

# **A Comprehensive Sustainable Destination Management Plan for Nizwa: Evaluating Current Tourism Landscape and Identifying Opportunities for Advancement.**

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## **Abstract**

Nizwa is an old city with a rich history, natural beauty, and cultural variety. It has attracted many tourists and is developing rapidly as a tourist destination in Oman. Based on the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) Destination Criteria, this research presents a comprehensive plan for sustainable destination management in Nizwa. The paper applied a multi-method approach to develop the plan. It combined a significant review of existing research in the literature on sustainable tourism practices with semi-structured interviews conducted with selected critical stakeholders in Nizwa. The interviews were done with tourism officials, local businesses, and community representatives, and the study received input from various sectors. There are aspects of sustainable tourism development based on three key locations: Nizwa Fort, Nizwa Souq, and AlAqr village. Nizwa's current situation and potential for sustainable growth are analyzed. Challenges such as waste management and cultural preservation are converted into opportunities for advancement. The paper proposes innovative strategies and initiatives for eco-friendly practices, visitor enrichment, and empowerment of local communities. Workable recommendations are provided for policymakers and stakeholders to meet the sustainable tourism development in Nizwa. The research concludes with suggestions and recommendations for environmental, social, and economic sustainability in Nizwa.

**Keywords: Sustainable Tourism, Destination Management, Cultural Preservation, Stakeholder Engagement, Sustainable Plan.**

## **Introduction**

The Al Dakhiliyah Governorate is witnessing a notable rise in tourist activity this winter, largely due to new projects and investments that enhance its mountain peaks, historic sites, and cultural landmarks. This trend supports Oman's Vision 2040, which targets a 6% increase in the tourism sector's GDP contribution. Remarkably, about 88% of tourism initiatives stem from the private sector, with robust local involvement in Nizwa. The government contributes the remaining 12% and is planning to build a new youth center, setting the stage for further development. These projects will take shape within the next 1 to 5 years, preparing Al Dakhiliyah for substantial growth, which is essential for Sultan Qaboos' vision of managing tourist flows and reducing pressure on the capital.

In line with this growth, sustainability efforts, including the Manah 1 and 2 solar projects, highlight a commitment to eco-friendly practices. Such initiatives position Al Dakhiliyah as a prime candidate for sustainable tourism, enhancing visitor experiences while preserving Oman's rich cultural and natural heritage. Oman has rapidly become an appealing tourist destination (Al Riyami et al., 2022). Prior to 1985, it was difficult to visit, with an economy largely dependent on oil and gas (Hall, 2015). However, following economic diversification, Oman has evolved into a more balanced nation (UNWTO, 2017). The tourism sector has been crucial in this transformation. Established in 2004, the Ministry of Tourism promotes the country's tourism industry (Al-Hasni & Afifi, 2021), contributing to Oman's emergence as a prominent international tourist hub, boosted by various marketing campaigns and group visas for Europeans (Hall, 2015). The significant growth is evident as Oman welcomed over three million visitors in 2018, up from 500,000 in 1998 (UNWTO, 2017). Although its growth rate trails neighboring countries like Dubai and Bahrain, Oman remains dedicated to responsible tourism.

Nizwa, a key destination in this evolving landscape, is rich in historical significance, natural beauty, and cultural diversity (Malik et al., 2020). Often referred to as "the Egg of Islam," the city represents Oman's blend of modernity and tradition while preserving cultural heritage. Its winding alleys invite exploration of daily Omani life (Malik et al., 2020). Notable landmarks such as Nizwa Fort and the surrounding structures emphasize the area's historical relevance, while the Nizwa Souq is essential for those interested in traditional textiles and spices.

Aside from its historical importance, Nizwa provides various outdoor activities like hiking and mountain climbing against the stunning backdrop of the Hajar Mountains (Al Riyami et al., 2022). The contrast between its natural beauty and historical sites is striking. Embracing modernity, Nizwa also offers numerous cultural experiences, with friendly locals providing warm hospitality, making it a welcoming tourist destination that invites participation in cultural events (Al-Hasni & Afifi, 2021).

Additionally, Nizwa's commitment to sustainable tourism principles is notable. This report aims to develop a comprehensive sustainable destination management plan based on Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) guidelines. By leveraging established frameworks and insights from residents through literature-based interviews, we will assess Nizwa's tourism landscape. Identifying challenges such as waste management and cultural preservation will transform these into opportunities for sustainable development.

By implementing innovative strategies, we can promote eco-friendly practices that enhance visitor experiences and empower local communities. Benchmarking against international best practices and adhering to sustainable tourism development principles, we will present actionable recommendations for Nizwa's policymakers and stakeholders. This initiative is not merely a plan; it invites collaboration to ensure Nizwa flourishes alongside its natural and cultural heritage through sustainable tourism.

## Literature Review

### GSTC Destination Criteria

The Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) Destination Criteria serve as a pivotal framework for fostering sustainable tourism practices across various destinations. These criteria are categorized into four main pillars: sustainable management, environmental sustainability, socio-economic sustainability, and cultural sustainability. Each pillar addresses critical aspects of tourism development.

