

Perceptions and Attitudes of Domestic Tourists toward Ecotourism

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Abstract: Although authorities are aware of the economic benefits of ecotourism, domestic tourism in Oman often fails to prioritise environmentally conscious visits to natural areas that incorporate observation and education. Without greater awareness, the preservation of these destinations will remain a mere aspiration. This study aimed to collect data on the perceptions and attitudes of local tourists towards ecotourism in Oman, focusing on three popular nature destinations from different governorates. To address the research problem, a mixed approach, along with the descriptive correlational design, was used. Over a month-long survey, primary data was collected from fifty respondents, revealing an overwhelmingly positive attitude towards ecotourism in Oman. The potential for ecotourism in the country was rated as 'High,' reflecting optimism about the future of the tourism sector. However, respondents also acknowledged that ecotourism can have a 'High' detrimental impact on the ecosystem. Economic and sociocultural implications were considered to be of 'Very High' importance. The positive perceptions and attitudes towards ecotourism in Oman were mainly driven by the economic and sociocultural benefits it offers. The results of this study indicate a promising outlook for ecotourism in Oman, as long as sustainable regulations are in place. Planning is crucial for every aspect of ecotourism, particularly regarding management, operation, and development. All goals related to preservation and conservation, as well as marketing and promotion, must be effectively communicated among stakeholders. The way in which Omani visitors perceive ecotourism is heavily influenced by economic considerations. Although ecotourism is viewed positively for its financial advantages for the nation and communities, concerns remain regarding the negative impacts of tourism development on the environment. It is therefore essential to focus on promoting sustainable growth in these areas without compromising the environment.

Keywords: Perceptions, Attitudes, Domestic tourism, Ecotourism, Visual Perception Theory (VPT), Functional Attitude Theory (FAT)

1. Background

As tourists become increasingly interested in vacationing in rural and natural communities, the popularity of traditional tourist destinations is waning. Instead, more people are turning to ecological travel, or ecotourism, which involves ethical travel to various natural sites that support environmental conservation, promote the well-being of local populations, and raise awareness about this particular tourism practice (International Ecotourism Society, 2019).

Oman, a Middle Eastern country renowned for its stunning sea, desert, and mountain landscapes, is among the many locations in which ecotourism has gained a foothold. According to Henderson (2014), Oman possesses a wealth of natural and cultural attractions, including beaches and sizable mountains, that make it an ideal ecotourism destination. However, to assess the viability of ecotourism in Oman, it is necessary to evaluate sustainability indicators related to the economy, socio-culture, and environment (Haddle, 2015).

1.1 Aim and Objectives

This study was carried out to examine the growth and development of ecotourism in Oman and assess how local tourists perceive and feel about tourism in natural destinations. The results of the study have formed the basis for drawing recommendations toward a more sustainable and responsible approach to ecotourism following the attainment of these research objectives: To determine the popular ecotourism destinations in Oman; To analyse the perceptions and attitudes of domestic tourists toward responsible ecotourism in the country; To appraise the potential impacts of tourism on the country's nature destinations in terms of economic, sociocultural, and environmental facets; and To formulate recommendations to promote responsible ecotourism in Oman.

1.2 Hypothesis

Based on the above-mentioned objectives, this study was hypothesized at a 0.05 level of significance such that: There are no significant relationships between the perceptions and attitudes of domestic tourists towards ecotourism in Oman and the potential economic, sociocultural, and environmental impacts.

