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# ECONOMIC CHALLENGES OF TOURISM INVESTMENT IN THE SULTANATE OF OMAN: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF LOCAL AND FOREIGN INVESTMENT

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## ABSTRACT

*Tourism investment is a key pillar in the economic diversification strategy of the Sultanate of Oman, aiming to reduce the country's heavy dependence on oil revenues. However, both local and foreign tourism investors face multiple economic, regulatory, and infrastructural challenges that impact their ability to operate and expand effectively. This study provides a comparative analysis of the challenges encountered by local and foreign investors in Oman's tourism sector, highlighting the key barriers that hinder investment growth and sustainability. The research employs a qualitative approach, utilizing semi-structured interviews with local and foreign investors, tourism policymakers, and industry experts. Data is analyzed using content analysis methods, supported by NVivo software to extract key themes and insights. The findings indicate that local investors primarily struggle with limited access to financing, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and inadequate tourism infrastructure, which restricts their growth potential. On the other hand, foreign investors face stringent entry regulations, profit repatriation restrictions, and complexities in obtaining operational licenses, despite benefiting from better financial incentives and stronger access to international capital markets. Additionally, infrastructure deficiencies, particularly in transportation and hospitality services, were identified as a major obstacle affecting both local and foreign investors. A comparative performance analysis between local and foreign investments reveals that foreign investors exhibit higher capital inflows, better scalability, and international market reach, whereas local investors demonstrate a deeper understanding of the domestic market and cultural alignment, but with significant financial and regulatory limitations. Based on these findings, the study proposes policy recommendations aimed at improving the tourism investment climate in Oman. These include streamlining regulatory frameworks, enhancing financial support mechanisms for local investors, developing tourism-related infrastructure, and fostering public-private partnerships to encourage investment collaboration. This research contributes to the growing literature on tourism investment challenges in emerging economies and provides policymakers with strategic insights to enhance the attractiveness of Oman's tourism sector for both local and foreign investors. Future research could extend this study by incorporating a quantitative analysis of investment returns and assessing the long-term impact of policy changes on investment performance in the tourism sector.*

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**KEYWORDS:** Tourism Investment, Economic Challenges, Foreign Investment, Local Investment, Oman, Economic Diversification, Infrastructure, Regulatory Barriers.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Background and Research Gap

Tourism is increasingly recognized as a key driver of economic growth and diversification, particularly in resource-dependent economies such as the Sultanate of Oman. The Omani government has actively promoted tourism investment as part of Vision 2040, a long-term economic strategy aimed at reducing dependence on oil revenues and fostering a more sustainable and diversified economy [1]. Despite these efforts, tourism investment in Oman faces multiple challenges, particularly for local and foreign investors who encounter economic, regulatory, and infrastructural barriers that limit growth and profitability [2]. While numerous studies have explored the economic significance of tourism in Oman, limited research has conducted a comparative analysis of the challenges facing local versus foreign tourism investors. Most existing literature focuses on general tourism development, investment policies, or financial constraints without examining the differences in barriers encountered by domestic and international stakeholders [3]. This study aims to fill this gap by conducting a comparative investigation of the economic challenges hindering local and foreign tourism investments in Oman, identifying key differences, and proposing targeted policy recommendations.

### 1.2. Research Problem

The tourism sector in Oman presents a paradox: while the country offers significant investment opportunities, investors—both local and foreign—face persistent barriers that hinder business operations and expansion. The key research problem is: What are the economic challenges facing local and foreign tourism investments in Oman, and how do these challenges differ between the two groups? By addressing this question, the study seeks to provide a clear comparative perspective on the investment climate and identify which challenges affect local investors more than foreign investors and vice versa.

### 1.3. Research Objectives

The main objectives of this research are to:

1. Analyze the major economic, regulatory, and infrastructural challenges faced by tourism investors in Oman.
2. Compare and contrast the barriers encountered by local versus foreign investors in terms of market entry, financial accessibility, and operational constraints.
3. Assess the impact of these challenges on investment

performance and sustainability in Oman's tourism sector.

4. Propose strategic policy recommendations to enhance the attractiveness and competitiveness of Oman's tourism investment environment.

