality is a crucial element of tourism, particularly in sports tourism, and a major event like the World Cup must uphold high standards. According to the data, the hospitality during the World Cup met tourists' expectations, with terms like "great job" and "great hospitality" commonly mentioned.

Regarding the event's execution, the writer found that the World Cup was highly efficient. Words such as "smooth operation," "easy," and "practical" were noted in the interviews, suggesting the event was well-planned and effectively managed.

The level of tourist satisfaction was also assessed. Many respondents expressed their willingness to return to Qatar, with the word "fantastic" appearing in at least one interview and "will be back" mentioned frequently. This indicates a high level of satisfaction among tourists, demonstrating that Qatar successfully provided an exceptional experience.

The analysis confirms that the theoretical framework established at the beginning of the thesis is valid. The writer hypothesized that the service quality of the FIFA World Cup 2022 would influence tourist satisfaction and positively impact Qatar's tourism sector. The data support this hypothesis, showing good service quality and high tourist satisfaction. While there were some negative comments about transportation congestion, this was understandable given the scale of the event.

Among the ten respondents, all expressed happiness and satisfaction with their stay. Many praised the compactness of the World Cup, which was held entirely within one city, reflecting positively on Qatar's success as a host.

• **Discussion**

The result of this research confirmed what the writer suspected from the first day in Qatar: an extraordinary level of quality paired with outstanding hospitality, delivering a result rarely matched by others. What drove this outcome? The answer is surprisingly simple: money and compromise. These two factors were brilliantly managed to achieve the desired result.

So, what impact does this have on Qatar's tourism sector? Will it be negative or positive? Studies of this nature, as noted in previous research, are often based on hypotheses that can later be confirmed or disproved. For instance, the FIFA World Cup in South Africa in 2010 had a substantial impact on tourism and the economy, effectively placing South Africa on the global tourism map (Pillay & Bass, 2008). Similarly, Qatar's

hosting of the World Cup is expected to yield similar results, positioning it as a premier destination for sports tourism and enhancing its global tourism profile.

This aligns with findings from other major sporting events. For example, research by Baade and Matheson (2004) on the economic effects of the World Cup in Germany suggested that the event significantly boosted tourism, with lasting effects on the host city's reputation. Similarly, the 2014 World Cup in Brazil had an observable impact on tourism infrastructure and international arrivals, though the long-term economic benefits remain debated (Lima & Trigo, 2018). In Qatar's case, the strategic goal behind hosting the World Cup seems to be not just short-term tourism growth, but the longer-term establishment of Qatar as a central hub for sports tourism.

The writer found it challenging to locate recent research on Qatar's tourism sector, as most studies are outdated and often focus on Dubai, the most renowned destination in the GCC region. For example, research by Alrawadieh et al. (2016) found that Dubai's tourism sector had outpaced its GCC neighbours, with significant growth due to infrastructure investments and hosting events. However, Qatar's tourism sector has been comparatively underdeveloped. In 2017, for instance, Turkey recorded the highest number of tourist arrivals in the region at 39.478 million, while Qatar hosted only 2.929 million tourists, roughly a third of Turkey's number. This disparity underscores the relative underdevelopment of Qatar's tourism sector in comparison to its regional peers.

Nevertheless, recent trends indicate that Qatar is making significant strides. The Qatar National Tourism Sector Strategy 2030 aims to diversify the economy and enhance the tourism sector's global competitiveness (Qatar National Tourism Council, 2020). The FIFA World Cup 2022 represents a key element of this strategy, expected to boost Qatar's global recognition and solidify its position in the sports tourism market. This is consistent with findings from research by Glaesser (2008), which highlights how mega-events like the World Cup serve as catalysts for infrastructure development and increased international visibility.

The Qatari government has invested heavily in tourism infrastructure, with several new hotels, stadiums, and transport systems developed in preparation for the World Cup. Studies on similar events, such as the 2006 World Cup in Germany and the 2018 event in Russia, show that such investments lead to significant short-term tourism growth, although the long-term effects can vary (Preuss, 2019). Qatar's tourism figures reflect this trend: in 2022, Qatar welcomed 2.6 million tourists, a significant increase from 600,000 in 2021, although still lower than other GCC countries. This upward trend aligns with similar studies indicating that hosting the World Cup can provide a significant boost to a nation's tourism sector, even if it remains lower than regional competitors.

Overall, while Qatar's tourism sector lags behind faster-growing GCC nations like the UAE and Saudi Arabia, the results from the World Cup indicate considerable progress. This research suggests that the country is well on its way to realizing its ambition of becoming a major player in the global sports tourism market.

(Note: The graph below includes Saudi Arabia's results, which account for pilgrimage and Hajj tourists.)

