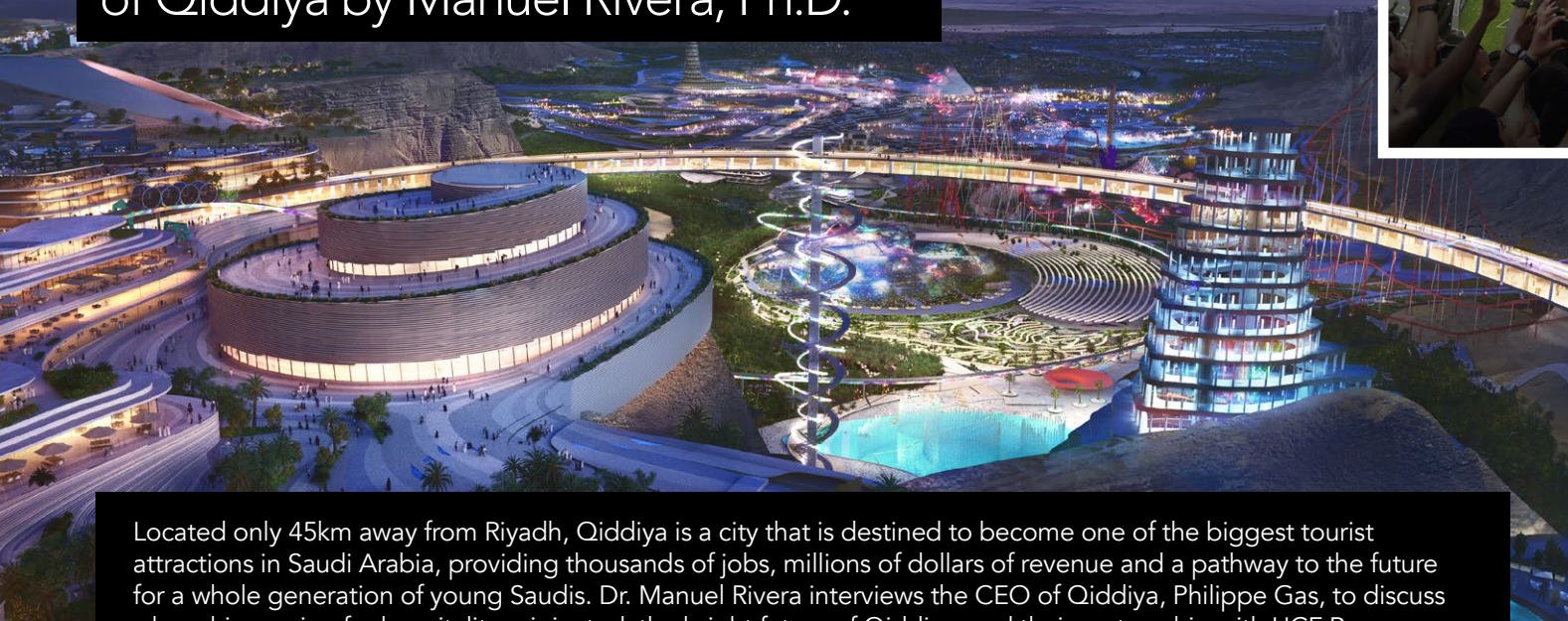


# QIDDIYA THE CAPITAL OF ENTERTAINMENT IN SAUDI ARABIA

An interview with Philippe Gas, CEO of Qiddiya by Manuel Rivera, Ph.D.



Less than 40 minutes away from Riyadh, Qiddiya will become the capital of Entertainment, Sports and the Arts with a knock-on effect on Riyadh—hopefully doubling the population by 2030.



Qiddiya will be an integrated city, combining attractions with real estate opportunities and strong community services.



***I fully connected with the brand ethos and what it stood for, which was to bring happiness to anyone who came into contact with it***

Located only 45km away from Riyadh, Qiddiya is a city that is destined to become one of the biggest tourist attractions in Saudi Arabia, providing thousands of jobs, millions of dollars of revenue and a pathway to the future for a whole generation of young Saudis. Dr. Manuel Rivera interviews the CEO of Qiddiya, Philippe Gas, to discuss where his passion for hospitality originated, the bright future of Qiddiya, and their partnership with UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management.

Philippe Gas is at the helm of Qiddiya Investment Company as Chief Executive Officer. He possesses a deep understanding of entertainment and hospitality with 30 years of experience at The Walt Disney Company where he held several key roles.

His most recent position was President & Managing Director of Walt Disney Attractions Japan & Disneyland International, where he oversaw the development of the Tokyo Disney Resort.

During his time at Disney, Philippe held other key roles including Chief Executive Officer of Euro Disney SCA, he successfully led the launch of Shanghai Disney Resort—The Walt Disney Company's first theme park in mainland China and its largest international investment

to date—and was the worldwide EVP Human Resources for the organization.