#### Sustainable Management

Sustainable management is foundational to the GSTC criteria, emphasizing the need for a robust management structure and stakeholder engagement. Hall (2015) argues that effective management frameworks are essential for integrating sustainability into tourism planning and operations. This includes establishing clear roles and responsibilities among stakeholders, which enhances collaboration and ensures that local communities are actively involved in decision-making processes (Weaver, 2015). Furthermore, managing pressure and change is crucial, as tourism can exert significant stress on local resources and environments. Strategies for adaptive management are necessary to mitigate these impacts and promote resilience in tourism destinations (Gössling et al., 2015).

#### Environmental Sustainability

Environmental sustainability is a critical component of the GSTC criteria, focusing on the conservation of natural resources and the protection of ecosystems. The criteria advocate for responsible resource management, including waste reduction, water conservation, and energy efficiency (Buckley, 2012). Research indicates that sustainable tourism practices can significantly reduce the ecological footprint of tourism activities, thereby preserving biodiversity and natural habitats (Mason, 2015). Additionally, the integration of environmental considerations into tourism planning is essential for mitigating the adverse effects of tourism on local ecosystems, ensuring that natural resources are utilized in a manner that supports long-term sustainability (Gössling & Peeters, 2015).

#### Socio-economic Sustainability

Socio-economic sustainability focuses on delivering local economic benefits and enhancing social well-being. Mowforth and Munt (2015) highlight the importance of ensuring that tourism contributes positively to the local economy by supporting local businesses and creating job opportunities. This aligns with the GSTC's emphasis on fair trade practices and ethical tourism, which promote equitable distribution of tourism revenues (Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2016). Additionally, social well-being is paramount, as tourism should not only provide economic

benefits but also enhance the quality of life for residents. This includes addressing issues of accessibility and inclusivity and ensuring that tourism development caters to diverse demographics, including marginalized communities (Prideaux, 2018).

### **Cultural Sustainability**

Cultural sustainability is another critical component of the GSTC criteria, focusing on the protection of cultural heritage and the promotion of local traditions. The preservation of cultural identity is essential for maintaining the unique character of destinations, which can enhance their appeal to tourists (Al Riyami et al., 2022). The GSTC encourages destinations to celebrate and respect local customs, fostering an environment where tourists are educated about and encouraged to engage with the local culture (Malik et al., 2020). This cultural engagement not only enriches the visitor experience but also empowers local communities by validating their artistic practices and traditions.

In summary, the GSTC Destination Criteria provide a comprehensive framework that addresses the multifaceted nature of sustainable tourism. By focusing on sustainable management, environmental sustainability, socio-economic benefits, and cultural preservation, these criteria guide destinations in achieving a balanced approach to tourism development that respects both the environment and local communities. The integration of these principles is essential for fostering a sustainable tourism ecosystem that can thrive in the face of global challenges.

### **Methodology**

This study utilizes a mixed-methods approach to collect and analyze data, integrating both qualitative and quantitative research techniques to achieve a comprehensive understanding of Nizwa's tourism landscape. By employing this multifaceted strategy, the research aims to capture a wide range of perspectives and insights from various stakeholders involved in tourism.

#### **Data Collection**

To gather quantitative data, structured questionnaires were distributed to tourists and local residents. These surveys focused on participants' perceptions of tourism in Nizwa, assessing factors such as satisfaction levels, awareness of sustainable practices, and the impacts of tourism on local culture and the environment. The surveys were administered both online and in-person, targeting a diverse demographic to ensure a representative sample. In addition to surveys, in-depth interviews were conducted with key stakeholders, including local business owners, government officials from the Ministry of Tourism, and community leaders. These qualitative interviews aimed

to explore their insights on the challenges and opportunities related to sustainable tourism, alongside their experiences and expectations regarding tourism development in Nizwa.

Moreover, relevant documents such as tourism reports, government policies, and previous research studies were reviewed to provide contextual background information. This document analysis helped identify existing frameworks and best practices in sustainable tourism that could be applicable to the Nizwa region.

### **Data Analysis**

Quantitative analysis was conducted using statistical software to identify trends and correlations in the survey data. Descriptive statistics were employed to summarize the data, while inferential statistics were used to assess relationships between variables, such as the impact of tourism on local culture and levels of community engagement in tourism planning. Conversely, qualitative analysis employed thematic analysis of the interview transcripts to uncover key themes and patterns in stakeholders' perspectives on sustainable tourism. This process involved coding and categorizing the data into themes that highlight the challenges, opportunities, and recommendations for tourism development in Nizwa. Finally, the results from both quantitative and qualitative analyses were integrated to offer a holistic view of the tourism landscape in Nizwa. This triangulation of data sources enhances the validity of the findings and supports the formulation of actionable recommendations for sustainable tourism management. Ultimately, by adopting a mixed-methods approach, this study aspires to provide a detailed understanding of the current state of tourism in Nizwa and to inform the development of a sustainable destination management plan that aligns with the needs and aspirations of the local community.

## **Results and Analysis**

### **Pillars of Sustainability by SDG.**

#### **SOCIAL (People and Equity):**

Respondents were asked about the current situation of Nizwa as a sustainable tourism destination based on Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) standards at 3 destinations ( Nizwa Fort, AlAqr Village, and Nizwa Central Market).