1.3 Scope

The descriptive correlational design, which employs a quantitative approach, was applied in this inquiry to propose resolutions to the problems that have been raised. Three ecotourism sites were the focus of this

study, namely: Ras Al Hadd, Wakan Village, and Wadi Bani Khalid, which are all located in Oman. These destinations were recognized as the top three ecotourism destinations due to their accessibility and close proximity to the capital city Muscat. Data on the perceptions and attitudes of fifty (50) domestic tourists on ecotourism's possible impact on the identified places in terms of economic, sociocultural, and environmental factors were the study's main goals. The survey among local tourists lasted for a month.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Ecotourism: Contexts, Facets, Programmes, and Policies

Ecotourism tourism also referred to as ecological tourism, is the successful implementation of the different initiatives needed to create a sustainable tourism business. Ecotourism entails interacting with nature and is motivated by a desire to learn more about the attraction. This type of tourism is a subset of alternative tourism, which offers experiences that are different from the conventional forms of tourism. It is another alternative travel option that is connected to and supported by nature (Al-Riyami et al, 2017; Diogo et al, 2017; Blanza, 2020). Furthering this context of ecotourism, it is organised efforts by the host country, region, or community that commit to enhancing and preserving the destination through the help of the inhabitants. The host is responsible for planning initiatives to develop and preserve the location for ecotourism. Similar to this, a multitude of stakeholders can be included by putting in place a variety of procedures, such as publicising and promoting regulations or even using companies to support land management and development of ecotourism communities.

Ecotourism promotes distributing the advantages of development equitably by stimulating the economy's flexibility for expansion and maximising the potential of the host region through economic diversification. It is the combination of visiting and enjoying flora and fauna with the participation of the host communities in ethical travel. The main objective of this concept is to improve the image of tourism-related locations, businesses, and activities for the benefit of all parties while minimising environmental harm (Simkova and Kasal, 2012; Villepontoux, 2013; Wang et al, 2014). Examples of this include raising human living standards, increasing wildlife populations, and promoting the travel and tourism industry and all of its related sectors. With this goal in mind, the industry would be able to create a number of important approaches necessary for future expansion. The UN Global Sustainable Tourism Council listed various sustainability requirements for travel destinations, hotels, and tourism and hospitality SMEs in Oman. Ecotourism is a strategy that encourages tourists to visit natural areas responsibly while taking deliberate steps to protect and preserve the ecosystem. The strategy, (White, 2016; Oseid, 2017) must incorporate components that attract funding for conservation initiatives, give visitors priceless memories, and heighten their understanding of the social, political, and environmental situations in the nation they are visiting.

Ecotourism is a form of tourism used in Oman that promotes sustainable growth while maintaining the country's natural and cultural heritage. It promotes community participation and cooperation when it comes to managing and maintaining natural resources, cultural assets, and indigenous peoples' knowledge and customs. These programs serve as essential tools for people to preserve and protect the environment and give communities employment opportunities. For instance, traditional irrigation known as falaj irrigation is popular among tourists and this makes the local people aware of its significance and value (Zekri, 2011; Simkova & Kasal, 2012; THR, 2016; Palafox, 2017; Tatar, Herman, and Gozner, 2018).

2.2 Ecotourism in Oman

Oman's officials have identified four suitable locations for development as ecotourism destinations, offering a mix of seaside resorts, natural parks, and mountaintop camping grounds. The Environment Authority will supervise the construction of three of the four projects, with plans to build facilities for activities like mountain hiking, bird watching, and exploring the surrounding countryside. Investors can also consider creating walking paths and building stores to promote the sale of local products, antiques, and photography services.

Oman has ratified the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, supporting the country's focus on the ecotourism sector as one component of the tourism industry. The Omani Ministry of Heritage and Tourism and Ministry of Environment and Climate Affairs are supporting the nation's efforts to collaborate in nurturing responsible engagement in a wide range of natural resources, including world-class diving locations, beaches, oases, and mountains that host distinctive wildlife like the Arabian Oryx and sea turtles.

While the Omani government strongly supports the country's vast environmental diversity, there is a lack of published studies clarifying the country's existing ecotourism situation (Busaidi, 2018). The conservation of sea turtles and their habitat, the potential for oases to advance ecotourism, and some of the obstacles to this ambitious project have been linked to Oman's best achievement in this area (THR, 2016). Wadi Bani Khalid represents the greatest oasis, Ras Al Hadd is home to sea turtles, and Wakan Village represents traditional farming and agriculture - all subjects of this investigation.

