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Strategies for sustainable tourism development in Afghanistan: a SWOT and thematic analysis

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Abstract: Purpose: This study examines strategies for sustainable tourism development in Afghanistan, focusing on environmental sustainability, economic development, community participation, and preservation of cultural and natural heritage. Consistent with UN Tourism sustainable tourism principles, it assesses opportunities and challenges affecting Afghanistan's tourism sector and identifies strategies for responsible, inclusive, and resilient tourism development.

Methodology: The study employed a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative and qualitative data collected through questionnaires and focus group discussions. Participants are selected using random and snowball sampling techniques. Thematic analysis identified recurring themes related to sustainable tourism, while SWOT analysis assessed internal strengths and weaknesses and external opportunities and threats affecting tourism development in Afghanistan.

Results: The findings indicate that sustainable tourism development requires environmental protection, community participation, cultural preservation, economic support, effective governance, tourist awareness, and technological innovation. The SWOT assessment demonstrates a strong internal position (IFE = 3.36) and favorable external conditions (EFE = 3.65). However, inadequate funding, weak stakeholder coordination, political instability, climate-related risks, and institutional constraints remain important challenges.

Conclusion: Afghanistan has considerable potential for sustainable tourism development if its cultural and natural resources are responsibly managed and supported by effective governance, community participation, investment, and institutional cooperation.

Recommendations: The study recommends strengthening environmental management, protecting cultural heritage, supporting local tourism businesses, expanding investment and public-private partnerships, improving institutional capacity, and enhancing coordination among government agencies, communities, and tourism stakeholders to promote responsible and sustainable tourism development.

Keywords: Afghanistan; Community Participation; Cultural Heritage; Sustainable Tourism Development; SWOT Analysis; Thematic Analysis; Tourism Strategy.

Introduction

Afghanistan possesses considerable potential for tourism development because of its diverse cultural heritage, historic sites, mountainous landscapes, archaeological resources, and distinctive local traditions. Despite these assets, the country's tourism sector remains underdeveloped and faces significant challenges related to governance, infrastructure, investment, environmental management, security perceptions, institutional capacity, and coordination among relevant stakeholders. Developing tourism in Afghanistan therefore requires more than simply increasing visitor numbers; it requires a strategic approach that generates economic opportunities while protecting cultural heritage, conserving natural resources, and ensuring meaningful benefits for local communities.

Tourism can contribute to economic development through employment creation, income generation, business development, investment, and cultural exchange. These potential benefits are particularly relevant to developing countries such as Afghanistan, where tourism may provide opportunities for local economic diversification and community-based enterprise development. However, poorly planned tourism can also generate negative environmental, economic, and socio-cultural consequences. Pressure on natural resources, environmental degradation, damage to cultural and historical sites, unequal distribution of tourism benefits,

and insufficient community participation can undermine the long-term contribution of tourism to sustainable development. Consequently, tourism development in Afghanistan requires careful planning that balances economic opportunities with environmental protection, cultural preservation, and social inclusion.

Sustainable tourism provides an appropriate framework for achieving this balance. It considers the present and long-term economic, social, cultural, and environmental consequences of tourism while addressing the needs of visitors, host communities, tourism businesses, government institutions, and the environment. Sustainable tourism development therefore depends on effective policies, responsible resource management, stakeholder participation, institutional cooperation, and the involvement of local communities in tourism planning and decision-making. These principles are particularly important in Afghanistan, where institutional and socioeconomic conditions can influence the capacity of the tourism sector to develop sustainably.

Government policy and institutional capacity are central to sustainable tourism development. Clear tourism policies can establish priorities for destination development, environmental protection, cultural heritage conservation, investment, infrastructure, and community participation. However, policies alone are insufficient without effective implementation and coordination. Tourism development often involves several government institutions, private businesses, local communities, investors, cultural organizations, and other stakeholders. Weak coordination among these actors can result in fragmented initiatives, inefficient resource allocation, and inconsistent implementation of tourism strategies. Strengthening mutual understanding and cooperation between government institutions and relevant stakeholders is therefore essential for developing a coherent and sustainable tourism sector in Afghanistan.

Community participation is another important component of sustainable tourism. Local communities are directly affected by tourism activities and can play an important role in protecting cultural traditions, managing local resources, providing tourism services, and creating authentic visitor experiences. When communities participate meaningfully in tourism planning and receive equitable economic benefits, tourism can contribute to employment, entrepreneurship, poverty reduction, and local development. In contrast, limited community participation and unequal distribution of tourism benefits may reduce local support for tourism initiatives and weaken their long-term sustainability.

Environmental protection and cultural heritage preservation are equally important in the Afghan context. Afghanistan's natural landscapes, historical monuments, archaeological sites, and cultural traditions represent important potential tourism resources. However, tourism development without appropriate environmental and heritage-management measures may place these resources at risk. Sustainable tourism strategies should therefore incorporate environmental management, responsible visitor behavior, conservation practices, and mechanisms for protecting cultural and natural assets for future generations.