### 1.4 Research Significance

This study is significant for several reasons:

1. Economic Diversification Relevance: Oman's heavy reliance on oil revenues has made economic diversification a national priority. Tourism is one of the key sectors expected to contribute to GDP growth, employment generation, and foreign direct investment (FDI) attraction [4]. By understanding the barriers to tourism investment, policymakers can design more effective strategies to accelerate sectoral growth.
2. Policy Implications: Identifying and comparing the challenges faced by local and foreign investors will help the Omani government refine its investment policies and create a more balanced, competitive, and attractive investment climate [5].
3. Practical Relevance for Investors: The findings will provide valuable insights for both local entrepreneurs and international investors seeking to enter or expand within the Omani tourism market. Understanding key investment risks and policy inefficiencies can help investors make informed decisions regarding business expansion, market entry, and strategic partnerships.
4. Bridging the Research Gap: The comparative approach adopted in this study enhances existing literature by providing a dual-perspective analysis, offering a more nuanced understanding of investment challenges beyond the typical focus on either local or foreign investment separately [6].

### 1.5. Research Questions

To achieve the study's objectives, the following research questions will be explored:

1. What are the key economic, regulatory, and infrastructural challenges faced by tourism investors in Oman?
2. How do these challenges differ between local and foreign investors?
3. What are the implications of these challenges on investment performance and sustainability?
4. What policy interventions can be implemented to improve the investment climate for both local and foreign tourism investors?

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1 Concept of Tourism Investment

Tourism investment refers to the allocation of

financial resources into tourism-related infrastructure, services, and facilities to support and enhance the tourism industry. This includes investments in hotels, resorts, transportation networks, entertainment facilities, cultural sites, and eco-tourism projects. Tourism investment plays a critical role in stimulating economic growth, creating employment opportunities, and improving the overall competitiveness of a destination [1]. Countries that strategically develop their tourism sectors often experience increased foreign direct investment (FDI), higher GDP contributions from tourism, and a more diversified economy [2]. Investment in the tourism sector can be classified into domestic investment, where local investors fund tourism projects, and foreign investment, which involves international entities bringing capital into the host country. Both investment types are essential for sustainable tourism growth, yet they face different sets of challenges. Domestic investors may struggle with limited financial resources, market competition, and policy constraints, while foreign investors often encounter entry barriers, regulatory restrictions, and cultural adaptation issues [3]. Understanding the dynamics of these challenges is crucial for developing effective investment policies that support both local and international stakeholders in the tourism industry.

## **2.2. Key Economic Challenges in Tourism Investment**

Despite the potential benefits, tourism investment faces several economic challenges that hinder sectoral growth and sustainability. These challenges include regulatory barriers, infrastructure limitations, financial constraints, and market risks.

### **2.2.1 Regulatory and Bureaucratic Barriers**

Regulatory challenges are among the most significant obstacles to tourism investment, particularly in emerging markets. Government policies and legal frameworks dictate licensing procedures, land acquisition regulations, environmental compliance requirements, and tax policies, all of which can either facilitate or hinder investment flows. Studies have shown that excessive bureaucracy and lengthy approval processes discourage both local and foreign investors, leading to slower tourism sector development [4]. For foreign investors, restrictions on land ownership, repatriation of profits, and visa regulations often act as deterrents to long-term investment commitments [5]. Similarly, local investors may face inconsistent policy enforcement, limited government support,

and unclear investment guidelines, which reduce investor confidence. Addressing these regulatory bottlenecks is essential for fostering a more attractive investment climate in the tourism industry.

### **2.2.2 Infrastructure and Logistics Barriers**

A well-developed infrastructure is fundamental for the success of tourism investments. Infrastructure in the tourism sector includes transportation networks (airports, roads, ports), hospitality services (hotels, resorts, restaurants), and tourist attractions (cultural heritage sites, nature reserves, entertainment hubs). Poor infrastructure quality can severely limit the potential of a destination to attract and retain tourists, thereby discouraging investment [6]. In Oman, challenges such as insufficient public transport connectivity, lack of high-quality accommodation, and underdeveloped tourism facilities have been cited as key barriers to investment growth [7]. Foreign investors may hesitate to enter markets with inadequate infrastructure, while local investors often struggle to finance large-scale infrastructure projects without government support. The development of smart tourism infrastructure, digital tourism services, and integrated transport networks could significantly enhance Oman's attractiveness to investors.