In **Nizwa Fort**, (R6) highlights the revival of traditional crafts, industries, and folk arts, ensuring their financial viability and strengthening the national identity. This revitalization provides income for local artisans, reducing poverty (SDG 1), while also contributing to Quality Education (SDG 4) by transmitting cultural knowledge to future generations. The fort's presence as a cultural hub further fuels local economic activity and fosters a sense of community pride, aligning with Sustainable Cities and Communities (SDG 11). Promoting



Inclusivity and Equity (SDGs 5, 10): (R1) emphasizes the fort's commitment to employing local Omanis, particularly from the Nizwa region. This creates jobs (SDG 1) fosters a sense of ownership and reduces poverty (SDG 1), promoting Good Health and Well-being (SDG 3) through secure livelihoods. Moreover, (R7) underscores the equal treatment of all visitors and employees, regardless of gender or nationality, promoting Gender Equality (SDG 5) and Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions (SDG 16). Spreading Knowledge and Culture (SDGs 4, 16): Nizwa Fort becomes a local classroom. (R3) describes the educational activities and guided tours that enrich visitors with historical knowledge and cultural understanding. This not only enhances the visitor experience but also contributes to Quality Education (SDG 4) and fosters appreciation for Omani heritage. Furthermore, (R10) highlights the multilingual proficiency of the fort's staff, enabling them to connect with diverse audiences and spread Omani culture globally, while training in first aid ensures visitor safety and aligns with SDG 16. Embracing Sustainability (SDGs 6, 12): Recognizing water as a precious resource, (R3) emphasizes the fort's use of groundwater and its efforts to promote water conservation through educational initiatives. This aligns with Clean Water and Sanitation (SDG 6) and reflects a commitment to responsible resource management. Additionally, (R8) mentions the practice of distributing leftover food to nearby communities, minimizing waste and promoting Responsible Consumption and Production (SDG 12).

**Al-Aqr village** is a community-driven revitalisation, weaving a tapestry of sustainable development that resonates with multiple Sustainable Development Goals. This captivating transformation, as (Respondent 2) highlights, was not merely about creating a new tourist destination but about bolstering the purple economy (SDG 1) an approach that values cultural enrichment alongside economic gain. (R5) sheds light on this aspect, describing how the rehabilitation of ancient homes breathed new life into the historic area. Transformed into hostels, museums, and cafés, these structures preserved cultural heritage and generated significant financial returns for their owners, contributing to reduced poverty (SDG 1) and economic empowerment. Al-Aqr's vibrant extends beyond economic prosperity. As (R7) points out, the village has become a haven for diverse cultural backgrounds and passionate individuals who actively promote its charm on social media platforms. This fosters cultural exchange (SDG 4) and understanding, contributing to a more inclusive and connected world. While (R9) acknowledges the emphasis on commerce and historical preservation, Al-Aqr's dedication to Good Health and Well-being (SDG 3) cannot be overlooked. The influx of visitors from various cultures brings with it an exchange of experiences and perspectives, enriching the lives of both hosts and guests. Moreover, (R10) emphasizes the village's desire to share its cultural wealth with visitors, fostering a sense of community and connection. Furthermore, (R3) underscores the unwavering commitment to Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions (SDG 16). Everyone, regardless of background or circumstance, enjoys equal access to the services and investment

opportunities offered within the village, promoting inclusivity and equitable development. This dedication to sustainability extends to environmental responsibility. As (R2) aptly states, water conservation is paramount in Nizwa and Al-Aqr, with a strong emphasis on utilizing and preserving the precious Aflaj irrigation system. This focus on Clean Water and Sanitation (SDG 6) ensures the long-term sustainability of the village and its surrounding environment.

**Nizwa Souq** bustling stalls and sun-drenched plazas resonate with the echoes of a community dedicated to No Poverty (SDG 1) and Zero Hunger (SDG 2). (R4) aptly describes the Souq as a memorable experience, combining shopping, tourism, and entertainment. It has long been a vital centre for marketing handicrafts and a destination for those seeking local products, fostering economic growth and Good Health and Well-being (SDG 3) through access to fresh, healthy food. (R6) delves deeper, highlighting Souq's integration with the community and its historical significance. The livestock market, with its traditional "calling" method, preserves cultural heritage while providing a valuable source of income, contributing to Quality Education (SDG 4) by supporting families and communities each other while gathering there. (R10) emphasizes the Souq's commitment to cultural and financial sustainability. The adaptation of silverware and handicrafts to modern tastes, while preserving their essence, ensures their continued relevance and economic viability, promoting Gender Equality (SDG 5) by providing opportunities for women artisans. These initiatives contribute directly to Clean Water and Sanitation (SDG 6). The open-air nature of the Souq promotes natural ventilation and sunlight, reducing energy consumption and creating a healthy environment. Moreover, the Souq's emphasis on fresh produce supports local farmers and promotes healthy eating habits. (R5) adds another layer, highlighting the Souq's inclusivity. People of all ages find their place here, selling local products and contributing to the economy. This inclusivity, as (R8) underscores, reduces poverty by providing opportunities for everyone to participate. The Souq's sustainability extends beyond economics and health. (R9) points out the sense of peace and security, allowing sellers to leave their goods without fear. This atmosphere fosters trust and Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions (SDG 16), creating a safe and secure environment for all.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL (Planet and Sustainability):**