An even more immediate result can be seen in the first quarter of 2023, directly following the FIFA World Cup. Qatar welcomed a total of 730,000 visitors in January and February 2023, marking a substantial increase of 347 percent from the previous year. In March 2023 alone, 433,114 visitors arrived, compared to 152,772 in March of the previous year, showing a remarkable surge of 183.5 percent.

From an economic standpoint, it's clear that Qatar did not host the World Cup merely for financial gain. The primary goal was to gain international recognition and build a global reputation. Although Qatar will earn at least \$6.4 billion from the World Cup—a significant amount—it is still less than half of what was spent on hosting the event. Such results are possible only because of the World Cup's success.

Image 1. Total arrivals of GCC countries in 2022
(UNWTO, 2023)

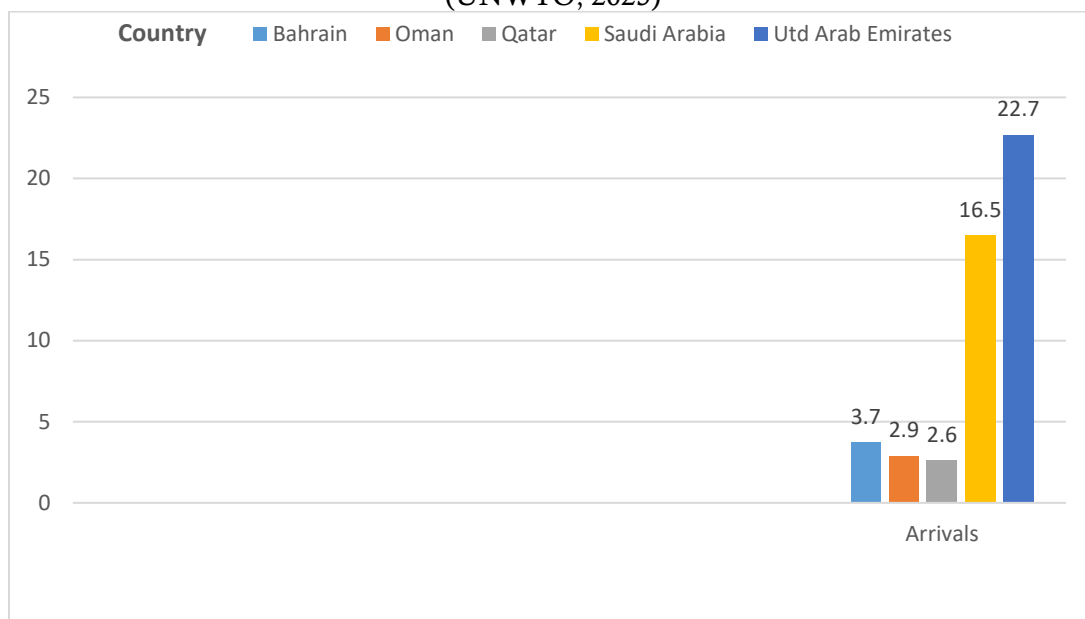


Image 2. Total arrivals of GCC countries in 2021
(United Nation World Tourism Organization, 2023)



This confirms what the writer anticipated from the outset: a successful World Cup will lead to increased tourism in Qatar. Moving forward, the tourism sector in Qatar is poised for growth. The positive impact from the World Cup is expected to be felt for years to come.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the FIFA World Cup 2022 was a significant success for Qatar, as evidenced by the overwhelmingly positive feedback from tourists. The event showcased Qatar's renowned hospitality and efficient infrastructure, positioning the country as a leading destination for sports tourism. The enduring positive impact of the World Cup on Qatar's tourism sector is expected to be long-lasting, with a surge in tourist arrivals already

evident in the months following the event. Qatar's successful hosting of the World Cup has not only enhanced its global reputation but has also laid a strong foundation for sustained tourism growth in the future.

However, there are several limitations to this research. First, the study relies on a qualitative approach, meaning the findings are based on subjective experiences and perceptions, which may not fully represent the broader population. Second, the data was collected primarily through hotel reviews and interviews, which may limit the diversity of perspectives and exclude certain groups of tourists, such as those not staying in hotels or attending the event in person. Lastly, the research focuses on the short-term impact of the World Cup, and while there are indications of sustained tourism growth, further studies are needed to assess the long-term effects on Qatar's tourism sector beyond the event itself.

Implications

Despite these limitations, the findings have important implications for Qatar's tourism strategy. The success of the World Cup presents a model for how Qatar can continue to leverage major sporting events to attract international tourists and enhance its global tourism profile. The research also highlights the importance of investing in infrastructure, hospitality, and overall visitor experience to ensure long-term tourism growth. Furthermore, as Qatar continues to develop its tourism sector, understanding the lessons learned from hosting the World Cup can inform future policy decisions and help the country position itself as a sustainable, world-class destination for sports tourism.

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