### **2.2.3 Financial Constraints and Access to Capital**

Access to financial resources is another critical challenge affecting tourism investment. Many local investors face difficulties in obtaining loans, high interest rates, and limited government funding programs, which restrict their ability to expand tourism businesses [8]. The tourism sector is capital-intensive, requiring significant upfront investment in land acquisition, construction, marketing, and operational costs. Without adequate financing mechanisms, investment stagnation occurs, limiting industry growth. Foreign investors, while generally having better access to global capital markets, may encounter restrictions on capital transfers, high taxation policies, and currency exchange risks in host countries. Research indicates that government incentives such as tax breaks, investment grants, and public-private partnership (PPP) models can improve access to capital and encourage sustained tourism investments [9]. In Oman, policies aimed at enhancing financing options for local investors could contribute to a more balanced and inclusive investment environment.

### **2.2.4 Market Risks and Investment Uncertainty**

Tourism investments are inherently subject to

market risks, including fluctuations in tourist demand, geopolitical instability, economic downturns, and global crises such as pandemics. The COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, severely impacted tourism investments worldwide, leading to business closures, project cancellations, and reduced investor confidence [10]. For local investors, market risks are particularly challenging due to the lack of financial reserves and market diversification options. Foreign investors, on the other hand, may have greater risk mitigation strategies but could be deterred by economic instability, fluctuating exchange rates, and changes in government policies. Risk management strategies such as insurance mechanisms, diversification of tourism offerings, and adaptive business models are necessary to minimize investment uncertainties.

### 2.3. Comparative Review of Local and Foreign Investment Challenges

Existing studies indicate that local and foreign investors in the tourism sector face distinct challenges, influenced by their access to capital, regulatory conditions, and market positioning. Table 1 summarizes key comparative insights based on prior research.

**Table 1: Comparative Challenges of Local vs. Foreign Tourism Investment.**

Challenge	Local Investors	Foreign Investors
<b>Regulatory Barriers</b>	Complex licensing, inconsistent policies	Stringent entry regulations, land ownership restrictions
<b>Infrastructure Issues</b>	Limited access to high-quality facilities	Hesitation to invest in underdeveloped areas
<b>Financial Constraints</b>	Limited access to loans, high interest rates	Capital transfer restrictions, taxation concerns
<b>Market Risks</b>	Dependence on local tourism trends	Exposure to currency fluctuations and political risks
<b>Investment Incentives</b>	Limited government support, lack of incentives	Attractive incentives but complex legal conditions

From this analysis, it is evident that local investors struggle more with financial constraints and infrastructure limitations, whereas foreign investors face greater regulatory and market-entry challenges. Policymakers must address these issues through targeted reforms that improve investment conditions for both groups.

### 2.4. Review of Related Studies

Several studies have explored the challenges of tourism investment at local and global levels. For instance, research conducted in the UAE and Saudi Arabia highlights the role of government support and infrastructure development in enhancing

tourism investment opportunities [11]. Similar studies in Southeast Asia emphasize the importance of policy transparency and financial incentives in attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) into tourism [12]. Studies specific to Oman have identified key barriers to investment, including high operational costs, limited private sector participation, and regulatory inefficiencies [13]. However, these studies often focus on either local or foreign investment separately, without offering a comparative perspective on the distinct challenges faced by both investor types. This research aims to bridge this gap by providing a dual-perspective analysis, offering a more comprehensive understanding of investment dynamics in Oman's tourism sector.

### 2.5. Summary and Research Implications

The theoretical framework establishes that tourism investment is influenced by economic, regulatory, financial, and infrastructural factors. The comparative analysis highlights the differences in challenges faced by local and foreign investors, providing a foundation for the empirical investigation in this study. Addressing these barriers is crucial for enhancing Oman's tourism investment climate, attracting more investors, and achieving sustainable economic diversification.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the study, analyzing the economic challenges facing both local and foreign tourism investors in Oman. The analysis focuses on four key themes: regulatory and bureaucratic barriers, infrastructure limitations, financial constraints, and market risks. To enhance clarity, data is presented in the form of tables and graphs to illustrate key differences and similarities between local and foreign investors' experiences. The discussion also connects these findings to existing literature and provides policy recommendations.

### 3.1 Regulatory and Bureaucratic Barriers

Regulatory complexity emerged as one of the most significant barriers to tourism investment in Oman. Both local and foreign investors reported facing challenges, but their experiences varied based on factors such as business registration processes, land ownership rights, and taxation policies.

