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THE EFFECTS OF SEASONALITY ON MICE TOURISM DEMAND IN JORDAN

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Abstract

Seasonal tourism is a set of influences that determines tourism demand, and it is defined as the movement of tourists caused by climate and institutional changes. Most tourist destinations in the world are affected by seasonal phenomena. Destinations with high seasonal variability often face various challenges, such as high costs, overcrowding, and inadequate infrastructure in peak seasons, while in low seasons, the challenges are low numbers of tourists, lack of services and job opportunities. Thus, the purpose of this article is to investigate how Jordan's MICE tourism demand is affected by seasonality. A quantitative research method was applied in this study by distributing a survey to 331 respondents among domestic and international tourists who visited Amman, stayed in a hotel at least one night and participated in meeting, incentive, conference and exhibition (MICE) activities, using a non-probability sampling technique. Data was analysed using Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 24.0 and Smart PLS software. The results of the study exhibited a significant and positive effect between two aspects of tourism seasonality (political and economic) and MICE tourism. The study indicates that MICE tourism is quite beneficial for the economy of a country to generate demand and to stimulate the tourism industry. MICE tourism that takes place should be systematically planned and developed, and should be established as tourist attractions, catalyst for further development, image builders and animators of the destination. Their success is mostly due to the backing of accommodations of a suitable caliber, the close coordination between travel agents, the accessibility of detailed information about events and related activities, and most crucially, effective marketing initiatives.

Keywords: Tourism Seasonality, MICE Tourism, Jordan

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INTRODUCTION

Tourism seasonality is defined by Allcock (1989) and Kocand Altinay (2007) as the movement of tourists caused by climate and institutional changes. Seasonal tourism is a set of influences that determines tourism demand due to recurring factors. The influences have been separated into various groups by researchers. First, a natural or climatic component, and this factor addresses weather and climate and their influence on seasonal tourism, especially changes in the temperature, duration of sunlight, and rain or snow. Secondly, the institutionalization of vacations, holidays, and public holidays. The third one is the religious factor, which increases the demand for tourism to religious and holy sites. Due to its vulnerability to internal, external, and seasonal shocks, the tourism industry is one of the most volatile industries. Additionally, economic, political, and social issues, as well as natural disasters and seasonality, have a significant impact on the number of tourists who visit a particular tourist location (Morales, 2003).

Additionally, Haji (2015) claims that there is little doubt that many people go on vacation during the tourism season, i.e, when offices, schools, universities are closed. Traditional holidays are frequently the ideal time to visit due to the weather. During specific year periods, the concentration of tourist flows has often been regarded as a critical part of tourism's seasonality. Seasonality is viewed as a physiological property of tourism and an unavoidable feature of the economic sector. Seasonality in commercial institutions broadly is a frequent pattern in a time series that spans a specific period during the year. In contrast, in tourism, seasonality it is the movement caused by changes in the weather, calendar, and timing of decisions, as manifested in tourist preparation, tourist spending, traffic, and other modes of transportation. Corluka (2019) summarized the most critical characteristics of seasonal tourism, stating that because tourist flows are concentrated in a relatively short period of the year, this period of tourism activity is likely to be inefficient due to the increased strain on the tourist destination.

Jordan has four distinct climates, each with its unique characteristics. The weather in Jordan is hot and dry during the summer, and the winters are mildly rainy. The weather in Jordan is an essential factor in attracting tourists. As a result, the country of Jordan is almost completely free of storms and heavy rain. Due to the favourable weather, tourist events, festivals, and celebrations can be held in a pleasant atmosphere (Ibrahim Bazazo 2020), and research shows that foreign visitors have a significant impact on the seasonality of tourist activity. It is possible to reduce tourism seasonality by creating a third peak summer season. To encourage Jordanians to travel outside of these peak seasons, planners and decision-makers must focus on diversifying tourism activities that cater to the interests of a wide range of visitors during summer vacation. In addition, the

government should encourage the holding of large-scale events like international conferences during off-peak times (Al-Zboun 2018). According to Oppermann (1996), the MICE industry is one of the most buoyant areas of overall tourism, is least sensitive to price variations, and helps to lessen "peak-trough" seasonal trends.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Butler (2014), tourism seasonality is a significant challenge for the tourist region as it limits the economic benefits of the tourist spot. The adverse effects of the tourist season can be minimized if the tourist destination can attract tourists to the region throughout the year. In a study carried out by Lee, Seers, Galloway & Mc Murray (2008), they agree that seasonality is complex and negatively impacts tourist facilities, as tourism is affected by natural and institutional factors, as explained below.