However, the challenges posed by ecotourism developments make it difficult for the nation to maintain its commitment to preserving the authenticity of these destinations. As Sawjarah, an oasis village, is one such example cited by Busaidi (2018). This scenario is similar to Misfat al-Abryeen, where locals who engage in traditional farming and animal management have been encouraged to switch from conventional farming to commercial enterprise. There are intentions to turn the village into an ecotourism venture, but as the majority of them had already abandoned the oasis, it is challenging to maintain the authenticity of the destination.

The Middle East is a region where foreigners are commonly employed, and the majority of the migrant workforce comes from Southeast Asia. While measures are being taken to promote this business for locals and stop the flow of migrant labour, Oman rarely sees local interest in ecotourism jobs rising. As noted by Buerkert (2009), government subsidies, family remittances, and non-agricultural businesses usually provide the revenues. This is especially challenging if a large portion of the workers, such as those working for ecotourism businesses, are expats, as noted by Al Riyami et al (2017). This is particularly true for those parties involved who work outside of government, as noted by THR (2016).

2.3 Ecotourism: Perceptions, Attitudes, and Theories

The investigation in question is based on the foundation of two theories: Visual Perception Theory (VPT) and Functional Attitude Theory (FAT). VPT relates to sensory data acquired through the five senses, such as sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch, with the organs like nose, ear, and eyes playing a crucial role in absorbing information from the environment. The sensory system then interprets this data and transmits it to the brain. VPT explains how physical energy received by sense organs leads to perceptual experience, turning sensory inputs into perceptions of objects.

On the other hand, FAT asserts that attitudes impact several psychological functions, including utilitarianism, sociability, connectedness to values, and reducing cognitive dissonance. Attitudes can be helpful and promote social engagement, and the significance of the attitude is more important than its truthfulness or accuracy. In this study, respondents' opinions regarding the economic, sociocultural, and environmental effects of ecotourism will be analyzed in light of these two theories.

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the ecotourism industry's target market from international to domestic, and demographic factors such as age and gender can impact visitors' perceptions and opinions. Individuals have different interests and perspectives towards ecotourism, and internal and external motivators influence their perceptions. Primary stakeholders include local and national public and private institutions, while secondary stakeholders include non-tourist businesses and destination management organizations.

According to Seddon and Khoja (2013), successful ecotourism activities are the result of carefully managed areas, where locals play a crucial role in cooperation with concerned parties, leading to benefits and advantages for all stakeholders. Therefore, cooperation among all parties involved is crucial to achieving the desired outcomes.

2.4 Ecotourism Perspectives: Economic, Sociocultural, and Environmental

According to various studies (Pereira and Mykletun, 2012; Palafox, 2017), ecotourism is increasingly being embraced by developing countries like Oman due to its potential for sustainable development. The primary objective of ecotourism is to educate visitors on the natural surroundings, plant and animal ecosystems, and cultural heritage. This approach can be effective if supported by appropriate laws and regulations. The process of refining natural resources into tourist offerings that draw visitors to the region is referred to as ecotourism, and it focuses on economic growth through the exploration of natural resources, cultural heritage, and rural lifestyles (Simkova & Kasal, 2012; Tisdell, 2013).

In Oman, ecotourism is recognized as a potential source of sustainable income for the local population, accelerating the growth and development of communities (Teguh, 2011). The UNWTO (2015) has highlighted that ecotourism's purpose is to ensure sustainable use while protecting resources, particularly biological diversity, providing tourists with an ecological experience while also generating income and preserving the

environment. However, the viability of ecotourism objectives from economic, environmental, and ecological perspectives in Oman remains a question. Ecotourism has contributed to the preservation of biodiversity in Oman, which is crucial for maintaining human welfare. It promotes local engagement, ownership, and potential resource reduction, all of which enhance locals' business opportunities (Wang, 2010).