#### 3.1.1 Licensing and Permit Delays

Local investors cited long approval times for obtaining business licenses, construction permits, and tourism operation approvals. On average,

respondents reported that securing an operating license takes between 6 to 12 months, delaying project implementation and increasing costs. Investors in eco-tourism and adventure tourism projects faced even longer waiting times, as their projects required additional environmental approvals.

Foreign investors experienced additional hurdles related to visa processing for foreign employees, land acquisition restrictions, and profit repatriation rules. Many expressed concern that Oman’s regulatory framework is less competitive than that of other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, particularly the UAE and Saudi Arabia. Figure 1 shows the average approval time for various permits required by local and foreign investors.

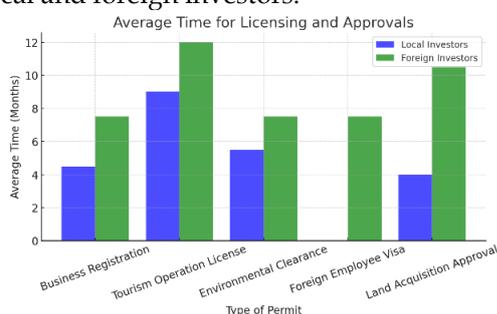


Figure 1: Average Time for Licensing and Approvals.

Type of Permit	Local Investors (Months)	Foreign Investors (Months)
Business Registration	3 - 6	6 - 9
Tourism Operation License	6 - 12	9 - 15
Environmental Clearance	4 - 7	5 - 10
Foreign Employee Visa	-	6 - 9
Land Acquisition Approval	3 - 5	9 - 12

These findings indicate that Oman needs to streamline its regulatory processes to reduce investment delays and increase investor confidence.

### 3.2. Infrastructure and Logistical Limitations

Infrastructure is a key determinant of tourism investment success, and investors both local and foreign expressed concerns over transportation connectivity, accommodation availability, and logistical barriers.

#### 3.2.1. Transportation and Accessibility Challenges

Both local and foreign investors emphasized that Oman’s transport infrastructure remains underdeveloped outside of major cities. While Muscat and Salalah have modern airports and road networks, secondary tourism destinations such as Jebel Akhdar, Musandam, and Al Wusta lack efficient transportation options.

A survey conducted among investors found that 67% of respondents identified transportation

challenges as a significant barrier. This issue was particularly relevant for investors in eco-tourism and adventure tourism, as tourists often find it difficult to reach remote locations.

Figure 2 presents investor perceptions of Oman’s transport infrastructure.

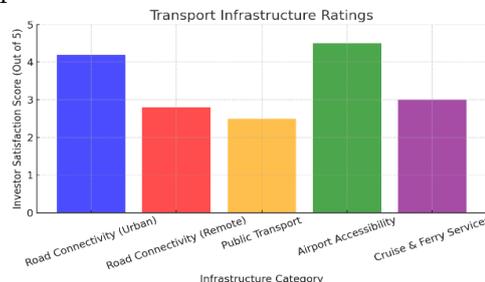


Figure 2: Investor Satisfaction with Transportation Infrastructure.

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Infrastructure Category	Investor Satisfaction Score (Out of 5)
Road Connectivity in Urban Areas	4.2
Road Connectivity in Remote Areas	2.8
Availability of Public Transport	2.5
Airport Accessibility	4.5
Cruise and Ferry Services	3.0

The results highlight the need for strategic investments in public transport systems and road networks to improve accessibility for tourists and investors.

#### 3.2.2. Accommodation and Hospitality Gaps

A major infrastructure-related challenge is the shortage of mid-range and budget hotels. While Oman has a strong luxury hotel sector, investors pointed out that affordable accommodation options are lacking, limiting Oman’s ability to attract budget-conscious travelers.

A market analysis of Oman’s hotel industry revealed that over 70% of available hotel rooms belong to the luxury category (4-star and 5-star hotels), while budget and mid-range hotels make up less than 30%. This imbalance discourages investment in mass-market tourism, as tourists seeking affordable options often choose neighboring destinations such as Dubai or Turkey. Table 2 provides a breakdown of Oman’s hotel industry by category.

Table 2: Distribution of Hotels by Category in Oman.

Hotel Category	Percentage of Total Hotels
5-Star Hotels	40%
4-Star Hotels	30%
3-Star Hotels	15%
Budget Hotels & Guesthouses	15%

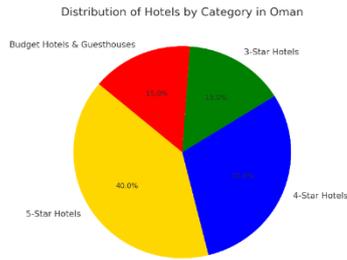


Figure 3: Distribution of Hotels by Category in Oman.