Natural Factor of Seasonality

The natural factor of seasonality is referred to as regular variations in visitor arrivals and activities that arise from weather patterns and natural environmental conditions in the context of tourism. These recurring trends often affect the number of tourists that visit a given location each year. According to Katab (1998), Al-Hawary (2001), Jang (2004), and Koc & Altinay (2007), the climate is a crucial aspect of the natural environment and a draw for visitors. Summer elements, such as fresh air, the sun, and temperature, are irresistible. On the other hand, extreme cold, rain, snow, dense clouds that obscure the sun, and high humidity offer significant barriers to winter tourism activities. Chen, Tingzhen (2010), Koenig Lewis & Bischoff (2005), and Jang (2004), Dengjun Zhang; JinghuaXie (2021), emphasize that the majority of tourism activities are highly dependent on weather conditions and natural seasonality affecting the host communities; the farther one travels from the equator, the greater the differences; the tropics significantly increase humidity and thus affect the rate of tourist arrivals. Al-Zboun (2018), addressed the issue of seasonal tourism in Jordan, identifying three distinct periods during the year during which the number of tourists varies. The first period runs from the first of November to mid-December in southern Jordan, where the climate is generally mild, particularly in the Gulf of Aqaba and the Jordan Valley; the second period runs from mid-March to the end of May in central Jordan, particularly in Amman, Jarsh, and Madba; and the third period runs from mid-March to the end of May in the north where a sizable number of tourists, especially from Arab nations, come to take advantage of leisure travel and Jordan's temperate environment.

Social and Cultural Factor of Seasonality

Meanwhile, the term social and cultural factors of seasonality in tourism describes how societal and cultural habits, events, and preferences affect patterns of traveler arrivals and activity at a certain location. When and why people decide to go to a certain place are greatly influenced by these considerations. In the same development, Lim and McAleer (2001), agree with Abd Al-Karim (2002), Jang (2004), and Koc & Al-Tinay (2007), the most important institutional factors that affect seasonal tourism are labour laws, types of vacations and school holidays. The tourist season will be reduced to a few regulations if holidays are spread out over the course of the year. As a result, it is necessary to establish forms of international tourism related to vacations, such as tourism, sports, cultural tourism, museum visits, festival attendance, and tourist attractions.

The most important factors influencing the seasonality of tourism are the times when schools and businesses are closed (Rossello and Sanso, 2017). Butler (1994), contends that the traditional extended summer vacations for students at schools continue to be the most significant single barrier to lowering the impact of seasonality, because children typically have more time off during the summer, families with school-aged children are more likely to take a significant trip during the summer than during any other season. The intensity of the seasonal peaking of tourism activities is also affected by work holidays. This is especially true ever since paid holidays were first instituted and certain industrial sectors were shut down for a few weeks during the summer months (Murphy, 1985). At present, particularly during the age of mass tourism, taking a vacation was frequently dependent on a holiday break from school, industry, or the government (Bender, Schumacher, and Stein, 2005).

According to Mathieson & Wall (1982), and Duro (2016), they concur that there are two aspects to the tourist season: the peak season and the slow season. During the busiest months, problems for both locals and tourists worsen, which raises the number of tourists, which raises traffic and tourist-area congestion, raises the price of goods and services, and puts more strain on the infrastructure. Expanding services like security guards and medical facilities are therefore necessary. The animosity of the local populace toward tourism operations is a result of these problems.

According to Timothy (1998), during periods of low tourism, some communities make use of amenities and tourist facilities, preserving their cultural character. Additionally, Kushan and Abdullah (2001) assert that in order to reverse the negative effects of increased tourist traffic on a particular area, ecological and social recovery is required. This can be done using tactics like product diversification, price cuts, the promotion of substitute goods, and the promotion of events and festivals. Shukri (2014) and Rasdi et al. (2022) conducted an analysis of the social and cultural aspects of tourism activity in the

host community, in which he discussed the social and cultural effects of tourism and the nature of the relationship between the tourist and the host community, highlighting the most significant negative social and cultural influences of tourism, such as the growing demand for services and facilities, superstructure and infrastructure. Nevertheless, seasonality and tourism have a lot of positive effects, like the more cultural exchange between host and visitor communities, the learning of new languages, the preservation of cultural assets, and the rise of the “foreign marriage”.

