



SUCCESS STORY

Aqaba Tourism Career Fair Shatters Misconceptions

First Tourism Career Fair opens dialogue with students, families, and tourism companies.



Tourism Career Fair student participants gathered before attending workshops.



Female students and facilitator in a discussion forum on "Women in Tourism."

Ibtisam's family is from Aqaba, but they have never considered tourism as a career. Despite the fact that the tourism sector has grown dramatically in Aqaba, as has demand for hospitality professionals and entrepreneurs, the citizens of Aqaba are not well-represented in the tourism labor force. Tourism companies here have recruited many foreigners and the Aqaba community has been hesitant to pursue careers in this critical economic growth driver due to cultural beliefs and lack of information.

Ibtisam and her parents participated in the November 2008 Aqaba Tourism Career Fair, an initiative of USAID's Aqaba Community and Economic Development (ACED) Program, in partnership with the Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority and INJAZ. The fair set out to promote interaction between the tourism private sector and the local community in order to correct mutual misconceptions and increase interest in tourism careers for Aqaba's youth.

Over 700 participants attended the fair's diverse range of activities over the course of one month, starting with "Inspirational Seminars" where pioneers in the local tourism sector candidly described their career experiences and answered questions for high school and college students. The second week offered students soft-skill capacity-building workshops. In the third week, students and their parents had the rare opportunity to participate in site visits of major tourism developments to observe operations firsthand. Afterwards, discussions were held with students, their parents, and tourism sector representatives. The fair concluded with a Tourism Career Day, in which attendees interacted with 47 companies to learn more about specific tourism careers and participated in discussion forums on topics including women in tourism and tourism sector salaries.

The inclusion of parents ensured that the Aqaba community had the opportunity to learn about the realities of working in the tourism sector. Ibtisam's father said, "we are very happy because this is the first time we attended such an activity with our children. We are surrounded by tourism in Aqaba, but we never knew anything about the opportunities it creates." Ibtisam agreed, "now, not only do I know more about tourism, but I feel comfortable talking about a career in the sector."