These findings indicate the need for policies that encourage investment in mid-range accommodation to diversify Oman’s tourism offerings.

### 3.3 Financial Constraints and Access to Capital

Financial constraints were cited as a major barrier to tourism investment, particularly for local investors, who face difficulties in securing bank loans and government incentives.

#### 3.3.1 Access to Financing for Local Investors

A survey of Omani tourism investors found that 80% of local entrepreneurs rely on personal savings or family funding, as bank loans for tourism projects have high interest rates and collateral requirements.

Foreign investors, while having better access to global financial markets, reported difficulties related to profit repatriation, currency fluctuations, and high corporate tax rates.

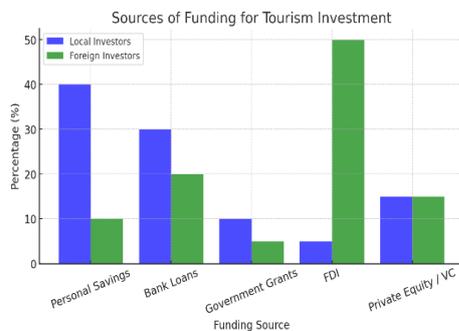


Figure 4: Sources of Funding for Tourism Investment.

Funding Source	Local Investors (%)	Foreign Investors (%)
Personal Savings	40%	10%
Bank Loans	30%	20%
Government Grants	10%	5%
Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)	5%	50%
Private Equity / Venture Capital	15%	15%

These findings highlight the need for government-backed financial programs that support

local entrepreneurs and SMEs in the tourism sector.

### 3.4. Market Risks and Economic Uncertainty

The final major challenge identified in this study was market risk, driven by seasonal fluctuations, geopolitical instability, and global economic conditions.

#### 3.4.1. Seasonal Variations in Tourist Demand

Oman’s tourism industry experiences significant seasonality, with peak tourist activity in winter (October – March) and a sharp decline in summer (June – August) due to high temperatures. Hotel occupancy rates drop by an average of 40% during the summer months, affecting revenue stability for investors.

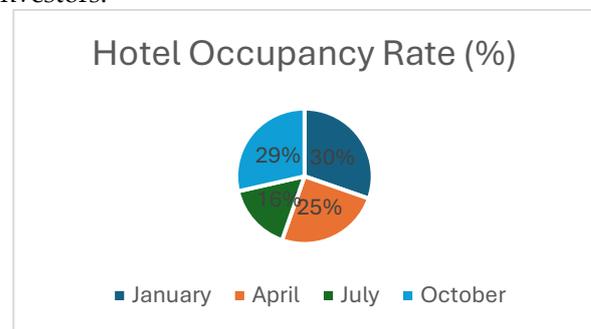


Figure 5: Monthly Hotel Occupancy Rates in Oman.

Month	Hotel Occupancy Rate (%)
January	85%
April	70%
July	45%
October	80%
December	90%

To mitigate the impact of seasonality, investors suggested developing year-round tourism activities, such as indoor entertainment, wellness tourism, and business tourism conferences.

## 4. DISCUSSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study reveal a series of economic and structural challenges that hinder both local and foreign tourism investment in Oman. These challenges—ranging from regulatory barriers and infrastructure limitations to financial constraints and market risks—underscore the need for comprehensive policy interventions. The following discussion synthesizes the key findings and proposes strategic policy recommendations to enhance Oman’s attractiveness as a tourism investment destination.

### 4.1. Discussion of Key Findings

The analysis of investment challenges in Oman’s

tourism sector highlighted four major areas that need urgent attention:

#### 4.1.1. Regulatory and Bureaucratic Barriers

Investors, both local and foreign, reported that the complexity and inefficiency of Oman's regulatory framework significantly delay project implementation. The long approval times for business licenses, tourism operation permits, and environmental clearances create bottlenecks that discourage investment.