3. Methodology

The main objective of this study was to examine the perceptions and attitudes of local tourists towards the expansion of ecotourism in Oman, using both qualitative and quantitative research methods. The qualitative approach involved gathering responses from a focus group, while the quantitative approach used a survey questionnaire to collect primary data. The descriptive research design was used to complement these approaches and allow for the determination of the impacts of ecotourism growth on Oman as perceived by domestic tourists. The survey included 50 domestic tourists residing in Muscat City, Oman at the time of the study, who were identified using convenience sampling, which allowed for voluntary participation based on the availability and convenience of volunteers.

The survey questionnaire was divided into three parts. Part 1 collected demographic information on the respondents, while Part 2 gathered opinions on the potential impacts of tourism growth on the economy, sociocultural, and environmental aspects. Part 3 measured the respondents' attitudes and views towards the expansion of ecotourism. Parts 2 and 3 of the questionnaire consisted of both open-ended and five-point Likert scale questions. An interview was also conducted to validate some of the coded questions from the survey questionnaire. Additionally, a focus group of six participants, equally representing each of the three ecotourism sites, was interviewed according to a prepared schedule.

Table 1: Continuum and Verbal Interpretations for Perceptions and Attitudes

Score	Responses	Scale	Verbal Interpretations
5	Strongly Agree	4.51-5.00	Extremely Favourable
4	Agree	3.51-4.50	Highly Favourable
3	Moderately Agree	2.51-3.50	Moderately Favourable
2	Disagree	1.51-2.50	Fairly Favourable
1	Strongly Disagree	1.00-1.49	Not Favourable

Table 2: Potential Impacts of Ecotourism in terms of Economic, Socio-Cultural and Environment Facets

Score	Responses	Scale	Verbal Interpretations
5	Strongly Agree	4.51-5.00	Very High
4	Agree	3.51-4.50	High
3	Moderately Agree	2.51-3.50	Moderate
2	Disagree	1.51-2.50	Low
1	Strongly Disagree	1.00-1.50	Very Low

- To ensure the validity and reliability of the survey questionnaire, a pilot test was conducted with a sample of twenty respondents who shared similar characteristics with the target population. These pilot test respondents were excluded from the final sample. A reliability test was also conducted by a professional statistician to assess the internal consistency of the questionnaire. Results of the reliability test indicated a high level of reliability, with Cronbach alpha values of 0.88 (part 2) and 0.82 (part 3).
- To simplify the data collection process, the survey questionnaire was created using Google Forms and distributed to participants via email and social media platforms. The quantitative data collected were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, including Spearman's correlation, mean, frequency distribution, rank, and standard deviation. The significance level for the study's hypothesis testing was set at 0.05 alpha.
- Data preparation and analysis were conducted using SPSS, which produced descriptive results presented in tables and figures. Qualitative data collected from Ministries' websites were presented

in a narrative format. The interview transcripts were analyzed using a thematic method, and findings were presented in a clear and concise manner.

- The study followed rigorous and systematic methods to ensure the validity and reliability of the questionnaire and data analysis techniques used. These methods are essential to obtain accurate and reliable results that can be used to inform policy and decision-making processes.