Philippe is the recipient of the Magnolia Award issued by the Shanghai Municipal government and foreign affairs bureau to foreign nationals having demonstrated an outstanding contribution to Chinese economic development, along with the Chevalier de l'Ordre National du Mérite—a French order of merit awarded by the President of the French Republic to recognize distinguished military or civil achievements.

## HOW DID YOU GET INVOLVED IN HOSPITALITY AND ENTERTAINMENT AND WHAT IS YOUR ROLE AS CEO OF THE QIDDIYA PROJECT?

I actually got into this industry because of a brand. As a child, I fell in love with it because

it intrigued me and made me dream. That brand is/was Disney. Watching all the cartoon characters and movies from a young age in France, just thinking about where Disney was geographically, seemed light-years away.

So when Disney announced plans for Euro Disney in Paris, I knew this was my destiny and calling and I grabbed the opportunity with both hands. I fully connected with the brand ethos and what it stood for, which was to bring happiness to anyone who came into contact with it. This happiness came to life by sharing moments with others that then translated to life-long memories.

A career in hospitality and entertainment followed and I spent 30 years with Disney working on some of the most amazing projects. For me it was more than just a job, it's actually a

human adventure. I enjoy bringing people into this adventure, developing and nurturing them while leveraging the excitement of the brand. One thing I found in common with all the projects I worked on was creating emotions. Disney did this effortlessly, and Qiddiya will too. So, never underestimate the brand!

In terms of my role as CEO of Qiddiya, in its most simplistic form, it is to see this unique project from its design and development stage right through to construction and build and, of course, eventually delivery.

My responsibility is to create a culture in an organization that focuses on the key areas of development of concepts, realization of these concepts and finally delivering these assets.

In parallel, sourcing talented individuals to join us and the development of this workforce to the level we expect in a city like Qiddiya. Brand, marketing and sales are all close to my heart. How to create that excitement behind the brand, how to create the demand and

that feeling of wanting to visit a destination that no one will ever want to pass on. My job is to deliver a city that people cannot find anywhere else in the world but before that, I need to create the feeling that they must go visit Qiddiya and cannot wait for the opening to happen.

## HOW IS QIDDIYA DIFFERENT OR UNIQUE COMPARED TO OTHER TOURISM GIGA PROJECTS IN SAUDI ARABIA?

Qiddiya is destined to become the capital of Entertainment, Sports and the Arts—a disruptive destination that will offer the world experiences, integrated on a scale never seen before. This is what distinguishes Qiddiya from any other place in the world. The breadth and scope of its offerings makes it a destination unique from any other.

Add to this, Qiddiya is the only Giga-project in Riyadh, which adds a layer of exclusivity to it. It is 30–40 minutes from the center; whereas, all the other Giga-projects are outside Riyadh.

Qiddiya has strong integration and alignment with the development and growth of Riyadh City. We play an active role in doubling the city's population, from 7.5 to 15–20 million residents by 2030 while contributing to making Riyadh one of the top 10 largest city economies in the world—today it stands at number 40.

The broad offering is inspired by the five cornerstones, namely Parks & Attractions, Sports & Wellness, Arts & Culture, Motion & Mobility and Nature & Environment, in addition to real estate and community services, shaped as an entirely integrated City.

## WHAT IS THE RELEVANCE OF THE QIDDIYA PROJECT FOR THE TRANSFORMATION OF SAUDI ARABIA AND ITS PEOPLE?

Qiddiya is fully aligned with Vision 2030, the Saudi leadership's transformation programme, which focuses on encouraging diversification away from oil and launching new economic sectors. This is expected to boost the economy, make it more sustainable

Thought Leader

and resilient, and enhance its image, welcoming the world to the Kingdom.

With approximately \$10 billion spent each year by Saudis abroad, mainly on tourism and entertainment, a city like Qiddiya is a great solution to help retain this outflow of spending and keep it circulating in the domestic economy. Qiddiya stands for a healthier population focused on leisure and tourism. We are a socio-economic project that will create new opportunities and professional pathways for aspiring Saudi youth and catalyze the development of up-and-coming sectors such as entertainment, tourism, hospitality and event management, creating innumerable jobs for Saudi nationals.

An abundance of opportunities to train and excel and ultimately become the Kingdom's future human resource powerhouse; and in the process, show the world the true potential people of Saudi Arabia have.