**Table 3: Comparison of Tourism Investment Regulations in GCC Countries.**

Regulatory Factor	Oman	UAE	Saudi Arabia
Foreign Ownership	Restricted (partnership required)	100% foreign ownership allowed	100% ownership in key sectors
Business Licensing Time	6 - 12 months	2 - 4 months	3 - 6 months
Land Ownership for Foreigners	Limited	Freehold zones available	Restricted, but lease options exist
Corporate Tax	15%	0% (Free Zones)	20%
Ease of Profit Repatriation	Moderate restrictions	Full repatriation allowed	Some limitations

Foreign investors, in particular, expressed concerns over land ownership restrictions, taxation policies, and profit repatriation constraints. A comparative analysis with regional competitors such as the UAE and Saudi Arabia indicates that Oman's regulatory environment is less investor-friendly, as these neighboring countries have simplified foreign investment laws and streamlined licensing procedures. Table 3 summarizes key differences in investment regulations across GCC countries.

These findings indicate that Oman must reform its investment policies to remain competitive in the global tourism market.

#### 4.1.1. Infrastructure and Accessibility Gaps

The study also identified infrastructure limitations—particularly in transport connectivity and accommodation options—as a key barrier to investment. Secondary tourism destinations, such as Musandam, Al Wusta, and Jebel Akhdar, suffer from poor road networks, limited public transportation, and inadequate tourism facilities.

Foreign investors emphasized that logistics and supply chain inefficiencies increase operational costs, making it more expensive to develop tourism projects in Oman compared to Dubai or Riyadh.

#### 4.1.2. Financial Constraints for Local Investors

A significant challenge for local tourism investors is access to capital. The study found that most local investors rely on personal savings or family funding because banks in Oman consider tourism projects high-risk. Additionally, government-backed financial incentives are difficult to access, and many small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) lack the collateral required for bank loans.

Foreign investors, while having better access to international financial markets, cited profit repatriation restrictions and high corporate tax rates as deterrents to expanding their investments in Oman.

#### 4.1.3. Market Risks and Economic Volatility

Market risks—such as seasonal fluctuations in tourist arrivals, global economic downturns, and geopolitical instability—pose challenges for investors. Oman's tourism industry experiences peak demand in winter but struggles during the summer, leading to revenue instability for hotels, tour operators, and transport services.

In comparison, destinations like Dubai have developed strategies to maintain tourism flows year-round, such as hosting major international events and investing in indoor attractions. Oman's tourism strategy must diversify offerings to mitigate the impact of seasonal demand fluctuations.

#### 4.2. Policy Recommendations

To address these challenges and enhance tourism investment in Oman, the following policy recommendations are proposed:

##### 4.2.1. Regulatory Reforms to Improve Investment Climate

- **Simplify Licensing and Approval Processes:** Reduce approval times for business licenses and tourism permits through a centralized digital platform for investor services.
- **Enhance Foreign Ownership Regulations:** Allow 100% foreign ownership in key tourism sectors, similar to the UAE's free zones.
- **Improve Transparency in Investment Policies:** Publish clear guidelines on tax incentives, land leasing, and business regulations to increase investor confidence.
- **Fast-Track High-Impact Projects:** Introduce a "Tourism Investment Fast-Track Program" for large-scale projects that can generate employment and economic growth.

##### 4.2.2. Infrastructure Development for Tourism Growth

- **Expand Road Networks and Public Transport:** Improve connectivity to eco-tourism and adventure tourism sites by upgrading road infrastructure and introducing public transport options for tourists.
- **Increase Investment in Mid-Range and Budget Hotels:** Introduce tax breaks and subsidies for investors building 3-star and budget hotels, to diversify Oman's accommodation options.
- **Develop Smart Tourism Infrastructure:** Invest in smart tourism technologies such as online booking platforms, AI-powered tourist guides, and cashless payment systems to enhance visitor experience.

#### **4.2.3. Financial Incentives to Support Local and Foreign Investors**

- **Create a Tourism Investment Fund:** Establish a government-backed fund offering low-interest loans and grants for local tourism businesses, particularly SMEs.
- **Introduce Tax Incentives for Tourism Investors:** Reduce corporate taxes and VAT for new tourism projects, with tax-free periods for the first five years.
- **Facilitate Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs):** Encourage joint ventures between local businesses and foreign investors to share investment risks and promote sustainable growth.

#### **4.2.4. Strategies to Reduce Market Risks and Boost Year-Round Tourism**

- **Diversify Oman's Tourism Offerings:** Promote business tourism, medical tourism, and cultural tourism to attract visitors beyond the peak season.
- **Host Mega Events and Festivals:** Develop large-scale events similar to Dubai Expo or Saudi's Riyadh Season to attract tourists during off-peak months.
- **Expand Domestic Tourism Initiatives:** Launch affordable travel packages for domestic tourists to reduce dependence on international visitors.