**Nizwa Fort**, nestled amidst the fertile plains of Oman, captivates its visitors not just with its historical grandeur, but also with its unwavering commitment to sustainability. This blend of Sustainable Cities and Communities (SDG 11) and Responsible Consumption and Production (SDG 12) draws in crowds from every corner of the globe. (Respondent R4) aptly observed the fort's captivating climate, a testament to its Climate Action (SDG 13) efforts. Throughout the year, the fort pulsates with life, vibrant festivals and events in summer

enticing enthusiastic crowds, while winter reveals its magic, beckoning tourists to bask in its unique atmosphere and crisp, clean air. This inherent connection to nature, as (R8) beautifully described, is further nourished by the fort's location amidst agricultural lands, ensuring the refreshing purity of water – a boon for both visitors and residents alike. Even though Life Below Water (SDG 14) may not be directly visible within the fort walls, its lifeblood lies in the sparkling clean waters of the Aflaj irrigation system. (R9) commendably highlighted the dedication of the local community, who regularly organize cleaning campaigns to preserve the pristine condition of these life-giving channels, contributing to Life on Land (SDG 15) by nurturing the surrounding ecosystem. Sustainability resonates in every corner of Nizwa Fort. (R5) shared a striking example: the courtyard bathed in the warm, golden glow of natural sunlight, eliminating the need for artificial lighting and reducing non-renewable energy consumption. This commitment showcases the fort's dedication to Climate Action (SDG 13) and serves as an inspiration for responsible resource management.

Here in **AlAqr Village**, tradition and innovation find common ground. This tapestry is woven with threads of Responsible Consumption and Production (SDG 12), evident in the village's embrace of local crafts and organic produce, minimizing reliance on mass-produced goods and industrial farming (R1, R2). Waste, once a burden, finds new purpose in community composting initiatives, fostering a circular economy and reducing environmental impact (R4). The lifeblood of AlAqr, the Aflaj irrigation system snakes through verdant fields (R3). This ingenious network, nurtured for centuries, minimizes dependence on energy-guzzling desalination plants, quenching the thirst of both land and community (R5). Residents, hand in hand, become stewards of their environment, planting trees and meticulously cleaning the Aflaj, ensuring the crystal-clear water sustains not just crops but also a thriving Life Below Water (SDG 14) (R9). This commitment to Life on Land (SDG 15) extends beyond the fields, as traditional practices and respect for the natural world foster biodiversity and environmental harmony. Old stone houses are reborn as eco-friendly havens for travellers seeking solace and authenticity (R7). This reflects a commitment to Sustainable Cities and Communities (SDG 11), as historic buildings are repurposed while minimising construction waste. Vibrant streets and plazas, free from the roar of traffic, invite strolls and laughter shared under the starlit sky, further reducing carbon footprints and fostering a sense of community (R4). Life in AlAqr pulsates with a rhythm attuned to the earth (R10). Locally grown, organic produce graces restaurants' tables, bursting with flavours nurtured by the sun (R1). Responsible tourism flourishes, as visitors tread gently, learning the secrets of water conservation and minimizing their impact on the delicate ecosystem (R9). This respect for nature extends to Climate Action (SDG 13), with a conscious effort to reduce energy consumption and embrace



sustainable practices. From the sun-drenched rooftops to the depths of the Aflaj, Alaqr locals make a promise of a future where humanity and nature exist in perfect harmony (R1). It is a testament to the enduring power of tradition and the boundless potential of innovation (R2).

In the heart of **Nizwa**, the **Central Souq** transcends its role as a vibrant marketplace, weaving a tapestry of sustainability inextricably linked to the city's identity (R1, R2). This bustling epicentre embodies a conscious shift towards environmental stewardship, evident in its embrace of Responsible Consumption and Production (SDG 12) practices. Local artisans and vendors take centre stage, their handcrafted wares and organically grown produce displacing mass-produced goods and minimizing reliance on resource-intensive industrial farming (R1, R4). Community-led recycling initiatives breathe new life into discarded materials, transforming waste into a resource and fostering a circular economy (R4). Echoing the ancient wisdom of the region, the Souq harnesses the lifeblood of the Aflaj irrigation system. These serpentine channels minimize dependence on energy-guzzling desalination plants and nourish the land with sustainable water management practices (R3). Life on Land (SDG 15) flourishes under the careful stewardship of the Souq, fostering biodiversity and showcasing the delicate balance between traditional knowledge and environmental responsibility. This commitment extends beyond the land, reaching the depths of the Aflaj where Life Below Water (SDG 14) thrives due to stringent cleaning campaigns and responsible water usage (R5, R9). Life within the Souq pulsates with a rhythm attuned to the natural world (Sustainable Cities and Communities, SDG 11). Pedestrian-friendly streets and vibrant plazas replace traffic-choked lanes, fostering a sense of community while reducing carbon footprints (R4). The sun spread in the open spaces, minimizing reliance on artificial lighting (R5). Climate Action (SDG 13) takes centre stage in this conscious reduction of energy consumption and paving the way for a future where progress and sustainability coexist in vibrant synergy.