The cultural effects of a destination's peak season are directly related to the volume of visitors it receives at that time of year. The changing seasons have cultural consequences for both the host community and the tourist (Koenig and Bischoff, 2005). The dramatic increases in population during the summer months have negative repercussions for locals because they put a strain on regular infrastructure and services (Murphy, 1985). These repercussions include, but are not limited to congestion, crowded streets, slower traffic, lack of parking, queues for services, higher prices for services, significant increases in the cost of community services, overcrowding at attraction sites, and pressure on the infrastructure.

Political Factor of Seasonality

The impact of laws, rules, and geopolitical events on patterns of traveler arrivals and activity in a specific location is known as the political component of seasonality in tourism. Depending on the political environment at the time, political issues can either stimulate or discourage travel, which can have a big impact on the tourist sector. According to Stemmann (2010), domestic and international tourism is significantly impacted by political instability, such as wars, riots, terrorism, and coups, as these events deteriorate tourist flows in any country and negatively affect bilateral relations, resulting in the imposition of travel restrictions. Saarinen (2003); Al-Omari, Ali, Mahmoud, and Jawabreh (2015), concur that the unstable political environment contributed to the emergence of tourist seasonality in the Arab world in general. The so-called Arab Spring upheavals and wars brought about a rise in corruption, economic stagnation, deplorable living conditions, and a tightening of political, economic, and media restrictions. Jordan's tourism industry has been particularly heavily hit, which has led to seasonality in travel. One of the biggest political challenges the Jordanian tourism industry faces is the fact that it is extremely vulnerable to the conflicts, wars, the spread of crime, and the complications related to Syrian refugees, according to Osama Al-Faouri's 2016 study on security and tourism stability in Jordan. Additionally, Stemmann (2010), agreed that wars and terrorism are significant domestic and international tourism adversaries, having a detrimental effect on international tourism in general, as wars between countries

destroy tourist flows not only within the fighting states but also in neighboring countries.

Economic Factor of Seasonality

The impact of economic factors, such as income levels, employment rates, and general economic stability, on patterns of visitor arrivals and activity at a specific destination is known as the economic factor of seasonality in tourism. When and how people decide to travel, as well as the kinds of places and activities they can afford, are heavily influenced by economic concerns. As argued by previous research, the enterprise-level manifestations of seasonality's economic effects relate mostly to problems during off-peak periods, specifically the loss of revenues due to the inefficient use of resources and facilities (Sutcliffe and Sinclair, 1980; Manning and Powers, 1984; Williams and Shaw, 1991). Baron (1975), suggested that seasonality creates "seasonal loss" in terms of cost. The loss of profit owing to inefficient use of resources is correlated with economic concerns.

Murphy (1985), asserts that businesses and communities require sufficient earnings from a few busy summer weeks to ensure their success throughout the year. Due to seasonal revenue fluctuations, business owners may be forced to seek credit or alternative sources of income. Changes in tourist demand may result in a lack of hotel rooms during the peak season, while tourism resources are always at danger of underutilization during the shoulder season. Particularly affected by seasonality are physical facilities with a higher proportion of fixed costs than other service providers (Chung, 2009). The management dilemma is whether to close during the off-season or remain open in order to generate adequate cash to cover fixed costs. Another significant issue with seasonality is low annual capital returns (Cooper et al., 2005). Due to low returns on capital, it is difficult to attract investors and lenders.

According to Dengjun Zhang and Jinghua Xie (2021), the costs of tourist services fluctuate with the seasons, which affects the seasonal concentration of tourism activities by increasing or decreasing, respectively. In other words, the economic effects are linked to issues with over- or underutilization of tourism resources. They operate at or close to capacity during the peak season because to higher demand, however the rest of the season they are paused or run at reduced power. An increase in economic pressure is also connected with an increase in social endurance capacity, which results in a rise in issues in the local community as a result. Because of the increase in visitors during the busiest tourist season, there is more strain on the infrastructure and superstructure, which results in increased prices for everyone, both the guests and the host.

