Beyond the Season: Sports Tourism Empowering Communities in Saïdia Mediterrania

Saïdia Mediterrania, Morocco
Société de développement Saïdia
Private Destinations (operating with multiple businesses)
Culture & Heritage

Summary of Good Practice Story

Setting the Scene: Destination & context

Saïdia Mediterrania is a coastal destination in the Oriental region of Morocco, known for its Mediterranean beaches, marina, and sports infrastructure. While tourism is a key economic driver for nearby communities such as Saïdia, Berkane and Oujda, the destination has long faced extreme seasonality. For years, activity was concentrated within a short two-month summer period, leaving hotels, shops and facilities closed for nearly ten months. This situation limited economic stability, reduced access to steady jobs, and weakened the connection between tourism and local communities. At the same time, the region benefits from a young population, a favorable climate for outdoor sports year-round, and strong local interest in sports. Despite this, access to quality infrastructure remained limited, especially for youth from rural areas. In this context, Saïdia Mediterrania began to rethink tourism, using sports to extend activity beyond summer while opening access to local communities. Events and initiatives such as golf academies transformed tourism into a driver of inclusion, opportunity and local development.

The Turning Point: Why change was needed
Saïdia Mediterrania faced a critical challenge: tourism activity was concentrated within a short two-month summer period, leaving the destination almost inactive for nearly ten months each year. During this long off-season, hotels, shops and facilities were closed, reducing economic activity and limiting stable employment for local communities. The destination became quiet and disconnected from its own infrastructure outside peak season. At the same time, many young people from Saïdia and nearby rural areas had limited access to quality sports facilities and opportunities for personal development, despite a strong local interest in sports. The turning point came with the realization that this model was no longer sustainable. Tourism could not remain a short seasonal activity benefiting only visitors. There was a need to reactivate the destination, reduce long closures, and create year-round opportunities for both residents and businesses. This led Saïdia Mediterrania to rethink sports not only as leisure or events, but as a

strategic tool to gradually reopen the destination, support the local economy, and reconnect communities with tourism infrastructure.

The Vision: What you set out to do
The vision of Saïdia Mediterrania was to transform tourism from a short seasonal activity into a year-round driver of local development. Facing long periods of closure, the objective was to reactivate the destination by using sports infrastructure to generate off-season activity, support local businesses, and restore more stable employment. Led by the Saïdia Development Company, the approach combined inclusion and performance through four initiatives: a golf academy (100 participants), a golf “sport-étude” program (80), golf initiation for private schools (60), and a football academy (90+ youth), alongside structured training programs in both disciplines. In parallel, diverse national and international events were developed, including Oriental Legends (golf tournament, ~200 participants), Raid Med (multisport event, ~150 participants), the international Triathlon (~1000 pr), as well as rugby, beach soccer and beach tennis competitions. These events attracted athletes, teams and visitors during off-season periods, while also supporting social causes such as the Noor Association and Ruban Rose. Supported by sports federations, the Ministry of Sport and local partners, this model aimed to reduce the 10-month inactivity and reposition Saïdia Mediterrania as a year-round destination.

The Journey: How change happened
The transformation of Saïdia Mediterrania became visible when the destination started coming back to life outside summer. Off-season events such as Raid Med and Oriental Legends brought new energy, with athletes, teams, medical staff, media and supporters gathering in a place that used to be inactive for most of the year. A key moment came

when two hotels reopened to host these events. During competitions, they quickly reached full occupancy, welcoming not only participants but an entire ecosystem of professionals and visitors. Medina mall, Restaurants, transport services and local businesses gradually resumed activity, creating more stable employment opportunities for the community. As events continued, this movement extended beyond individual competitions, contributing to a more continuous rhythm of activity across the year. At the same time, these initiatives remained rooted in strong social and environmental values. Events supported causes such as the Noor Association and breast cancer awareness, while academies and training programs enabled local youth to access sports facilities and develop new opportunities. Through this dynamic, the destination progressively reconnected its infrastructure, economy and community.

The Breakthrough: What you achieved

Saïdia Mediterrania evolved from a destination active only two months per year into a dynamic destination operating across nearly six months. Sports events became the catalyst for this shift, attracting visitors during periods when hotels and facilities were previously closed. A major breakthrough was the reopening of two hotels, reaching full occupancy during events, with around 550 rooms mobilized over 20 to 40 days of preparation and competition in low season. These hotels hosted athletes, teams, medical staff and media. Large-scale events reinforced this dynamic: the international triathlon gathers over 1,000 participants annually, while Oriental Legends (~200 participants) and Raid Med (~150) also drive off-season activity. Med Max sailing race further strengthens international visibility (30 international crews 25 boats). These events generate a full ecosystem, leading to the reopening of additional hotels and the

revival of the Medina Mall, restaurants, transport and local services, contributing to more stable employment. At the community level, inclusion programs reached significant scale with 100 children in the golf academy, 80 in sport-étude, 60 in school initiations, and over 90 in football. Today, tourism has become a driver of opportunity, inclusion and local pride

Reflections: What you learned and what others can learn

One key lesson was that tourism infrastructure delivers far greater impact when activated year-round and opened to local communities. What began as sports events to reduce a 10-month closure became a driver of economic reactivation, inclusion and local pride. A major surprise was how quickly small actions generated wider change. Off-season events led to the reopening of two hotels, which encouraged others to extend operations, progressively stabilizing employment. This showed that gradual activation can transform an entire destination. We also learned that impact is stronger when combined with social purpose. Partnerships with associations such as Noor and Ruban Rose, alongside academies and training programs, connected tourism with

education, health and community engagement. A key challenge was shifting perceptions and ensuring residents felt included. Our advice: start with existing assets, involve communities early, and use tourism as a lever for long-term economic and social resilience that others can replicate.

The Ripple Effect: Lasting impact
The initiative progressively helped position Saïdia Mediterrania as an emerging international sports destination, demonstrating that sports tourism can create benefits far beyond seasonal tourism activity. The growing success of sports events strengthened the destination's image and encouraged new collaborations, larger events and greater community participation. One of the most significant outcomes was the organization of an international women's beach soccer tournament bringing together teams from several countries, including Morocco, Spain, Portugal, France and Belgium... This event reinforced the destination's visibility on the international sports scene while promoting women participation in sports and intercultural exchange. The initiative also strengthened local pride, particularly among young people who began to see tourism infrastructure as spaces they could access, benefit from and actively participate in. Today, Saïdia Mediterrania continues to build on this momentum by developing sports, inclusion and community engagement as part of its long-term tourism vision. The experience showed that tourism can become a powerful driver of opportunity, empowerment and shared community identity for future generations.

Awards or Certifications
nothing to mention

Web Articles
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Quotes or Testimonials
"The Oriental Legends Pro-Am is much more than a golf tournament. It is a

human adventure that mobilizes positive energy in the service of education and the development of our region.” Abdelatif Benazzi Founder of Noor Association and partner of the SDS in the orgnaisation of the Oriental legends Pro-Am