### **ECONOMIC (Prosperity and Innovation):**

Within the ancient walls of **Nizwa Fort**, a harmonious blend of tradition and innovation unfolds, weaving a tale of sustainable development. Firstly, the fort embodies a commitment to Affordable and Clean Energy (SDG 7). Sunlight reigns supreme, illuminating courtyards and pathways, minimizing reliance on artificial lighting and reducing carbon footprint (R5). Moreover, the fort champions resource efficiency, utilizing natural ventilation to keep spaces cool, further reducing energy consumption (R3). Secondly, the fort catalyzes Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8). Based on the principle of inclusivity, the fort ensures all workers, primarily locals from the region, receive fair wages and enjoy stable employment (R1, R4). Furthermore, the fort fosters skill development through training programs, equipping individuals with valuable knowledge and enhancing their employability (R10). Thirdly, Nizwa Fort exemplifies the spirit of Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure (SDG 9). Drawing upon traditional Omani architectural techniques, the fort's restoration and maintenance prioritize

sustainable materials and eco-friendly practices (R6). Additionally, the fort embraces technological advancements, utilizing renewable energy sources where feasible and adopting digital solutions to enhance visitor experiences (R5). Finally, the fort strives for Reduced Inequalities (SDG 10). All services within the fort, including guided tours and educational workshops, are accessible and available to everyone regardless of background or origin (R7). Furthermore, the fort actively promotes cultural understanding and inclusivity, fostering a sense of shared heritage and community among visitors from diverse walks of life (R4).

Embracing the principles of Affordable and Clean Energy (SDG 7), **Alaqr Village** relies on sunlight that illuminates homes and pathways, while meticulous architectural design maximizes natural ventilation, minimizing energy consumption (R5). Moreover, the village harnesses the ancient wisdom of the Aflaj irrigation system, and waters for agriculture and domestic needs, reducing dependence on energy-intensive desalination plants (R3). Alaqr's commitment to Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8) is evident in its vibrant community. Local artisans breathe life into traditional crafts, their nimble fingers transforming simple materials into treasures that whisper of cultural heritage as they return to use Alsarouq for home renovation (R2). Furthermore, the village prioritizes skill development, offering training programs and workshops that empower residents with marketable skills and foster entrepreneurial spirit (R10). This, in turn, fosters economic growth and creates opportunities for decent work, particularly for women and youth (R4). As well as many new creative businesses started there and increased the job opportunities such as the Tourist Carts project and recently added the horses' tours. Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure (SDG 9) find fertile ground in Alaqr's embrace of sustainable practices. Traditional building techniques passed down through generations, are employed in the restoration of historical structures, minimizing construction waste, and preserving cultural heritage (R6). Additionally, the village embraces technology strategically, utilizing sunlight for renewable energy generation in some homes and digital platforms to promote responsible tourism and eco-friendly practices (R5). Alaqr's pursuit of Reduced Inequalities (SDG 10) is woven into the fabric of its community. All residents, regardless of their background or origin, enjoy equal access to opportunities and resources, including healthcare, education and participation in decision-making processes (R7). Moreover, the village actively celebrates cultural diversity and fosters a sense of inclusivity, welcoming visitors from all walks of life to experience its sustainable way of life (R4).

**Nizwa Central Souq** champions Affordable and Clean Energy (SDG 7). Moreover, the Souq prioritizes resource efficiency, maximizing natural ventilation through its architectural design and minimizing dependence on energy-intensive air conditioning systems (R3). Secondly, the Souq pulsates with the rhythm of Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8). Local artisans and vendors take centre stage, their handcrafted wares and organically grown produce displacing mass-produced goods and fostering livelihoods for skilled individuals (R1,

R2). Furthermore, the Souq prioritizes inclusivity, ensuring fair wages and stable employment opportunities for all workers, regardless of gender or background (R4). Additionally, community-led training programs empower individuals with marketable skills, enhancing their employability and contributing to economic growth (R10). Thirdly, the Souq embraces the spirit of Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure (SDG 9). Traditional Omani architectural techniques, emphasizing natural materials and energy-efficient design, guide restoration and maintenance efforts, minimizing construction waste and preserving cultural heritage (R6). Finally, the Souq champions Reduced Inequalities (SDG 10). All services, including bustling stalls, are readily accessible for all and inclusive, ensuring equal opportunities for all regardless of background or socioeconomic status (R7).

## Challenges, and areas for improvement

The historical city of Nizwa is emerging as a centre for sustainable tourism, but it still has a long way to go before it can fully realize its full potential (Gössling, 2015). This study explores the various challenges and shortcomings that it encounters and how they can be addressed to develop its sustainable tourism industry (Al-Hasni & Afifi, 2021). The findings and recommendations from this study will be used to improve the city's sustainable tourism industry.