4. Results of Quantitative Analysis

Table 3: Most Visited Ecotourism Site by the Local Tourists

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

- This investigation focused on three ecotourism destinations in Oman: Ras Al Hadd, Wakan Village, and Wadi Bani Khalid. The study aimed to identify the most popular ecotourism destination among domestic tourists in Oman.
- The results of the investigation showed that Ras Al Hadd was the most visited ecotourism destination, with a frequency score of $f=48$ and a rank of 1. This finding suggests that Ras Al Hadd has a strong appeal to domestic tourists, which can be attributed to its unique natural features, cultural heritage, and accessibility. Ras Al Hadd is known for its pristine beaches, marine wildlife, and turtle nesting sites, which provide visitors with a memorable and authentic ecotourism experience.
- Wakan Village ranked second in popularity, with a frequency score of $f=46$ and a rank of 2. Wakan Village is located in Al Batinah and is known for its traditional architecture, agricultural terraces, and scenic landscapes. The village's cultural and historical significance, coupled with its natural beauty, makes it an attractive destination for domestic tourists who seek an authentic and immersive cultural experience.
- Wadi Bani Khalid placed third in popularity, with a frequency score of $f=45$ and a rank of 3. Wadi Bani Khalid is situated in Oman's Wahiba Sands Deserts and is famous for its crystal-clear pools, lush vegetation, and scenic mountain views. The wadi's unique geological features and natural beauty make it a popular destination for outdoor enthusiasts and nature lovers.
- The findings of this investigation have significant implications for the development and promotion of ecotourism in Oman. The results suggest that Ras Al Hadd, Wakan Village, and Wadi Bani Khalid are valuable ecotourism assets that can attract domestic and international visitors to Oman.

Table 4: The Perceptions and Attitudes of Domestic Tourists Toward Ecotourism in Oman

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

- The use of mean and standard deviation to determine dispersion in domestic tourists' perceptions and attitudes toward the ecotourism destinations in Oman revealed that overall, their perceptions and attitudes are "Extremely Favourable." The obtained mean scores of 4.51 and 5.00 on the scale indicate that the domestic tourists had a positive view of the three ecotourism destinations individually and as a group.
- The small range of standard deviations, ranging from 0.3966 to 0.5111, implies that there was little variation across the means, indicating that the responses of the domestic tourists were consistent. This finding suggests that domestic tourists have similar perceptions and attitudes toward the ecotourism destinations in Oman and that their views are collectively favourable.
- Furthermore, the findings indicate that the three ecotourism destinations were perceived to have equitable features of an ideal ecotourism destination. This implies that each destination offers a unique and attractive experience that appeals to different types of ecotourists. The positive attitudes toward the development of the ecotourism destinations also suggest that domestic

tourists value the sustainable development and preservation of the natural and cultural heritage of these destinations.

- The implications of these findings are significant for the sustainable development and promotion of ecotourism in Oman. The positive perceptions and attitudes of domestic tourists toward the three ecotourism destinations in Oman suggest that there is a potential for the growth of ecotourism in the country. The findings suggest that policymakers and tourism stakeholders should prioritize the sustainable development and promotion of these destinations to attract more domestic and international tourists to Oman. By doing so, Oman can benefit from the economic, environmental, and socio-cultural advantages of ecotourism while preserving its natural and cultural heritage.

Table 5: Potential Impacts of Ecotourism Destinations in Oman In Terms of Economic, Sociocultural, And Environmental Facets

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

- The mean score of M=4.4 indicates that ecotourism is perceived to have a "High" impact on the overall state of the tourism industry in Oman. This finding suggests that ecotourism is considered an essential component of Oman's tourism industry, which has the potential to contribute significantly to the country's economic growth and development.
- The economic implications of ecotourism were ranked "Very High" with a mean score of M=4.55, indicating that respondents perceived ecotourism as beneficial to the economy. This finding suggests that ecotourism has significant economic potential in Oman, and policymakers and tourism stakeholders should prioritize sustainable ecotourism development to maximize its economic benefits.
- The study also found that ecotourism has "Very High" potential impacts on the sociocultural well-being of the locals, with a mean score of M=4.76. However, the study also identified a potential negative impact on traditional farming practices as farmers shift to commercial enterprises due to the perceived economic opportunities presented by ecotourism. Therefore, policymakers and tourism stakeholders should consider the potential sociocultural impacts of ecotourism on local communities and work towards mitigating any negative effects.
- The perception of the environmental impact of ecotourism was also analyzed, with a mean score of M=3.98 indicating that ecotourism is perceived to have a "High" environmental impact. This finding highlights the need for sustainable ecotourism practices that minimize environmental disturbance, including carbon footprint, artificial landscaping, pollution, mass tourism, and overdevelopment.
- The implications of this study emphasize the importance of sustainable ecotourism development that balances economic benefits with sociocultural and environmental considerations.

