Reinventing Oman's Potential: Strategies for Transforming Seasonal Tourism into Sustainable Nature-Based Tourism

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- **Purpose:**

This paper explores the potential for nature-based tourism in Oman, focusing on maximizing the unique ecological advantages and cultural fascination of the Khareef (monsoon) season while reinventing strategies to envision Salalah as a year-round tourism destination. During Khareef, Salalah's landscape takes on a phenomenal transformation, attracting visitors with its verdant scenery, waterfalls, and diverse flora and fauna, making it a distinct destination within the Arabian Peninsula. However, predominant dependence on this seasonal influx weakens Oman's potential for sustainable economic growth and environmental grandiose. The research examines both the ecological and economic benefits of expanding nature-based tourism across all seasons, promoting eco-tours, guided wildlife experiences, and cultural adventures aligned with sustainable tourism avenues. Through a creative and modern analysis of Salalah's unique biodiversity, endemic species, and seasonal climate variations, this paper probes into strategies for evolving diverse yet distinct tourism offerings for winter and summer, including cave expeditions, desert safaris, coastal cruises, culinary tasting tours, and cultural festivals that celebrate Salalah's rich heritage. Key recommendations focus on creating innovative and customized guided eco-tourism experiences led by trained locals, diversifying Salalah's tourism portfolio, and deploying targeted marketing campaigns to attract visitors year-round. Additionally, the paper underscores the importance of community involvement and collaborative stakeholder partnerships to enhance sustainable practices that drive economic resilience and environmental conservation beyond the Khareef season.

- **Originality:**

    This paper contributes a novel viewpoint by uniting an in-depth analysis of Salalah's seasonal tourism leanings with global best practices from destinations like Costa Rica and Bhutan. Different earlier studies that focus primarily on the Khareef season, this research examines the unexploited possible of Salalah's winter and summer tourism chances. It also integrates local community assignation, biodiversity preservation, and cultural protection into the framework for year-round sustainable tourism. The originality lies in its holistic approach, which syndicates local visions, statistical examination, and international judgements to adapt a sole model for Salalah.

- **Brief Literature Review:**

    The study outlines on existing literature that highpoints the achievement of nature-based tourism mockups in destinations like Costa Rica and Bhutan. Costa Rica's wide network of endangered areas and community-driven eco-tourism creativities provide a blueprint for integrating conservation and tourism. Bhutan's high-value, low-volume tourism model validates how limiting tourist numbers while focusing on premium experiences can preserve cultural heritage and biodiversity. Previous research on Salalah has largely focused on its Khareef season; however, this paper expands the scope by examining strategies for diversifying its tourism portfolio. Key sources include case studies on sustainable tourism, visitor statistics for Salalah, and global frameworks for eco-tourism development.

- **Design/Methodology/Approach:**

    This research adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methodologies to provide a comprehensive analysis.

- **Results:**

    The research categorizes Salalah's unique strengths, with its lush Khareef season, rich biodiversity, and cultural inheritance, as well as its trials, such as over reliance on cyclical tourism and incomplete substructure for year round actions. Key results include: The possible for increasing tourism actions beyond Khareef, such as cave explorations, desert safaris, fish watching, and social cultural festivals. The need for community-driven tourism creativities to safeguard reasonable financial welfares and environmental stewardship. The efficacy of battered advertising movements to transpose Salalah as a year-round terminus. Understandings from

Costa Rica and Bhutan underscore the importance of mixing preservation strategies, local participation, and top involvements to withstand tourism development.

- **Visitor Statistics (2019–2024):**
  - **2019:** Salalah welcomed 766,772 visitors during the Khareef season, marking a 7.2% decrease from 2018.
  - **2020–2021:** Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, global travel restrictions led to a significant decline in tourist numbers. Specific data for these years are limited.
  - **2022:** The Khareef season saw approximately 813,000 visitors, a 6% increase compared to 2019.
  - **2023:** Data for this year is not readily available.
  - **2024:** As of August 31, 2024, Salalah recorded 1,006,635 visitors, an 8.7% increase from the same period in 2023.

- **Visitor Origins:**
  - **Omani Nationals:** Consistently the largest group, accounting for 70.5% of visitors in 2019 and 69% in 2022.
  - **GCC Countries:** Visitors from Gulf Cooperation Council countries comprised 16.9% in 2019 and 19.8% in 2022.
  - **Other Nationalities:** Asian visitors made up 8% in 2019, with other nationalities accounting for the remaining percentages.