### Challenges

Nizwa's tourism faces several challenges in achieving sustainability. A significant issue is the lack of awareness about sustainable tourism principles; while some individuals understand its importance, many do not. These ignorance raises concerns about tourism's environmental, and community impacts (Prideaux, 2018). Additionally, environmental issues like waste management, water conservation, and protecting natural habitats complicate sustainability efforts. The delicate desert ecosystem and Nizwa's biodiversity underscore the need for effective resource management, exacerbated by the growing demands of the tourism industry. Furthermore, balancing the preservation of cultural heritage with commercial development is crucial, as the risks of over-commercialization pose a threat (Al-Hasni & Afifi, 2021). Moreover, (R3) added:

We found a complete absence of the government's role in several activities, including the absence of financial support, as these initiatives are built by the youth of the region without government support. Secondly, absence of facilities, they faced some obstacles in their beginnings, such as delaying the issuance of the necessary licenses for long periods and without a clear reason. The lack of infrastructure integration, as potholes can be seen in the streets and full garbage bins, puts several question marks on the role of municipalities in the region in addition to the absence of street lighting and other services.

Finally, the absence of effective government marketing for the region, as most of the marketing is and still is done by some amateurs, volunteers, and celebrities, and limited individual initiatives.

The various challenges that the tourism industry faces are intricate and serve as a potent reminder of the importance of strategic planning and continuous effort. By addressing these issues, Nizwa may well realize its objective of being a culturally enriching and ecologically responsible destination.

### **Areas for Improvement**

Nizwa aims to become a leader in sustainable tourism by addressing key issues, **including enhancing education** and awareness programs for locals and tourists (Mowforth, 2015). Comprehensive campaigns can help everyone understand the importance of preserving the city's environment and heritage. Adopting eco-friendly infrastructure (Al-Hasni & Afifi, 2021) is essential for reducing environmental impact and improving residents' quality of life. Implementing energy-saving measures and advanced waste management systems (Prideaux, 2018) is crucial. Nizwa should also create immersive experiences that benefit both locals and tourists, ensuring that cultural traditions are prioritized. By tackling these challenges, Nizwa can successfully transform into a sustainable tourism destination while preserving its rich heritage.

### **Strategies and initiatives**

#### **Certify and Monitor Scientifically:**

Develop and implement a certification system by establishing rigorous environmental and social standards for tourism businesses in Nizwa. Conduct regular audits and monitoring by independent and qualified specialists. Secondly, partner with research institutions through collaboration with universities and research organizations to conduct ongoing studies on the environmental and social impacts of tourism. Thus, utilize the data to inform policy decisions and measure progress towards sustainability goals. Moreover, implement a transparent data platform, to share collected data and progress reports publicly to ensure accountability and encourage continued improvement.

#### **Cultivate the Workforce:**

Invest in training and education by developing and providing training programs for tourism workers on sustainable practices, and visitor management. As well as promote green skills and knowledge relevant to ecotourism. Moreover, empowers local communities by including residents in tourism planning and decision-making processes by Creating opportunities for income generation through tourism, such as handicrafts, homestays, and guided tours. Furthermore, it supports fair labour practices by implementing fair wages and working conditions for all tourism workers, including informal sectors and promotes ethical recruitment and hiring practices.

### **Prioritize Communities:**

Integrate local culture and traditions by encouraging tourism experiences that showcase local arts, crafts, cuisine, and customs. Simultaneously, support community development projects through investing in infrastructure and services that benefit both residents and tourists, such as healthcare facilities, educational institutions, and waste management systems. Moreover, it promotes responsible tourism behaviour while educating visitors about the importance of respecting local communities and their way of life. Also, encourage responsible interactions and support locally owned businesses.

### **Align Visitors:**

To align visitors with Nizwa's sustainable mission, captivating marketing campaigns will showcase its unique cultural tapestry, breathtaking landscapes, and unwavering commitment to eco-friendly practices. This message translates into tangible experiences through carefully curated tourism packages that minimize environmental impact, support local communities, and authentic interactions with residents. Additionally, comprehensive educational programs equip visitors with the knowledge and tools to practice responsible tourism, participate in conservation activities, and minimize their footprint, ensuring all stakeholders - Nizwa, its communities, and travellers alike - reap the benefits of a thriving and sustainable tourism future.

### **Protect Heritage:**

To safeguard Nizwa's heritage, it implements restoration and preservation programs for its historical treasures, educating visitors on their significance and fostering responsible behaviour at these sites. Simultaneously, it nurtures the traditional crafts and practices through workshops, demonstrations, and market opportunities, to ensure these cultures continue for the next generations.

### **Protect Nature:**

Implement sustainable resource management practices by promoting responsible water use, energy conservation, and waste management within the tourism sector. Additionally, it offers ecotourism activities by developing and promoting nature-based activities that minimize environmental impact, such as guided hikes.

### **Produce and Consume Responsibly:**

Encourage local sourcing by promoting the use of locally sourced food, materials, and products in tourism businesses. As well, as reduce reliance on imported goods and minimize transportation emissions. Moreover, reduce waste generation through implementing waste reduction and recycling programs within the tourism sector.



Encourage composting and responsible disposal of waste. In addition, promote energy efficiency invest in renewable energy sources for tourism facilities and promote energy-saving practices among hotels and restaurants.