Despite Afghanistan's tourism potential, the development of a sustainable tourism sector is constrained by several interconnected challenges. These include limited financial resources, insufficient tourism infrastructure, institutional weaknesses, fragmented stakeholder coordination, inadequate implementation of tourism policies, environmental risks, and limited community participation. At the same time, Afghanistan possesses strengths and opportunities that could support tourism development, including its cultural diversity, historical heritage, natural attractions, local traditions, and opportunities for community-based tourism. Understanding both the internal and external conditions affecting tourism is therefore necessary for developing realistic strategies for sustainable tourism development.

Existing discussions of sustainable tourism provide important general principles, but these principles must be examined within Afghanistan's specific institutional, environmental, economic, and socio-cultural context. Sustainable tourism strategies developed for other

countries may not be directly applicable to Afghanistan because tourism development is shaped by local governance structures, stakeholder relationships, available resources, community conditions, and national development priorities. There is therefore a need for context-specific evidence that identifies the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats affecting tourism development while also examining stakeholder perspectives on environmental sustainability, economic benefits, cultural preservation, governance, and community participation.

Against this background, this study investigates strategies for sustainable tourism development in Afghanistan using SWOT and thematic analysis. It examines current tourism development practices, their environmental, economic, and socio-cultural implications, the major barriers and enabling factors affecting sustainability, and the perspectives of relevant stakeholders. By integrating these dimensions, the study seeks to develop practical and context-sensitive recommendations for strengthening tourism governance, stakeholder coordination, environmental management, cultural heritage protection, community participation, and sustainable destination development in Afghanistan.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Afghanistan has significant cultural, historical, and natural resources that could support tourism development and contribute to employment creation, local business development, income generation, and economic diversification. However, realizing this potential sustainably remains challenging because tourism development is influenced by institutional capacity, policy implementation, infrastructure, environmental management, investment, community participation, and cooperation among government institutions and other stakeholders.

Although tourism can generate substantial economic and social benefits, poorly planned development can contribute to environmental degradation, pressure on natural resources, damage to cultural heritage, unequal distribution of economic benefits, and exclusion of local communities from tourism decision-making. These concerns are particularly important in Afghanistan, where limited resources and institutional constraints may make the effective management of tourism destinations more difficult.

A further challenge is the need for stronger coordination among government institutions, private-sector actors, local communities, tourism businesses, and other relevant stakeholders. Fragmented initiatives and insufficient stakeholder cooperation can limit the effectiveness of tourism policies and prevent the development of integrated approaches to destination management. Similarly, inadequate community participation may reduce the ability of tourism development to generate sustainable socioeconomic benefits at the local level.

Despite increasing recognition of sustainable tourism, there remains a need for context-specific evidence concerning the internal and external factors influencing sustainable tourism development in Afghanistan. In particular, greater understanding is required regarding current tourism practices, environmental and socio-economic impacts, institutional and policy constraints, stakeholder relationships, and opportunities for sustainable destination development. Therefore, this study addresses this gap by applying SWOT and thematic analysis to identify the major factors affecting sustainable tourism development in Afghanistan and to develop practical strategies for responsible, inclusive, and environmentally sustainable tourism.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study focuses on sustainable tourism development in Afghanistan, with particular attention to selected tourism destinations and relevant stakeholders. It examines the environmental, economic, and socio-cultural dimensions of tourism development and considers the roles of tourism policies, institutional capacity, stakeholder coordination, community participation, cultural heritage protection, and environmental management. The

study uses stakeholder perspectives to identify the major strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats affecting sustainable tourism and to formulate practical strategies for responsible and inclusive tourism development in Afghanistan.

Research objectives

- Examine current tourism development practices in Afghanistan and assess their alignment with sustainable tourism principles.
- Assess the environmental, economic, and socio-cultural impacts of tourism development on local communities and destination.
- Identify the major barriers and enabling factors affecting the implementation of sustainable tourism strategies in Afghanistan.
- Develop strategic recommendations and policy directions for promoting responsible, inclusive, and sustainable tourism development in Afghanistan.

Research questions

Research questions are:

- What tourism development practices are currently applied in Afghanistan, and to what extent do they align with sustainable tourism principles?
- What are the environmental, economic, and socio-cultural impacts of tourism development on local communities and tourism destinations?
- What major barriers and enabling factors influence the implementation of sustainable tourism practices in Afghanistan?
- What strategies and policy measures can promote responsible, inclusive, and sustainable tourism development in Afghanistan?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is significant because it addresses sustainable tourism development within the specific context of Afghanistan, where considerable cultural and natural tourism potential exists alongside institutional, economic, environmental, and governance challenges. Academically, the study contributes to the sustainable tourism literature by providing context-specific evidence on tourism development in Afghanistan and by examining the interaction between environmental protection, economic development, cultural preservation, community participation, governance, and stakeholder coordination.

From a policy perspective, the findings can assist government institutions and tourism authorities in identifying priority areas for improving tourism policies, institutional capacity, destination management, and coordination with relevant stakeholders. The study can also support private-sector actors and development organizations by identifying opportunities for investment, partnerships, and sustainable tourism initiatives.

