

Introduction

Ecotourism, a form of ethical travel to natural sites that supports environmental conservation and local well-being, is gaining popularity globally (International Ecotourism Society, 2019). Oman, with its diverse landscapes, is identified as a potential ecotourism destination due to its natural and cultural attractions (Henderson, 2014). However, to determine the feasibility of ecotourism in Oman, it's crucial to assess sustainability indicators across economic, socio-cultural, and environmental dimensions (Haddle, 2015).

Objectives

- To determine the popular ecotourism destinations in Oman.
- To analyze the perceptions and attitudes of domestic tourists toward responsible ecotourism in the country.
- To appraise the potential impacts of tourism on the country's nature destinations in terms of economic, sociocultural, and environmental facets.
- To formulate recommendations to promote responsible ecotourism in Oman.

Methodology

Study Design:

- Mixed-methods approach
- Descriptive design for quantitative analysis
- Narrative analysis for qualitative data
- Participants:
- 50 domestic tourists (survey)
- 6 participants from 3 ecotourism sites (interviews)
- Data Collection:
- Survey questionnaire (high Cronbach's alpha reliability)
- Semi-structured interviews
- Questionnaire Structure:
- Demographic information
- Assessment of tourism impacts (Likert scale and open-ended questions)
- Measurement of attitudes towards ecotourism expansion

Findings

Ecotourism Destinations in Oman: Protection Concerns

- Irresponsible tourist behavior persists despite warning signs.
- Insufficient number of warning signs, most unrelated to environmental protection.
- Examples: pollution in Wadi Bani Khalid, disturbing turtles in Ras Al Hadd.
- Tourists' lack of awareness and disregard for the environment remain issues.
- Sociocultural impact: abandonment of traditional farming in Wakan Village.

Popular Eco-tourism

Results

Ecotourism Destination	Frequency	Rank
Ras Al Hadd	48	1
Wakan Village	46	2
Wadi Bani Khalid	45	3



Perceptions and Attitudes of Domestic Tourists toward Ecotourism in Oman

Ecotourism Destination	Mean	Verbal Interpretation	SD
Ras Al Hadd	4.53	Extremely Favourable	0.4211
Wakan Village	4.51	Extremely Favourable	0.3966
Wadi Bani Khalid	4.52	Extremely Favourable	0.5111
Overall Perception and Attitude	4.52	Extremely Favourable	0.4429



Impacts of ecotourism destinations

Ecotourism Factors	Mean	Verbal Interpretations	SD
Economic	4.55	Very High	0.5441
Socio Cultural	4.67	Very High	0.4312
Environmental	3.98	High	0.4411
Overall Impact	4.4	High	0.4721



Factors influencing ecotourism destination choice:

- Accessibility and convenience: Proximity to the airport, ease of transportation, and availability of amenities are key considerations.
- Safety and services: Tourists prioritize feeling safe and secure, and value guided tours, facilities, and infrastructure.
- Cultural significance and educational opportunities: Learning about local culture, traditions, and the natural environment are important factors. Exciting activities and unique experiences are also valued.



Attitudes Towards Ecotourism Development:

- Participants expressed favorable attitudes despite acknowledging potential negative impacts.
- Economic benefits seen as outweighing negative impacts, especially during economic hardship.
- Advocate for environmental protection and conservation to ensure ecotourism for future generations.
- Believe ecotourism can provide economic opportunities while preserving heritage.
- Emphasize sustainable development, responsible practices, education, and awareness-raising.

Conclusion:

Raising awareness and prioritizing sustainable practices are crucial for preserving Oman's ecotourism destinations and realizing their economic potential. Balancing economic gains with environmental and sociocultural preservation is key for long-term success.

Recommendations:

Strengthen collaboration among stakeholders, invest in long-term sustainability, and develop comprehensive environmental regulations and monitoring. Mitigate negative sociocultural impacts, promote responsible tourism practices, and expand development to other potential ecotourism sites.