### **Calibrate Infrastructure:**

Sustainable infrastructure can be developed by investing in renewable energy sources, eco-friendly buildings and water management systems. As well as adapting climate changing by integrating climate change considerations into infrastructure planning and development and implementing strategies to address potential risks and impacts on tourism.

### **Govern Effectively:**

Implement strong environmental and social regulations: Establish clear and enforceable regulations for tourism businesses to ensure adherence to sustainability principles. In addition, it fosters inter-agency collaboration by encouraging collaboration and coordination between government agencies responsible for tourism, environment, culture, and other relevant sectors. Also, promote stakeholder engagement: Involve local communities, private sector representatives, and other stakeholders in tourism planning and decision-making processes.

### **Embed Resilience:**

Develop adaptive management strategies by designing flexible tourism plans that can be adapted to changing circumstances, such as natural disasters, and economic fluctuations. Furthermore, promotes diversification through encouraging diversification of tourism offerings and attractions to minimize dependence on specific resources or segments. Finally, build community resilience by investing in programs and initiatives that enhance the resilience of local communities to cope with economic and environmental challenges.

## **Suggestions and recommendations**

### **Environmental Sustainability:**

Harnessing the sun: Switzerland: Eco-lodges in Zermatt like Matterhorn Paradise use solar panels for hot water and heating, reducing their dependence on fossil fuels. Invest in solar panels for Nizwa's Fort, illuminating its beauty sustainably and powering its guest facilities. Additionally, eco-lodges nestled amidst the AlAqr Village can rely on solar power for energy needs.

Waste transformation: Costa Rica: Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve composts food waste and recycles materials, converting waste into fertilizer and resources for local crafts. Implement composting bins throughout the bustling

Nizwa Souq, converting food waste from restaurants and cafes into fertile compost for local farms. Upcycling workshops can be held in historic courtyard houses, transforming discarded materials into unique crafts and souvenirs.

Zero Waste Island: New Zealand: Waiheke Island has ambitious goals to be zero waste by 2030. We could aim for a "Zero Waste Nizwa" initiative, encouraging businesses to adopt reusable packaging, implement recycling programs, and minimize single-use plastics. Public awareness campaigns can educate visitors and residents on responsible waste management.

Water conservation: Costa Rica: Manuel Antonio National Park uses rainwater harvesting systems to irrigate gardens and flush toilets, minimizing freshwater consumption. Nizwa's Aflaj irrigation system can be revitalized to optimize water usage in agriculture and landscaping. Hotels and restaurants can install water-saving fixtures and educate guests on responsible water consumption.

Sustainable sourcing: Iceland: The Blue Lagoon Hotel prioritizes sourcing seafood from local, sustainable fisheries and uses geothermal energy for heating, minimizing its environmental footprint. In Nizwa, could collaborate with local farmers and producers to prioritize fresh, seasonal ingredients for restaurants and hotels. Encourage the use of natural, locally sourced materials for handicrafts and souvenirs, supporting sustainability and creating a circular economy.

### **Social Sustainability:**

Immerse travellers in village life: Kyoto: The "Stay with a Local" program connects visitors with families in traditional Kyoto neighbourhoods, offering cultural immersion and homestay experiences. Nizwa might allow tourists to participate with families in nearby villages to offer homestay experiences, allowing visitors to connect with local customs and traditions. Moreover, announce the establishment of a "Village Trails" program where tourists can participate in daily activities like farming, weaving, and pottery with locals.

Artisanal workshops: Peru: Ollantaytambo offers weaving workshops where tourists learn traditional Inca techniques while supporting local artisans and preserving cultural heritage. Here, we can organize pottery workshops within the Souq's historic workshops, where visitors can learn the ancient art of Omani pottery from skilled artisans. Similar workshops can be held for metalworking, jewellery making, and other traditional crafts, empowering artisans and preserving cultural heritage.

Educating visitors: Iceland: Jokulsarlon glacier lagoon tours educate visitors on responsible glacier tourism practices, minimizing environmental impact and promoting respectful interaction with natural wonders. Nizwa locals could develop guided tours through the Souq and historical sites that focus on responsible behaviour and respect for local customs. Furthermore, they could consider interactive exhibits and educational material at the Fort, Nizwa and Gateway Past Museums to raise awareness about environmental protection and cultural preservation.

Partnerships with communities: Bhutan: The Royal Manas National Park partners with local communities for ranger training, forest patrols, and income generation projects, ensuring shared benefits from tourism. Collaborate Government with local communities and empower them to develop and offer cultural experiences like traditional music performances and storytelling evenings.

Skills development and training: Bhutan: The Bhutan Institute of Tourism provides hospitality training for rural communities, empowering them to participate in the tourism industry. MHT could provide hospitality and language training programs for residents in partnership with local colleges and NGOs. This equips them with relevant skills for tourism jobs, ensures local participation in the industry, and fosters community development.

Support cultural events and festivals: Madagascar: Village festivals like the Famadihana (turning of the bones) are regularly showcased to tourists, offering windows into local traditions, and supporting cultural preservation. It is possible to do a regular showcase of Nizwa's cultural events like the Nizwa Festival and Date Palm Festival, inviting tourists to witness Oman's rich heritage. Also, an idea about hosting weekly or monthly cultural performances and demonstrations in the Souq to offer continuous insights into local traditions.