For local communities, the research emphasizes participation, equitable distribution of tourism benefits, local enterprise development, and protection of cultural and natural resources. By identifying the major strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats affecting tourism and integrating these findings with stakeholder perspectives, the study provides practical recommendations for developing a more responsible, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable tourism sector in Afghanistan.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Zamfir, A., & Corbos, R. A. (2015), the study shows the increasing significance of urban development simultaneously with sustainable tourism. Cities are urged to shed light on the planning of urban tourism from the eco-friendly angle. This case study describes sustainable urban tourism in Romania. It offers primary data designed to address sustainable urban tourism and lists the most determined factors of successful management. These factors can guide future endeavors in urban tourism management.

According to Risteskia, M., Kocevskia, J., & Arnaudov, K. (2012), the expected effects of tourism growth when left unsupervised is detrimental to the economy, the culture of the nations, as well as the surroundings. In the case of unsustainable overcrowding, the growth of the tourism industry, like every other economic sector, needs to be regulated, monitored, and dispersed in an optimal manner. Sustainable development, like the other form of modern tourism developments, necessitates to be embraced by modern tourism leaves policymakers no choice but to advocate and bring forth the adoption of practices and the refinement of frameworks and methodologies like destination planning and strategic tourism quality control to maintain relevance.

According to the Seraphin, H., & Gowreesunkar, V. G. (2021), the study analyzes the global case studies of various countries engaged in cross-border tourism in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It pinpoints barriers and achievements in the hospitality, agriculture, and wildlife tourism industries. The results of the research strongly support cross stakeholder collaboration and the scale of the organization as central components to achieving sustainability, which helps to inform strategic management and provide much needed tools for practitioners and destination managers, across the globe.

According to Angelevska-Najdeska, K., & Rakicevik, G. (2012), the foundation of the tourism economy's sustainability rests on the proper use of valuable natural and cultural sites, thus setting them aside for future generations. These sites are the very foundation of the tourism economy. Therefore, the development of the economy of the tourism region and the protection of the surrounding environment is a question which must be studied in detail and very thoroughly planned. This ensures that the area remains a prime destination for visitors while also serving the needs of the surrounding population.

According to Romagosa, F., Priestley, G., & Llurdés, J. C. (2013), the selected years hinged on in recent, now planning must, along with parallel activities, incorporate sustainability. And yet, in general planning, tourism is rare as a subject of concern. This article addresses diverse approaches to mid-range planning that aim to include tourism in order to construct concurrent rationalizations to the subsequent review of a planning exercise done in Catalonia, Spain. This reasoning is grounded in the plans, the challenges that have risen with goal-setting and indicator systems, and the subsequent decision on the balance and likely impact of the chosen measures. According to the Dunets, A. N., Vakhrushev, I. B., Sukhova, M. G., Sokolov, M. S., Utkina, K. M., & Shichiyakh, R. A. (2019), the paper examines sustainable tourism development options for the Altai-Sayan mountain region. It proposes a five-stage strategy focusing on preserving biodiversity and ethnic heritage through ethnoecological tourism. The study emphasizes functional zoning and landscape- adaptive spatial planning to balance tourism and environmental management. Different types of tourist networks are analyzed, leading to prioritized development zones for intensive tourism, nature preservation, and ecotourism, as well as areas with varying economic activity levels.

According to the Mason, P., Augustyn, M., & Seakhoa-King, A. (2023), the research won't discuss other scholarly works or compare them; it will focus on examining and analyzing improving the quality of a place and how it helps achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It will delve into principles of sustainability with regards quality of a destination and discusses strategic destination quality attributes (safety, authenticity and hospitality) that support the SDGs. The study suggests enhancing destination quality advances sustainable development and proposes a destination management approach for advancing quality along with sustainability. There is also a strong case for pursuing further research to confirm these links.

According to the Brokaj, R. (2014), tourism is a rapidly growing global industry important to many developing countries' economies but can cause environmental and cultural harm without proper planning. This paper examines sustainable tourism development in Vlora, Albania,

focusing on the roles and challenges faced by key stakeholders: local government, tourism businesses, and the community. Using interviews and data analysis, the study highlights multiple factors that hinder sustainable tourism practices in Vlora, emphasizing the need for better collaboration and management.

According to Pascariu, G. C., & Frunză, R. (2012), the tourism plays a vital role in the European Union's economy and integration, increasingly linked to sustainable development goals. This paper examines how tourism enterprises can support sustainability by adopting corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices, especially in developing destinations. It highlights the relationship between tourism and regional development and discusses the benefits of alternative markets for aligning the interests of tourists, businesses, and local communities within an integrated sustainable management framework.

According to Streimikiene, D., Svagzdiene, B., Jasinskas, E., & Simanavicius, A. (2021), the tourism is a dynamic global industry that requires careful, sustainable planning to balance environmental, economic, and social goals. This paper reviews how strengthening tourism competitiveness can be achieved by integrating sustainability targets and new technologies. It highlights challenges such as changing consumer behavior and the impact of COVID-19 on sustainable tourism. The study offers insights and future research directions to support the development of competitive, sustainable tourism destinations.