Table 6: The Relationship Between the Perception and Attitudes of the Domestic Tourist Towards Ecotourism in Oman and the Potential Impacts of These Sites on Economic, Sociocultural, and Environmental Facets

Independent Variable	Dependent Variables	Spearman's rho	p value
Perception and Attitudes	Economic Impact	0.888	0.000
	Socio Cultural Impact	0.765	0.000
	Environmental Impact	0.675	0.000
	Overall Impact	0.776	0.000

- The study conducted a Spearman's correlation analysis to determine the relationship between domestic tourists' perceptions and attitudes toward ecotourism destinations in Oman and their potential implications on the tourism industry in terms of economic, sociocultural, and environmental factors. The results showed a strong correlation between the two variables, with Spearman's correlation coefficient values of 0.888 for economic impacts, 0.765 for sociocultural impacts, 0.675 for environmental impacts, and 0.888 for overall impacts (0.776). The obtained p values of 0.000 were less than 0.05, indicating that the correlation between perceptions and attitudes and prospective economic, sociocultural, environmental, and overall implications was significant.
- These findings suggest that domestic tourists' perceptions and attitudes toward ecotourism destinations in Oman have a significant influence on the potential implications of ecotourism on the tourism industry in the country. The rejection of the null hypothesis that there are no significant relationships between these variables indicates that there is a meaningful association between the two. Therefore, policymakers and tourism stakeholders should prioritize understanding and addressing the perceptions and attitudes of domestic tourists towards ecotourism destinations in Oman to maximize the potential positive impacts of ecotourism on the tourism industry.
- The findings of this study highlight the importance of sustainable ecotourism development and promotion in Oman. Policymakers and tourism stakeholders should consider the economic, sociocultural, and environmental implications of ecotourism and work towards sustainable development that maximizes the benefits of ecotourism while minimizing its negative impacts. By doing so, Oman can strengthen its position as a leading ecotourism destination in the region while preserving its natural and cultural heritage for future generations.

5. Findings of the Qualitative Analysis

5.1 What Factors do you Consider for Choosing an Ecotourism Destination?

- During the interviews, participants were asked about the factors they consider when choosing an ecotourism destination. The most frequently mentioned considerations were accessibility, convenience, safety, services, cultural significance, educational opportunities, and exciting aspects. These considerations were ranked based on how often they were mentioned.
- The most frequently mentioned factor was accessibility, with participants emphasizing the importance of proximity to the city where the airport of entry is located. This finding suggests that tourists prioritize ease of access when choosing an ecotourism destination. The second most frequently mentioned factor was convenience, which encompasses factors such as ease of transportation, accommodation, and availability of amenities.
- Safety was also considered an important factor, with participants mentioning the importance of feeling safe and secure while visiting ecotourism destinations. Services such as guided tours, facilities, and infrastructure were also mentioned as essential considerations when choosing an ecotourism destination.
- Participants also highlighted the cultural significance of the destination as an important factor, with many expressing a desire to learn about the local culture and traditions. Educational opportunities were also deemed significant, with participants expressing an interest in learning about the natural environment, ecology, and wildlife of the destination. Exciting aspects such as adventure activities, scenic views, and unique experiences were also mentioned as important considerations when choosing an ecotourism destination.
- These findings suggest that tourists consider a range of factors when choosing an ecotourism destination, with accessibility and convenience being the most frequently mentioned factors. Policymakers and tourism stakeholders should prioritize the development of ecotourism destinations that offer a range of amenities, services, and experiences that meet the needs and expectations of tourists while prioritizing sustainable and responsible tourism practices.

5.2 Do you think the Ecotourism Destinations in Oman are Properly Protected From Visitors?

- The study found that despite the presence of warning signs in ecotourism destinations in Oman, there is still a prevalence of irresponsible behavior among tourists that could potentially harm the environment and ecosystem. The number of warning signs is also relatively low, with the majority of them having nothing to do with environmental protection.