### **Economic Sustainability:**

Responsible Tourism: Palau: Their environmental fee funds conservation projects and community development initiatives, ensuring tourism revenue directly benefits the environment and local people. Thus, We need to allocate a portion of tourism revenue toward the restoration and upkeep of Nizwa's historical sites and the Aflaj irrigation system, ensuring their preservation for future generations. Additionally, invest in community development projects like healthcare and education initiatives.

Focus on water conservation: Greece: Santorini hotels like Vedema Resort installs water-saving fixtures and educate guests on water conservation, reducing operational costs and attracting responsible tourists. In Nizwa, implementing water-saving measures in hotels and restaurants can significantly reduce operational costs while

attracting responsible tourists. Additionally, revitalizing the Aflaj system can optimize water usage in agriculture, boosting local food production and economic benefits.

Promote alternative modes of transportation: Netherlands: Amsterdam's extensive cycling infrastructure and car-free zones encourage green transportation, boosting cycling tourism and reducing carbon emissions. Moreover, in Switzerland, The car-free resort of Bettmeralp attracts eco-conscious tourists with its electric shuttle system and solar-powered facilities. So, developing car-free zones within the Souq and historic areas, encouraging pedestrian exploration and reducing air pollution is necessary. Moreover, it's a good idea to Invest in electric shuttle buses for convenient transportation within the city, attracting eco-conscious tourists.

Offer incentives for eco-friendly practices: France: Their "Green Key" program awards grants and promotes hotels with certified sustainable practices, motivating businesses to invest in green solutions. Therefore, recognizing and rewarding Nizwa hotels, restaurants, and businesses that adopt sustainable practices through tax breaks, marketing assistance, or awards, creates a competitive environment that encourages green initiatives throughout the tourism industry.

## Conclusion

The comprehensive evaluation of the potential of Nizwa's tourism industry lead to the resulted in numerous recommendations and strategies which will help improving the sustainable tourism of the region status. To sum up the key findings and conclusions from the report, this report underscore the significance of the region's cultural heritage and natural beauty for the tourism industry. The city of Nizwa and its residents can consider sustainable tourism as one of the most critical factors that can be consider when it comes to their future prosperity. Sustainable tourism is not only helping the city preserve its heritage and environment but also promotes a positive relationship between the visitors and the locals. By implementing sustainable tourism principles and adopting the necessary strategies, it can be a leading destination for travelers from all over the world. The path that Nizwa is on is a testimony to its commitment to sustainability. It involves aligning economic prosperity, environmental conservation, and cultural authenticity with the destination's image as a responsible and memorable place to visit.

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## APPENDIX A

To delve deeper into the current practices of sustainability within Nizwa, semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten locals. These individuals represented a diverse cross-section of the community, hailing from the bustling Nizwa Souq, the traditional village of AlAqr, and the historic Nizwa Fort. By engaging with residents from these key locations, the interviews aimed to uncover firsthand insights into the successes, challenges, and potential avenues for improvement in Nizwa's journey towards a more sustainable future.

### Interview Questions

#### Environmental Sustainability:

- How efficiently are resources like water, energy, and waste managed here? Are there renewable energy sources or responsible waste disposal practices in place?
- What measures are taken to protect natural landscapes, flora, and fauna? Are there initiatives for eco-tourism conservation?
- How is the destination addressing climate change and its impacts? Are there plans for reducing carbon footprint or adapting to rising temperatures?

### Social Sustainability:

How are local communities involved in tourism development and decision-making? Does tourism benefit the local economy and cultural well-being?

Does the destination provide accessibility and cater to diverse demographics, including people with disabilities and marginalized communities?

How are local traditions and cultural heritage protected and celebrated? Are tourists encouraged to respect local customs and values?

### Economic Sustainability:

Does the tourism industry support local businesses and entrepreneurs? Are there initiatives promoting fair trade practices and ethical tourism?

Does the destination rely solely on tourism, or are there other thriving sectors? What efforts are made to diversify the economy and create sustainable livelihoods?

How does the destination ensure its tourism development is sustainable and will not negatively impact the environment, society, or future generations?

### Author Biographies



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#### Education

2021 | Bachelor's degree from Oman Tourism College, Tourism and Hospitality Management

2023 | Master Student, Sultan Qaboos University, Tourism Destination Management

### Experience & Certificates

2018-2020 | Agent - Guest Services, Muscat International Airport

2020-2022 | Acting Officer - Premium Services Department, Muscat International Airport

2022- Present | Customer Services Administrator, Oman Across Ages Museum

2022 | Train the Trainer, Transom (Airport Internal Coach)

2024 | Train the Trainer, World Federation of Tourist Guide Association

### Conference participations 2024

- International Museum Construction Congress (IMCC)– OAAM, Oman
- International Conference for Education and Innovation in Museums (ICEIM)– Riyadh, KSA
- Atlas Business Tourism Conference – Valencia, Spain
- International Conference of Museums ( ICOM-ICOFOM)- Doha, Qatar