According to the Zhu, L., Zhan, L., & Li, S. (2021), using data collected from 130 destinations, this research investigates the relationship between environmental competitiveness and the growth of tourism. The findings, as research found, suggest there is a positive relationship for developed destinations, whereas for developing countries the relationship is weak and insignificant, which might be a consequence of a lack of resources. The results of this research show the relationship between destination competitiveness and the environment, and affirm the need for advocating tourism which is sustainable in principle, particularly in developing countries.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research design

This study used a mixed-methods research design, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine strategies for sustainable tourism development in Afghanistan. A mixed-methods design is considered appropriate because sustainable tourism is a multidimensional phenomenon involving environmental, economic, socio-cultural, institutional, and governance factors that cannot be adequately understood through a single source of evidence. The quantitative component is used to identify patterns in stakeholders' perceptions of sustainable tourism practices and conditions, while the qualitative component provided deeper explanations of participants' experiences, concerns, opportunities, and recommendations.

The study therefore combined questionnaires and focus group discussions (FGDs). The findings generated through these methods are analyzed using descriptive analysis and thematic analysis and are subsequently synthesized within a SWOT framework to develop strategic recommendations for sustainable tourism development in Afghanistan.

Data Collection

Primary data are collected through questionnaires and focus group discussions (FGDs). Used these two sources allowed the study to obtain both structured stakeholder responses and more detailed qualitative explanations of the issues influencing sustainable tourism development.

Questionnaire

A structured questionnaire containing both closed-ended and open-ended questions is used to collect information from relevant tourism stakeholders, including visitors, members of host communities, local business operators, and other individuals involved in or knowledgeable

about tourism development.

The questionnaire examined participants' perceptions of current tourism practices, environmental sustainability, economic benefits, cultural heritage preservation, community participation, governance, stakeholder cooperation, and barriers and opportunities related to sustainable tourism development in Afghanistan.

Focus Group Discussions

Focus group discussions are conducted to obtain deeper qualitative insights into sustainable tourism development. Participants included individuals with relevant knowledge or experience, such as local residents, tourism-related business representatives, and individuals concerned with cultural or environmental conservation.

The discussions focused on major challenges and opportunities affecting tourism development, environmental protection, cultural heritage preservation, community involvement, institutional support, stakeholder coordination, and possible strategies for improving sustainable tourism in Afghanistan.

The FGDs complemented the questionnaire findings by allowing participants to explain their experiences and perspectives in greater depth and to identify issues that could not be fully captured through structured questionnaire responses.

Sampling Technique

The study used different sampling procedures according to the requirements of the two data-collection methods. Random sampling is used for questionnaire respondents where an appropriate sampling frame or accessible respondent population is available. This approach is intended to obtain responses from a broader range of participants and reduce systematic selection bias.

For the qualitative component, snowball sampling is used to identify participants with relevant experience or specialized knowledge for the focus group discussions. Initial participants helped identify other suitable individuals who possessed knowledge of tourism development, local communities, tourism businesses, environmental conservation, or related areas. Snowball sampling is considered useful because some knowledgeable tourism stakeholders could not easily be identified through a conventional sampling frame.

Data Analysis

The quantitative and qualitative data are analyzed separately before being integrated during the interpretation and strategic synthesis of the findings.

Quantitative Analysis

Responses to the closed-ended questionnaire items are organized and summarized used descriptive analysis. Weight, weightage score, or other appropriate descriptive measures are used to identify general patterns in respondents' perceptions of sustainable tourism development. The quantitative results provided an overview of stakeholder perceptions regarding environmental, economic, socio-cultural, governance, and institutional dimensions of tourism development.

Open-ended questionnaire responses are treated as qualitative evidence and analyzed together with relevant FGD data.

Thematic Analysis

Qualitative data obtained from the open-ended questionnaire responses and focus group discussions are analyzed using thematic analysis, following the systematic procedure proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis is selected because it provides a flexible and systematic method for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting recurring patterns of meaning within qualitative data.

The analysis followed six stages. First, the researchers became familiar with the data through repeated reading of the responses and FGD records. Second, relevant statements are systematically coded. Third, related codes are grouped to generate potential themes. Fourth,

the identified themes are reviewed against the original data to ensure consistency and relevance. Fifth, the themes are clearly defined and named. Finally, the themes are interpreted and reported in relation to the research objectives and questions.

Particular attention is given to themes concerning environmental sustainability, economic benefits, community participation, cultural heritage preservation, governance, stakeholder coordination, institutional capacity, challenges, and opportunities for sustainable tourism development in Afghanistan.

SWOT-Based Strategic Synthesis

In this study, SWOT analysis is not treated as the primary method for analyzing raw questionnaire or FGD data. Instead, it is employed as a strategic synthesis framework after the quantitative and thematic analyses had been completed.