According to Dengjun Zhang; JinghuaXie (2021), tourism seasonality is a detrimental phenomenon, not just economically, as it causes overuse and increasing strain on tourist sites during peak tourism seasons, as well as a seasonal decrease. On the other hand, when the economic value of tourism is zero, it forces investors in the tourism sector to make significant efforts to compensate for anticipated financial losses by raising prices, which results in an increase in the cost of living in tourist areas, which affects the length of the tourist's stay and rate of material expenditure. Thus, the seasonality of tourism affects tourism demand. Because of the cyclical nature of the tourism industry, both the quality and quantity of workers are directly impacted by changes in demand (during the recession season). However, while service prices rise during the peak time, workers' pay rise during the busiest travel season and fall during the slowest, leading to so-called seasonal unemployment. Investment in tourism in the area is hampered by these factors. Event tourism, in particular MICE tourism, has been acknowledge to generate tourism demand to offset the effect of seasonality, which is explained below.

MICE Tourism

Meetings (M), Incentive Trips (I), Conferences (C), and Exhibitions (E) are the components that make up the term MICE (Hiller, 1995; Rogerson, 2005), which is fundamental to generate tourism demand and to overcome seasonality. MICE is a novel form of tourism that has emerged as a result of the rise in the number of conventions and exhibitions that have been held in conjunction with the expansion of the tourism business. According to Leong (2007), MICE tourism is a specific subset of the tourism business that focuses on a certain issue, subject matter, or agenda. Butler (2014) says that to attract a large number of visitors to a tourist place and prolong their stay, there must be attractions and facilities that will be provided, in turn such as providing events and facilities. MICE tourism involves hosting events such as conferences, meetings, and exhibitions, which can help attract tourists during the low season and increase the length of stay and spending of visitors. This type of tourism can also have positive spill over effects on other sectors, such as transportation, accommodation, and food and beverage (Tola & Gebremedihen, 2020). According to Al-Ananzeh *et al.* (2018), Jordan is a potential destination for MICE due to several factors, including its location in the Middle East between three continents: Africa, Asia, and Europe; its safety; and the fact that it offers a wide range of services and features in addition to its natural environment and beautiful scenery, as well as diverse tourist sites. The Jordanian capital city of Amman is a popular destination for MICE tourism.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A quantitative research method was applied in this study by distributing a survey to 331 respondents from domestic and international tourists who visited Amman, stayed in a hotel at least one night, and participated in MICE activities. Using a non-probability sampling technique, data was analysed using Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 24.0 and Smart PLS software. The research hypotheses of the study are as follows:

Research Hypotheses

- H1: There is a significant effect of natural seasonality on MICE tourism in Jordan.
 H2: There is a significant effect of social seasonality on MICE tourism in Jordan.
 H3: There is a significant effect of cultural seasonality on MICE tourism in Jordan.
 H4: There is a significant effect of political seasonality on MICE tourism in Jordan.
 H5: There is a significant effect of economic seasonality on MICE tourism in Jordan.

RESULT

The sample of the study consisted of 331 respondents, as depicted in Table 1 below. Regarding gender, 61% of respondents were male and the remaining were female. The most frequent age group was between 31-40 years (29.3%), followed by 21-30 years (28.7%). Meanwhile, married respondents constituted over half of the total respondents, and 42.3% of them were Jordanians.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Variable	Items	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	202	61.0
	Female	129	39.0
Age	Less than 20	33	10.0
	From 21 - 30	95	28.7
	From 31 - 40	97	29.3
	From 41 - 50	57	17.2
	From 51 - 60	34	10.3
	More than 60	15	4.5
Marital Status	Single	154	46.5
	Married	168	50.8
	Other	9	2.7
Nationality	Jordanian	140	42.3
	Other Countries	191	57.7

Hypothesis Testing Result of Variables

The relations of the hypotheses were examined using Structural Equation Modelling. As discussed in the literature, the different factors of seasonality are important predictors of MICE tourism in general. However, the findings in Table 2 show that only hypotheses H4 and H5 are supported. The p values of the effect of individual context and its dimension are less than 0.05.

