



# Balancing Tradition and Tourism: Omani Residents' perception towards Sustainable Cultural Tourism

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“Throughout our country’s glorious history, **the world has known Oman as an influential cultural entity**, which promoted the region’s growth and prosperity, and security and peace..... we are committed to sustain this approach, with you and by you, so that we could together perform, with firm will, **our cultural role** and historic mission”

Al Said

- His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq





- **Tourism is a vital industry in Oman** and is undergoing a dynamic transformation with the government laying a **strategic focus** on it.
- As intended in Oman Vision 2040, newer avenues are opening as **Oman's authentic cultural heritage is seamlessly blended into various tourism activities.**
- Offering glimpse into **its rich past, cultural tourism** is creating unique experiences to tourists arriving to Oman from all over the world.





Culture and tourism have always been **inextricably linked** (Richards, 2018).

Recent decades have witnessed **extensive, worldwide growth** in cultural tourism (Weng, Liang, & Bao, 2020).

There is a demand for studies on cultural tourism destinations in developing countries since **scant research** has been conducted in the field (García-Villaverde, Elche, & Martínez-Pérez, 2020).





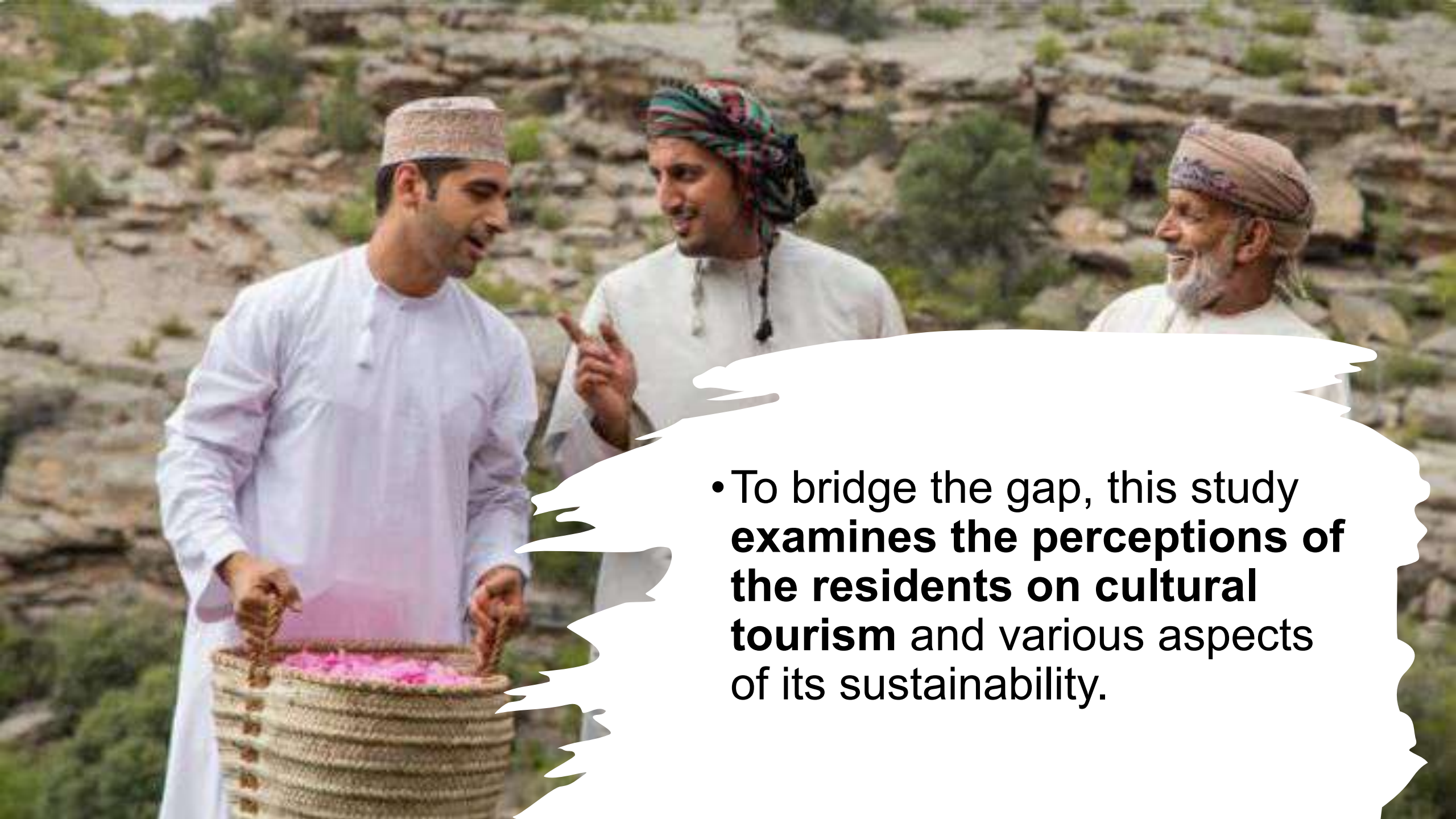
- According to **social exchange theory**, residents usually weigh their own **costs and benefits** of tourism development.
- The **perceptions of residents**, whose lives are deeply rooted in the culture, should be considered to sustain a conducive environment for cultural tourism.