**THE PERCEPTION FROM THE OUTSIDE WORLD IS THAT THE PEOPLE IN SAUDI ARABIA ARE FRIENDLY, HOSPITABLE, WELCOMING, AND VERY STEEPED IN THEIR CULTURE. HOW DO YOU SEE YOURSELF INFLUENCING MOVING FROM A COUNTRY SELF-IMAGE OF OIL-BASED ECONOMY TOWARDS A MORE SERVICE-ORIENTED INDUSTRY BASED ON ENTERTAINMENT AND LEISURE?**  
Hospitality, generosity and a warm welcome are innate qualities in Saudis, and Qiddiya will offer a chance to turn these qualities into specialized skills and welcome the world with them.

Through our various training and education programs, we aim to scout, train and develop the youth to become skilled



Through Qiddiya's partnership with Rosen College, they are able to innovate and provide extensive training for all students involved in the project.



**Qiddiya stands for a healthier population focused on leisure and tourism.**

In the Kingdom, access to courses in these specific fields has been limited. Through our partnership with the Rosen College, we will ensure Saudi students have the best opportunity to learn extensively about these sectors and develop the necessary skills to become the country's future leaders.

We appreciate the Rosen College/UCF's support and strong commitment to our scholarship program and the level of individual attention that is given to each and every single student.

We are certain that the high-caliber educational programs at the university will enable our students to become experts in the exciting fields of hospitality, tourism and entertainment.

**WHAT ROLE DOES RESEARCH PLAY AS A PILLAR OF INNOVATION IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF NEW TOURISM OPPORTUNITIES AND ENTERTAINMENT PROJECTS?**  
Qiddiya is a new and unique destination concept which means we don't have a reference point—we have to set a benchmark for ourselves.  
  
There will be many unknown and unforeseen challenges that will need to be identified, assessed and addressed throughout our

professionals in the fields of entertainment, tourism and hospitality.  
  
We are also exploring the establishment of a dedicated training and education Academy, enabling our staff to develop and enhance the required skills, competencies, and attitudes to excel in this business using hands-on vocational methods.  
  
The positive response our training and educational programs have received so far shows the ambition and drive Saudi youth have toward these exciting fields. The challenge now is to continue to highlight how promising these fields are to the older generation, that may have grown accustomed to more conventional jobs. It will be part of our role to show the

options and opportunities that exist in these new sectors and try and attract more Saudis to invest in an exciting career and gather skills and experience that they can use anywhere in the world.  
  
**WHAT ARE THE LEADERSHIP QUALITIES THAT WILL HELP YOU AND OTHERS ACHIEVE THE AMBITIOUS ASPIRATIONS OF QIDDIYA WHILE AT THE SAME TIME INSPIRING A NEW GENERATION?**  
I strongly believe in a lateral leadership style. Qiddiya is a place of inspiration, discovery and engagement, and we want these values to resonate with everyone from our future guests to our staff.

We constantly look for ways to inspire our staff to think outside the box, be creative, and explore unconventional ideas. We want them to become the best versions of themselves, specifically in a professional capacity, and subsequently, offer the best that they can to our guests.  
  
At Qiddiya, we are determined to provide a work environment that is both comfortable and conducive as we constantly seek to promote a

culture of open communication, transparency and trust. We will ensure our employees always feel connected, heard and motivated. After all, a more engaged workforce will lead us to our inevitable success.  
  
**HOW DO YOU SEE THE ROLE OF HOSPITALITY AND ENTERTAINMENT EDUCATION IN TRANSFORMING A NEW GENERATION OF SAUDIS THAT WILL JOIN QIDDIYA? HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR COLLABORATION WITH THE ROSEN COLLEGE?**  
These sectors are still growing and developing, which means this is the perfect time for us to train and develop students; so once these sectors are established and operational, a fully equipped and skilled workforce will be ready to run the show.  
  
We need a small army of young Saudis to take up promising roles in these new sectors and I am talking about tens of thousands of people, so it's not a challenge to be taken lightly. Having said this, Qiddiya is a national project and there is huge pride and expectation for the next generation to play their role in leading these new sectors in just a few years' time.



Philippe Gas  
Chief Executive Officer  
Qiddiya Investment Company  
W: <https://qiddiya.com/>

project's life cycle. Our wide array of assets and offerings have never been presented in the way they will be so we will have to pre-empt risks, be flexible and be innovative.  
  
Effective and regular market research plays a key role in identifying what our future guests expect to see at Qiddiya. It will provide us with more clarity and a deep understanding of their needs and desires, and to ensure we meet them, we will have to innovate every step of the way.  
  
Our in-house research and intelligence team is growing day by day at Qiddiya and the information they put forward is used throughout the organization.  
  
We have the opportunity to be a laboratory for hospitality and tourism development in Saudi Arabia. Through our wide range of unparalleled offerings, Qiddiya will be an example for others to follow—a benchmark and reference point in these sectors, locally and regionally.



Interview conducted by  
**Dr. Manuel Rivera**, Assistant Dean; Associate Professor, Rosen College of Hospitality Management; Editor in Chief *International Journal of Hospitality Management*