Table 2: Results of Hypotheses

		Beta	T- Statistics	P Values
H1	Natural Seasonality> MICE Tourism	0.066	0.981	0.327
H2	Social Seasonality> MICE Tourism	0.104	1.397	0.163
H3	Cultural Seasonality> MICE Tourism	0.037	0.536	0.592
H4	Political Seasonality> MICE Tourism	0.181	2.329	0.020**
H5	Economic Seasonality> MICE Tourism	0.421	6.384	0.000***

Note: * Significant at level ≤ 0.05 . ** Significant at level ≤ 0.01

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The result based on hypothesis 1 shows the existence of an insignificant effect between natural seasonality and MICE tourism in Jordan. Indeed, the coefficient associated with the variable is statistically insignificant. Thus, the hypothesis that there is a significant effect between natural seasonality and MICE tourism in Jordan is not supported. The results of this study were consistent with Lee *et al.* (2008) and Baron (1975), in which they found that the business travelers are typically unaffected by the weather in their travels. They claim that the most important feature of MICE tourism, is the fact that it is not affected by climate circumstances, and this type of tourism is frequented by highly motivated business oriented travelers with longer stays in highly rated hotels. And in more detail, Ibrahim Bazazo (2020) argued Jordan has four distinct climates, each with its unique characteristics. The weather in Jordan is hot and dry during the summer, and the winters are mildly rainy. The weather in Jordan is an essential factor in attracting tourists. As a result, the country of Jordan is almost completely free of storms and heavy rain. Due to the favorable weather, tourist events, festivals, and celebrations can be held at any time of the year.

Meanwhile, the results based on hypotheses 2 and 3 present the existence of an insignificant effect between social and cultural seasonality and MICE tourism in Jordan. Indeed, the coefficient associated with the variable is statistically insignificant. Thus, the hypothesis that there is a significant effect

between social and cultural seasonality and MICE tourism in Jordan is not supported.

The finding agrees with Al-Ananzeah, (2012) who found that the social seasonality depends on school and university holidays, so there is no impact on MICE tourism, because MICE travellers are business people. On the other hand, Getz and Nilsson (2004) indicated the most important institutional factors that contribute to seasonality are the holiday season, summer breaks from schools, universities, and workplaces. Similarly, BarOn, (1975), asserted that institutional seasonality is also a reflection of the social norms and practices of a society. As a result, Hinch, Hickey & Jackson, (2001), agreed it is contingent on social factors and legislated holidays. Institutional seasonality is more complicated than natural seasonality because it is based on human behaviour and the choices that consumers make.

Al-Zboun (2018) used the Gini Coefficient to calculate the seasonality in Jordan. Due to Jordan's abundance of cultural tourism destinations that draw a range of tourists, the results indicate that Jordan is distinguished by having a low level of seasonality in its tourism industry. According to Al-Ananzeh, (2012), social and cultural factors were rated as the least significant factors on MICE tourism in Jordan.

In relation to hypothesis 4, the study indicates the existence of a significant effect between political seasonality and MICE tourism in Jordan. Indeed, the coefficient associated with the variable is statistically significant. Thus, the hypothesis that there is a significant effect between political seasonality and MICE tourism is supported. The results provide evidence of a significant relationship between political seasonality and MICE tourism in Jordan.

The result of this study was consistent with Al-Ananzeh, (2012) that argued the political atmosphere is stable in Jordan, and that Jordan is a safe destination to visit, besides the fact that Jordanians are highly welcoming to visitors. Jordan has managed to stay stable (politically), and therefore considered as a safe place for MICE tourism. Similarly, Schneider and Sonmez (1999) have contended that Jordan is perceived positively internationally as a safe, politically stable, with very welcoming citizens. Moreover, Rosenberg & Choufany's (2009), in their study regarding the Middle East, in which they discuss the situation in this part of the world, which is often referred to as a problematic and conflicted region; nevertheless, Jordan has kept its reputation as a unchanging, unproblematic (stable) place.

Finally, hypothesis 5 reveals the existence of a significant effect between economic seasonality and MICE tourism. Indeed, the coefficient associated with the variable is statistically significant. Thus, the hypothesis that there is a significant effect between economic seasonality and MICE tourism in Jordan is supported.