- One example of this is the use of soap and shampoo by swimmers in the crystal-clear waters of Wadi Bani Khalid, which could pollute the water and endanger the flora and fauna. Similarly, tourists in Ras Al Hadd have been observed collecting baby turtles despite warnings, which could drive the animals away from the sanctuary. The study found that despite the existence of strict penalties, tourists' lack of awareness of existing laws and disregard for the environment remains a concern.
- The sociocultural impact of ecotourism was also observed in Wakan Village, where traditional farming practices have been abandoned in favor of commercial enterprise to meet the growing demand for goods and services. This shift in livelihood could potentially have a long-term impact on the local community's social and cultural practices and identity.
- These findings suggest that ecotourism development and promotion must prioritize sustainable and responsible tourism practices that protect the environment and respect local cultures and traditions. The study recommends increasing the number and visibility of warning signs, raising awareness among tourists about the potential environmental impacts of their actions, and providing educational opportunities on responsible ecotourism practices.
- Furthermore, policymakers and tourism stakeholders should consider the potential sociocultural impacts of ecotourism on local communities and work towards mitigating any negative effects. This includes supporting traditional farming practices and promoting local cultural heritage and identity as part of the ecotourism experience.

5.3 Between Ecotourism and Economic Impact, Socio-Cultural Impact, and Environmental Impact, What Would you Choose?

- The study found that all six participants expressed favourable attitudes towards ecotourism development despite acknowledging its potential negative impacts on the environment and social norms. The participants believed that the economic benefits of ecotourism outweighed its negative impacts, particularly during the current period of economic diversification and high unemployment caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.
- The participants advocated for unwavering progress in protecting and conserving the environment to support ecotourism for future generations. They believed that ecotourism could provide economic opportunities for local communities while preserving the natural and cultural heritage of Oman. The participants emphasized the importance of sustainable ecotourism development that prioritizes responsible tourism practices, education, and awareness-raising initiatives to minimize negative impacts on the environment and social norms.
- These findings suggest that there is a need for continued dialogue and collaboration between policymakers, tourism stakeholders, and local communities to ensure that ecotourism development is sustainable, responsible, and benefits both the economy and the environment. It is essential to balance the economic benefits of ecotourism with the need to protect and conserve the environment and preserve local cultures and traditions. By doing so, Oman can strengthen its position as a leading ecotourism destination while promoting sustainable development for future generations.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

- The study suggests that raising awareness is crucial to maintaining ecotourism destinations in their original state. The high rating of Oman's ecotourism potential could have a significant effect on the growth of the travel and tourism industry. However, the study also highlights that ecotourism can have a high negative impact on the ecosystem, and that economic implications should not overshadow environmental concerns.
- The management of ecotourism sites must encourage sustainable growth and be strengthened and coordinated with various stakeholders. Long-term investment strategies are required to sustain and maintain the welfare of the stakeholders, including the environment, local communities, and tourists. This includes the development of environmental rules, conservation and preservation policies, and ongoing monitoring and improvement of management and operations.
- The study also highlights the sociocultural impacts of ecotourism, including the abandonment of traditional farming as farmers switch to commercial enterprises. Policymakers and tourism stakeholders must consider the potential sociocultural impacts of ecotourism on local communities and work towards mitigating any negative effects.

- It is essential to balance the economic benefits of ecotourism with the need to protect and conserve the environment and preserve local cultures and traditions. Oman's ecotourism destinations, including Wakan Village, Ras Al Hadd, and Wadi Bani Khalid, have gained popularity as prime destinations for ecotourism. Still, other ecotourism sites should receive an equal level of attention and development.
- In conclusion, the study recommends the promotion of sustainable and responsible ecotourism practices that prioritize environmental protection, local cultural heritage, and economic development. By doing so, Oman can strengthen its position as a leading ecotourism destination while promoting sustainable development for future generations.

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