- Tourism must be developed purposefully and sustainably through a **right balance between environmental, economic and social aims of society** (Streimikiene et al., 2021).
- The **direct and indirect support of residents** in developing and management of any sustainable tourism initiative is of paramount importance (Birkic et al., 2019).
- Their attitude and perception have a **robust and direct association** with tourism and sustainability (Nicholas, Thapa and Ko, 2009).







- To bridge the gap, this study **examines the perceptions of the residents on cultural tourism** and various aspects of its sustainability.





- Adapting a **qualitative approach**, in-depth individual **interviews** were conducted to gather first hand, authentic data from **one hundred and eight** consented residents purposely selected from **culturally rich** governorates of **Muscat, A'Dakhiliyah, Musandam, Dhofar and Al Batinah**.





- The **one-to-one interviews** lasted for about an hour. All of them have **voluntarily agreed** to participate.
- Efforts were made to create a conducive environment to help the respondents feel comfortable participating in the interview. **Necessary ethical concerns** were also taken into consideration.
- **Open-ended questions** with prompts at appropriate times ensured that the right and rich data was collected. Additional questions were asked wherever necessary to fill the gaps in the collected data.





- A **structured thematic analysis** was performed on the interview data using NVivo software.
- To enhance the credibility of the results, **member checking** was done by returning the results to the participants to confirm whether they **reflected their views and for accuracy**.
- The results were then shared with two qualified researchers to assess the methodology and findings. This **peer debriefing technique** eliminated bias and assumptions, if any while **enhancing the reliability** of the research.



The **Royal Opera House** is a venue for musical arts and culture, while the **Grand Mosque** is a place of worship and a cultural hub.

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The **National Museum** in Oman's capital Muscat features exhibits highlighting **Omani cultural heritage**





**Sumhuram and Al-Balid** in Dhofar present **Oman's rich cultural heritage**, particularly its role in the frankincense trade and the ancient maritime trade networks.





The **Khanjar or Dagger**, a part of the national emblem, is a beautiful piece of art that **symbolizes the very soul of the Oman** - beautiful, tough and eternal..



The **Cuisine of Oman** is about flavors, ingredients, and the **deep-rooted cultural practices surrounding food**. Halwa and Kahwa holds a special place as they are a symbol of hospitality.

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The ancient and ingenious **Aflaj** irrigation systems prominent in Oman is not just a technological marvel but also a testament to sustainable water management practices and community cooperation.







Oman's maritime history spans over 5,000 years.

**Dhows**—traditional sailing vessels vital for trade, fishing, and transportation across the Indian Ocean.

The legendary figure of Sinbad the Sailor embodies the nation's enduring spirit of exploration and adventure.



Nizwa Fort in Al Dhakiriyah Governorate is a masterpiece of **traditional Omani** architecture



A large, gnarled Boswellia tree stands prominently in the foreground on a rocky, sloping hillside. The tree has a thick, dark trunk and a dense, green canopy. In the background, another similar tree is visible on a distant slope. The landscape is arid and mountainous, with a hazy sky above.

The precious resin is tapped from the Boswellia trees of mountainous Dhofar is the source of the **world's finest frankincense**. It has sweet, earthy aroma always on the breeze in hotels, or in the courtyards of private homes in Oman.





**Khasab Castle**  
in the  
Musandam  
Governorate was  
built by the  
Portuguese





**Nakhal's hot water**  
springs, in Al  
Batinah,  
surrounded by  
some of the best  
landscapes is one  
of the most  
popular tourist  
sites in Oman.



**Daba** in Musanadam represents unique assemblage for wealth and quality helping us to understand the early Arabian civilization.







- The findings reveal that Omani residents, regardless of their **geographic locations**, are **supportive of cultural tourism**.
- Considering it as an established **social practice**, they opine that it plays an important part in local economic development while **promoting tangible and intangible cultural heritage**.

- The residents' take pride in their culture and feel that a **balanced culture–tourism relationship** helps build social capital.
- They believe that it **enriches tourism offerings** and results in preservation and **meaningful interpretation of their culture.**







- Residents also cautioned that cultural tourism is a **double-edged sword** and has sometimes **unintended negative outcomes**.
- They consider that excessive **commodification of culture** and over tourism can erode the distinct cultural atmosphere leading to **substantial social costs**.
- They are wary about the



- To address these challenges, they feel that **resident empowerment** is the key.
- Their knowledge and participation at multiple levels of decision making, and implementation is imperative to **co-create value**.
- The residents are of the opinion that a **holistic approach** must be adopted as cultural tourism involves a complex set of factors.



- They suggest that **advanced technologies** can be leveraged to analyse data from multiple stakeholders to **develop tailored initiatives**.

- Further, they strongly believe that existing **localisation efforts and entrepreneurial initiatives** need to be **integrated with tourism initiatives** for synergistic benefits.







Thank you!



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