Evidence generated from the questionnaire results and thematic analysis is systematically categorized into four strategic dimensions: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Strengths and weaknesses represented internal factors influencing tourism development, whereas opportunities and threats represented external conditions that could facilitate or constrain sustainable tourism development.

This approach enabled the researchers to integrate empirical findings into a structured strategic assessment of Afghanistan's tourism sector. The resulting SWOT framework is subsequently used to formulate strategic options and recommendations concerning environmental management, cultural heritage protection, community participation, institutional development, stakeholder coordination, investment, and sustainable tourism policy.

Therefore, the SWOT framework served primarily as a decision-support and strategy-development tool rather than an independent method of empirical data analysis.

Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

The final stage involved integrating the quantitative questionnaire results, qualitative themes, and SWOT-based strategic assessment. Areas of convergence and divergence between the different sources of evidence are examined to develop a comprehensive interpretation of sustainable tourism development in Afghanistan.

This integration strengthened the analysis by combining broad stakeholder patterns with detailed contextual explanations. The resulting evidence is used to develop practical and context-sensitive strategies for responsible, inclusive, environmentally sustainable, and economically viable tourism development in Afghanistan.

Ethical Considerations

Participants are informed about the purpose of the study and the voluntary nature of their participation. They are informed that their responses would be used for research purposes and that confidentiality would be maintained. Participants are free to decline participation or withdraw where applicable. Personal identifying information is not disclosed in reporting the findings, and the collected information is used solely for academic research purposes.

Findings

Strategies for achieving sustainable development in tourism and tourist destinations

The thematic analysis of data related to sustainable tourism development reveals several recurring and interrelated themes that are critical to creating balanced, long-term strategies in the tourism sector.

THEMES

Environmental sustainability practices

According to the focus group discussion the participants narrated that the “Environmental Sustainability Practices” the participants consistently emphasize the importance of protecting natural resources, minimizing pollution, and integrating eco-friendly infrastructure into tourism planning. Initiatives such as the reduction, renewable energy use, and conservation

programs are commonly viewed as essential to reducing tourism's ecological footprint.

Community involvement and empowerment

The participants of the focus group discussion consider "Community Involvement and Empowerment" and most of them declare that the Sustainable tourism cannot flourish without the active engagement of local residents. Data points to the necessity of having participatory governance systems, their inclusive decision-making processes, and equity in the tourism payout. The social well-being and regional stability in the long run is assured through the local people.

Cultural heritage preservation

The focus group participants narrated that "Cultural Heritage Preservation" also emerges as a critical topic. Respondents emphasize that cultural erosion should not be caused by tourism. Rather, it should actively defend and advocate for local customs, traditions, and historical resources. This topic highlights the notion of 'performing tourism' and the positive exchange of real cultural practices that advantage both parties.

Economic sustainability and local development

The focus group participants narrated that "Economic Sustainability and Local Development" the Participants highlight that tourism must support local economies through job creation, support for small businesses, and minimizing revenue leakage. There is a clear demand for tourism models that prioritize long-term economic benefits over short-term profit.

Policy, governance, and strategic planning

The focus group participants stressed on "Policy, Governance, and Strategic Planning" Almost all participants stated that these are the all the policies that formed the backbone of responsible and sustainable tourism development. It is considered that effective governance, collaboration across different sectors, and the formation of public-private partnerships are all essential for the effective implementation of sustainability measures.

Tourist experience and awareness

The focus group participants showing so much focus on "Tourist Experience and Awareness" speaks to the growing realization that sustainability should enhance the visitor's experience. A sustainable destination not only has a low environmental impact, but also offers authentic and quality, meaningful experiences.

It is noted that explaining sustainable practices and promoting responsible tourism are some of the practices that are discussed.

Technology and innovation in sustainability

In the end focus group participants concentrating on, "Technology and Innovation in Sustainability" comes up as a contemporary theme. Stakeholders remarked on the possible uses of digital technology and smart tourism in monitoring and managing environmental impact, as well as in optimizing destination management and providing tailored, sustainable experience. Planning and innovation driven by data are perceived more and more as core facilitators of sustainability.

SWOT ANALYSIS

INTERNAL FACTOR ANALYSIS (IFEM)

TABLE 1: INTERNAL FACTOR ANALYSIS (IFEM): STRENGTHS

INTERNAL FACTORS EVALUATION MATRIX				
S.No	STRENGTHS:	Rating	Weights	Weighted score
S1	The organization/destination has a clear and actionable sustainable tourism strategy.	3	0.076923	0.230769
S2	There is strong leadership commitment to environmental sustainability.	4	0.102564	0.410256
S3	Local tourism businesses actively collaborate on sustainability initiatives.	4	0.102564	0.410256
S4	Sustainable practices (e.g., the reduction, water conservation) are well integrated into daily operations.	3	0.076923	0.230769
S5	The destination has unique natural or cultural assets that attract responsible tourists.	4	0.102564	0.410256
S6	Staff are trained and motivated to support sustainability goals.	3	0.076923	0.230769