- **Popular Destinations in Salalah:**
  - **Al Baleed Archaeological Park:** A UNESCO World Heritage site showcasing the region's rich history.
  - **Wadi Darbat:** Known for its waterfalls and natural beauty, especially during the Khareef season.
  - **Mughsail Beach:** Famous for its blowholes and scenic views.
  - **Jabal Samhan Nature Reserve:** Offers unique wildlife and panoramic vistas.

- **Tourism Revenue:**
  - **2019:** Visitor spending reached OMR 78 million, a 1.4% increase from 2018.

- **2022:** Expenditure during the Khareef season was approximately OMR 86 million, surpassing the 2019 figures.
- **2024:** Specific revenue data for this year is not yet available.

- **Accommodation Preferences:**
  - **2019:** 57% of visitors opted for furnished apartments and houses, while 32% chose hotels and hotel apartments.

- **Transportation:**
  - **Land Travel:** In 2019, 79.6% of visitors arrived via land, with approximately 95,000 vehicles entering Dhofar.
  - **Air Travel:** In 2022, 165,704 visitors arrived by air, a 20.4% increase from 2019.

Keywords: Digital Transformation, Artificial Intelligence, Tourist Satisfaction, AI Chatbots, Data Analysis

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Author Biographies

Dr. Wilfred Blessing N.R is working as a Senior Lecturer in Information Technology Department, College of Computing and Information Sciences, University of Technology and Applied Sciences-Ibri, Sultanate of Oman. He has received B.Tech degree in Information Technology, M.E degree in Computer Science and Engineering, Ph.D degree in Information & Communication Engineering from Anna University, Chennai, India. He has got 17 years of teaching cum research experience in India and Oman. He has got good publications in reputed international conferences and journals. He has also acted as reviewer for research publishers including IEEE, Inderscience, Springer impact factor journals and served as "International Program Committee Member" for different international conferences. He has also got experience in collaborating research projects with creative student community. His core interest is in Artificial Intelligence Technologies and Software Computing. He is also being a keynote speaker, motivational speaker and presented training to various universities, colleges for teachers and students around the globe.

Glorious Stephen is a multi-talented writer, celebrated as one of the best self-made research scholars. He is the host of the popular Life Cafe Podcast Series, where meaningful conversations unfold. Beyond his creative pursuits, Glorious Stephen is a dedicated social worker, championing the rights of tribal and indigenous communities, and an environmental activist working to uplift communities in the Western Ghats region, India. As the founder of the NGO SCOPE, he focuses on generating employment and empowering marginalized groups. Stephen also shines as a YouTube creator with his channel Wit & Wisdom Music, where he shares relaxing music, spiritual quotes, and meditative content that resonates deeply with his audience. He has other channels like Psychology Campus for promoting psychological well-being. He is a skilled AI Trainer and English language trainer, he is passionate about guiding people toward self-improvement and achieving their goals. His interests span ancient civilizations, storytelling, small business initiatives, and inspiring youth through unique narratives that blend culture, compassion, and creativity. Glorious Stephen's journey is a remarkable blend of art, advocacy, and empowerment, making him a beacon of inspiration in the creative and social spheres.

Dr. Suresh Palarimath Dr. Suresh Palarimath is an author and researcher with a prolific academic career. He has authored 25 widely recognized computer science textbooks. His research contributions include 18 published articles, 7 Indian patents, and 2 UK patents. In 2023, he secured a $56,200 Research Grant for three projects. Dr. Palarimath is currently a Lecturer in Information Technology at UTAS, Salalah, Oman since 2013.

Dr. Wasim Haidar SK is a lecturer in IT from UTAS-Salalah. With a strong academic foundation and hands-on experience in the software industry, Dr. Haidar brings a unique blend of theoretical knowledge and practical expertise to his teaching and research endeavors. Dr. Haidar completed his academic journey in India, earning his undergraduate, postgraduate, and doctoral degrees in computer science. He has since specialized in Python programming, emerging as a sought-after expert in the field. Before transitioning into academia, Dr. Haidar garnered valuable industry experience, working with leading software companies. During this time, he contributed to diverse projects, honing his skills in software engineering, project management, and cutting-edge technologies. As a researcher, Dr. Haidar is deeply passionate about contributing to the field through scholarly work. He has authored several research articles. His dedication to advancing knowledge has earned him recognition at various academic and professional conferences.