The results of this study were consistent with Connell, Page & Meyer (2015); Sainaghiet *al.*, (2019), who developed and identified the strategies regarding events and festivals, for their important role they play in attracting tourists, subsequently, having a vital economic impact on the hosting communities. Events, thus, are considered as one of the strategies that eliminate seasonality. Furthermore, Lau, Milne & Johnston, (2005); Rogerson, (2005), argued tourism industry can be beneficial internationally as well as locally. As for international level, MICE increases job demand in the facilities associated with MICE in hotels, convention centres. Moreover, MICE tourism increases foreign currency exchange, creates new investments, encourages networking and contact between business affiliated personnel, promote and facilitate access to new technologies, besides, people who participate in MICE are considered to be high-spending tourists. Locally, MICE tourism is a booster to small businesses, which encourage people within the hosting communities into initiating small business that caters for the needs of visitors, especially in the times outside the peak season.

Oppermann (1996) asserts that the MICE sector is one of the most thriving sectors of overall tourism, is least sensitive to price changes, and aids in reducing "peak-trough" seasonal tendencies. Therefore, MICE tourism has the potential to significantly contribute to shoulder and off-season demand. MICE has significant effects on the economy, according to Kim & Chon (2008). Firstly, MICE tourism participants and attendees come in large numbers of attendees; some conferences are attended by up to 500 participants. Secondly, people who attend MICE event stay longer in the hosting place in comparison to other types of tourism; most attendees of MICE event arrive at their destination few days before the launch of the event, and many others stay few days after the event is over to travel and explore the hosting country.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Jordan has long been recognized as a prominent tourist destination, with a rich historical and cultural heritage that attracts visitors from around the world. The country has been keenly aware of the immense significance of tourism and has shown a growing interest in further developing its tourism industry in recent years by recognizing the potential economic and social benefits of tourism. Jordan has made efforts to attract more tourists and capitalize on the opportunities presented by the sector. This includes investment in tourism infrastructure, promotion of unique experiences, and fostering partnerships with international organizations to host conferences and exhibitions. The recognition of the importance of MICE tourism indicates a strategic approach to diversifying the tourism product offering and tapping into a lucrative market segment. The advancements in transportation and communication technologies have made it easier for Jordan to attract

business travelers, conference participants, and event attendees, leading to the growth and expansion of the MICE sector.

Policymakers and other stakeholders in the Jordanian tourism sector can take into considerations the findings of this research to make informed decisions that can positively impact the lives of individuals and companies operating in the industry. By understanding the identified factors and their influence on Jordan's tourism, there is a better chance of addressing the issue of tourism seasonality, thereby creating new jobs, fostering stability in employment, and promoting the growth of prosperous businesses. Research findings can lead to a more balanced distribution of tourists throughout the year, reducing the reliance on peak seasons and mitigating the associated challenges such as overcrowding and uneven revenue streams. This, in turn, can create a more sustainable tourism industry with improved job opportunities for locals and a stronger overall economy. Besides, tourism industry if sustainably managed, it would contribute significantly to any country's economy in terms of fiscal output (see Azinuddin et al., 2022a; 2022b; 2022c; Shehab et al., 2023).

The results of the study exhibited a significant and positive effect between two aspects of tourism seasonality (political and economic) and MICE tourism. However, there is no statistically significant effect between three aspects of tourism seasonality (natural, cultural, and social) and MICE tourism. According to the findings of this study, both official bodies and authorities (the government) and the private sector need to develop creative tactics and strategies to draw tourists, particularly MICE tourism because of its effect on boosting the number of tourists visiting the area. Moreover, the results of this research ought to motivate other scholars interested in this topic to do more research in order to extend the knowledge and cover more topics that were not discussed.

The recommendations derived from this research are targeted towards researchers and the Jordanian government with the aim of enhancing tourism and achieving the desired level set by the government. Understanding the patterns of tourism seasonality in various tourist destinations can significantly contribute to the growth of tourism. Therefore, it is advisable for the Jordanian government to promote longer stays and visits by tourists, which can be accomplished through the activation of MICE tourism and the expansion of diverse travel options and tourism programs. Considering the significant importance of tourism, it is recommended that similar studies be conducted in other regions of Jordan.

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