TABLE 2: INTERNAL FACTOR ANALYSIS (IFEM): WEAKNESSES

INTERNAL FACTORS EVALUATION MATRIX				
W.No	WEEKNESSES:	Ratings	Weights	Weighted score
W1	Lack of funding or investment in sustainable tourism infrastructure.	4	0.102564	0.410256
W2	Limited awareness or training among staff on sustainability practices.	3	0.076923	0.230769
W3	Poor coordination between public and private tourism stakeholders.	3	0.076923	0.230769
W4	Overdependence on mass tourism instead of diversified sustainable tourism models.	3	0.076923	0.230769
W5	Insufficient data collection or monitoring of environmental impacts.	3	0.076923	0.230769
W6	Inadequate communication of sustainability policies to tourists and stakeholders.	2	0.051282	0.102564
TOTAL			1.00	3.358971

INTERPRETATION OF IFEM

The IFE matrix provides a structured assessment of the internal strengths and weaknesses related to sustainable tourism at the destination/organization. The total weighted score from the matrix is **3.36**, which indicates that the destination has a strong internal position in supporting sustainable tourism development.

Table 1 illustrates the most important internal strengths an organization may possess.

- Very strong internal factors outweighing competitive pressures include strong leader's commitment to ecological sustainability & the active cooperation with other local performers in tourism (both 4's) which internal strength, sustainability & sustainable tourism each weighted 0.410
- Benevolently, the destination is enriched with specific natural/cultural attractions (3) which socially responsible travelers are more than eager to visit- this further consolidates the

competitive edge in sustainable tourism.

- Other favorable conditions are the clear sustainability framework & the integration of training.

In Table 2, although there is a strong internal foundation, a number of internal issues are recognized:

- The greatest weakness is the absence of financial resources or investments in the infrastructure of sustainable tourism (W1) which, having a weighted value of 0.410, shows the greatest need for attention.
- Other weaknesses include lack of awareness and training, inadequate internal stakeholder coordination, and overreliance on mass tourism, which are all associated with moderate internal environment risks.
- The communication of sustainability policies (W6), although the lowest weighted value, demonstrates a lack of stakeholder involvement and lack of educational initiatives for tourists.

EXTERNAL FACTOR ANALYSIS (EFEM)

TABLE 3: EXTERNAL FACTOR ANALYSIS (EFM): OPORTUNITIES

EXTERNAL FACTORS EVALUATION MATRIX				
O.No	OPPORTUNITIES:	Ratings	Weights	Weighted score
O1	Increasing global demand for eco-friendly travel experiences.	3	0.069768	0.209304
O2	Availability of government incentives or international grants for sustainability.	4	0.093024	0.372096
O3	Growing partnerships with NGOs and environmental organizations.	4	0.093024	0.372096
O4	Development of green technologies (e.g., energy-efficient transport, smart tourism tools).	4	0.093024	0.372096
O5	Expansion of sustainable tourism certification programs.	4	0.093024	0.372096
O6	Enhanced interest from tourists in community-based and cultural tourism.	4	0.093024	0.372096

TABLE 4: EXTERNAL FACTOR ANALYSIS (EFM): THREATS

T.No	THREATS:	Ratings	Weights	Weighted score
T1	Climate change and extreme weather affecting tourist seasons or destinations.	3	0.069768	0.209304
T2	Over-tourism causing environmental and cultural degradation.	3	0.069768	0.209304
T3	Political or economic instability impacting long-term planning.	4	0.093024	0.372096
T4	Lack of enforcement of environmental regulations.	3	0.069768	0.209304
T5	Global pandemics or health crises disrupting tourism.	4	0.102564	0.372096
T6	Competition from unsustainable low-cost tourism models.	3	0.069768	0.209304

TOTAL

1.00

3.651192

Interpretation of EFEM

The EFEM analyzes the key external opportunities and threats that influence the strategic direction of a destination or organization focused on sustainable tourism. The total weighted score is 3.65, which reflects a very favorable external environment for sustainable tourism development.

The matrix in Table 3 illustrates a number of significant external opportunities that the destination is able to take advantage of:

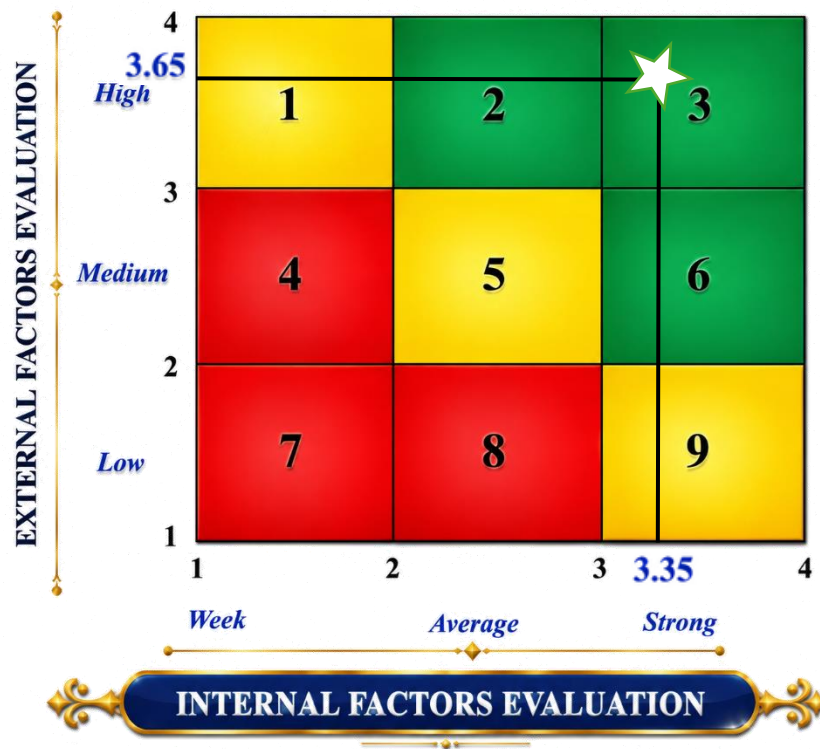
- Grants and funding by the government (O2), collaboration with NGOs (O3), development of green technologies (O4), green certification (O5), and interest in community-based tourism (O6) are all rated the highest with a score of 4 signifying that they are all very pertinent and tremendously influential.
- All of these highly rated opportunities are weighted with a score of 0.372 which is of equal and great significance, affirming that they are all strategically critical.
- Also the rising global market for green tourism (O1) has a positive contribution, although rated and weighted lower.

In general, the array of opportunities available is very positive, providing avenues for funding, technological enhancement, and greater interaction of tourists with sustainable practices.

The matrix in Table 4 has identified several external threats likely to hinder the success of sustainable tourism initiatives:

- Political and economic instability (T3) and global health crises (T5) are rated 4 and considered primary threats of high magnitude each receiving weighted scores of 0.372.
- Additional threats of climate change, over tourism, inadequate enforcement of regulations, and competition from models of sustainable tourism are all rated 3 and considered valuable impediments to the efforts toward sustainability.

All of the above suggest the importance of some form of strategic risk management, which would include thorough preparatory governance on crises, and market positioning against the competition for unsustainable tourism.



1	HARVEST & DIVEST	4, 7, 8
2	HOLD & MAINTAIN	1, 5, 9
3	GROW & BUILD	2, 3, 6

Interpretation of IEM

IE Matrix position (Cell 3) confirms that the destination/organization is in a high- growth, high-opportunity strategic zone. Leadership should confidently pursue expansion, innovation, and investment in sustainability to reinforce its competitive edge and long-term resilience.

Strategies

The following strategies for achieving sustainable development in tourism and tourist destinations derived from SWOT analysis (IFE & EFE Matrices), are organized using the TOWS Matrix approach matching Strengths (S) and Opportunities (O) to formulate growth strategies, and addressing Weaknesses (W) and Threats (T) to formulate corrective or defensive strategies.

SO strategies

(Using strengths to maximize opportunities)

Use internal strengths to exploit external opportunities:

1. Strengthen Public-private-NGO collaborations
 - Form and sustain long-term partnerships with NGOs and environmental organizations (O3) for technical support, co-marketing, and funding using strong leadership

commitment (S2) and active local business collaboration (S3). Use the Existing Clear Sustainable Tourism Strategy the the Sustainability Strategy for Green Certifications & Grants.

- Apply for government incentives and international sustainability grants (O2), and green certification programs (O5) to use the clear sustainable tourism strategy (S1).
2. Promote unique natural and/or cultural assets for eco tourism projects
 - To design and implement destination promotion (O1, O6) sustainable travel packages with eco-friendly and community-based tourism to the growing world (S5) demand.
 3. Integrate green technologies in tourism operations
 - Apply (O4) energy-efficient transport and smart tourism tools using integrated sustainability practices (S4), and leadership support (S2).

WO strategies

(Overcome weaknesses by using opportunities)

Minimize internal weaknesses by taking advantage of external opportunities:

1. Secure Funding for Sustainable Infrastructure Development
 - Address the lack of investment in sustainable tourism infrastructure (W1) by vigorously securing government grants and NGO funding (O2, O3). Implement Staff Training through NGO Collaborations
 - Resolve the restricted staff awareness and training issue (W2) by working with NGOs (O3) and certification bodies (O5) to develop capacity-building workshops and sustainability training. Promote Sustainable Alternatives to Mass Tourism
 - Reduce the overdependence on mass tourism (W4) by developing and advertising community-based and cultural tourism experiences (O6) on social media and through eco-certifications. Develop Data-Driven Monitoring Systems with Tech Support
 - Address the insufficient monitoring of environmental impacts (W5) by using intelligent technologies and digital tools (O4) for tracking, reporting, and managing sustainability.

ST strategies

(Counteract weaknesses by leveraging opportunities)

Minimize internal weaknesses by taking advantage of external opportunities, ST strategies (utilize strengths to diminish threats) (counter external threats by using internal strengths) to formulate crisis-resilient sustainable policies:

- S1, S2 strong sustainability, S1, S2 strong sustainability to develop crisis- resilient plans for tourism Position the Destination as a Sustainable Brand.
- S5, S4 Coupling the end site to an internationally recognized eco-tourism destination, using the geographic differentiation (S5) and certification (S4) to market it as a premium eco-tourism offering, thus avoiding the competitive corridor of unsustainable low-priced offers (T6). Increase Effectiveness of Collaborative Environmental Governance.
- S3 Use collaborative structures to enhance the enforcement of environmental policy (T4) and control the consequences of over-tourism (T2).

WT strategies (*Defensive strategies intended to mitigate internal weaknesses and eliminate external risks*)

Defensive strategies:

1. Enhancing stakeholders' communication and crisis readiness:
 - Focus on communication silos (W6) and political/health-related risks (T3, T5) by creating and deploying a unified communication strategy for tourists, employees, and

local stakeholders.

2. Set up a cross-industry sustainability council

- Reduce poor integration (W3) and lack of enforcement (T4) by establishing a destination-level sustainability council. This council will consist of government, business, and community leaders.

3. Broaden the range of tourism activities to the control of visitor distribution

- Diminish effects of over-tourism (T2) and dependence on mass tourism (W4) by supplying varied products (agricultural tourism, cultural heritage trails, shoulder season) to better control the flow of visitors.

CONCLUSION

Focus group participants underline that sustainable tourism should be regarded as an approach that integrates the mitigation of possible negative impacts on the environment and downtrodden local communities with the protection of the culture and the maximization of profit. The study also shows that the practice of sustainable tourism should add value to the traveler's experience as well as to the destination and all other participants of the value chain. This should be from a perspective of intergenerational and persistent returns.

Based on the SWOT analysis, the destination has the potential to dominate in the development of sustainable tourism. Strong internal (IFE score: 3.36) and supportive external (EFE score: 3.65) factors place the destination in the "Grow and Build" zone of the IE Matrix, which means the internal factors may be relied on to take advantage of external opportunities which is the case here. Sustainable tourism initiatives, funding, partnerships, and stakeholder engagement can be all be expanded. While there still exist internal weaknesses of inadequate investment and coordination, these weaknesses are surpassed in importance by committed leadership and collaboration and unique tourism assets.

To capitalize on external opportunities, the destination has to continue dominating in the development of sustainable tourism, along with managing key threats such as political instability and climate change. This can be done by smooth coordination of several key actions to reinforce the resilient, responsible, and forward-thinking global position in leadership of tourism in the world.

Recommendations are:

1. Strengthen the ecology practices Integrate new development and infrastructure under the operationalization of zero waste approach, renewable energies and eco-logical practices. In tourism development, develop policies and new programs that promote the use of more sustainable practices and green technologies, including smart tourism systems and clean mobility.
2. Preserve and Promote Cultural Heritage: Develop and promote tourism that fosters the safeguarding of the local culture, traditions, languages, and heritage sites, especially the world heritage sites. Work with cultural institutions to create original cultural tourism products that have educational value and promote cultural pride.
3. Ensure Economic both local and sustainable growth: Integrate local entrepreneurs and small businesses into the value chain of tourism developed to provide local, sustainable and responsible tourism. Reduce economic leakage by supporting the purchase of local products and services by foundation that promote sustainable development.
4. Secure Sustainable Tourism Funding: Look for government support and international grants to fill the infrastructure investment gap. Build alliance with NGOs and other organizations that promote sustainable development for technical and financial support.
5. Strengthen the Governance, Policy and Institutional Capacity: Implement and integrate tourism policies that have been developed with a long-term sustainability goal. Establish

inter-disciplinary sustainability councils that cut across government, private and civil society for the purpose of a coordinated approach to sustainable development.

6. Improve Internal and External Stakeholder Coordination and Communication: Integrated awareness campaigns support stakeholder communication to fill the gaps in internal communication. Enhance policy execution through strengthened Public-Private Partnerships on conservation works.
7. Improve Visitor Education and Experience: Integrate tourism interpretive and digital materials on the awareness and education of sustainability. Provide efficient and low-impact experiences to respond to the growing request for responsible tourism.
8. Apply the Adoption of Digital Transformation and Intelligent Systems: Implement digital systems to monitor and analyze the environmental impacts and visitation patterns. Integrate smart tourism approaches to optimize operations, reduce carbon footprints, and enhance responsible experience.
9. Improve the Ability to Anticipate and Prepare for External Shocks: Formulate appropriate mitigation plans to preemptive and reactive risks, and disruptions in politics, economy, and health, with a tourism crisis.
10. Diversification of tourism activities (i.e. agri-tourism, off peak season activities) to reduce dependence on the problem of overtourism, and the uncontrolled dispersal of visitors.
11. Broaden Community Participation and Empowerment: Create structures of participatory governance that improve the engagement of local people in the planning and decision-making of tourism development. Community-based tourism should promote and practice sustainable tourism that provides the community with social and economic benefits.

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