#### **4.2.5. Strengthening Global Marketing and Branding Efforts**

- **Enhance Oman's Global Tourism Campaigns:** Invest in international marketing and digital advertising to position Oman as a leading adventure, eco-tourism, and heritage destination.
- **Collaborate with International Tour Operators:**

Establish partnerships with global travel agencies to increase the visibility of Oman in major tourist markets such as Europe, China, and the USA.

- **Improve Digital Presence:** Develop a comprehensive online portal for tourism investors, showcasing available investment opportunities, legal frameworks, and financial incentives.

#### **4.3. Future Research Directions**

While this study provides a comprehensive analysis of economic challenges in Oman's tourism investment sector, further research is needed in the following areas:

1. **Impact of Policy Reforms:** A longitudinal study should be conducted to assess the impact of recent investment policy changes on tourism sector growth.
2. **Role of Emerging Technologies in Tourism Investment:** Future research should explore how AI, blockchain, and smart tourism solutions can enhance investment attractiveness.
3. **Comparative Studies with Leading Tourism Destinations:** A deeper analysis comparing Oman's tourism investment climate with global leaders (e.g., Singapore, Maldives, and Dubai) can provide valuable policy insights.

This study highlights that regulatory complexity, infrastructure gaps, financial constraints, and market risks are the key barriers to tourism investment in Oman. The proposed policy recommendations—including regulatory reforms, infrastructure investments, financial incentives, and market diversification strategies—can significantly improve Oman's competitiveness as a tourism investment destination. By implementing these strategies, Oman can align with Oman Vision 2040, fostering a diverse and sustainable economy that reduces reliance on oil revenues.

#### **5. CONCLUSION**

This study has provided an in-depth analysis of the economic challenges facing tourism investment in Oman, with a comparative focus on local and foreign investors. The findings reveal that regulatory barriers, infrastructure limitations, financial constraints, and market risks are the primary obstacles hindering tourism investment growth. Despite Oman's rich cultural heritage, natural landscapes, and strategic location, the sector remains underdeveloped compared to regional competitors like the UAE and Saudi Arabia. Addressing these

challenges through targeted policy interventions is essential for unlocking the full potential of the tourism industry.

The study found that bureaucratic inefficiencies and regulatory complexities are major deterrents for investors, particularly in terms of business licensing, land acquisition, and foreign ownership restrictions. While Oman has made progress in economic reforms under Vision 2040, further streamlining of investment regulations is necessary to improve investor confidence. Moreover, infrastructure gaps, especially in transportation connectivity and mid-range accommodation options, limit the ability of local and foreign businesses to develop sustainable tourism projects.

From a financial perspective, local investors struggle with limited access to funding, high interest rates, and a lack of government-backed financial incentives, making it difficult for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to thrive in the tourism sector. Foreign investors, while having better access to capital, face challenges related to profit repatriation, taxation, and operational costs. Additionally, seasonal fluctuations and external economic shocks contribute to market instability, requiring diversification strategies to sustain year-round tourism.

To overcome these challenges, this study proposed five key policy recommendations:

1. Regulatory Reforms – Simplifying investment procedures, allowing 100% foreign ownership in key tourism sectors, and establishing a fast-track approval system for large-scale projects.
2. Infrastructure Development – Expanding road networks, public transport, and budget hotel investments to improve accessibility and affordability.

3. Financial Incentives – Establishing a Tourism Investment Fund, providing low-interest loans for local businesses, and offering tax breaks for foreign investors.
4. Market Diversification Strategies – Developing business, cultural, and medical tourism, hosting mega-events, and expanding domestic tourism campaigns to ensure sustainable growth.
5. Global Branding and Marketing – Enhancing digital marketing efforts, forming international partnerships, and improving Oman's online tourism investment platforms.

By implementing these policy measures, Oman can increase tourism investment, attract global investors, and create a more diversified economy. These reforms align with Oman Vision 2040, which aims to reduce reliance on oil revenues by expanding sustainable sectors like tourism.

### 5.1. Future Outlook

While this study has identified critical challenges and solutions, further research is needed to examine:

- The long-term impact of recent policy reforms on investor confidence and sector growth.
- The role of emerging technologies (e.g., AI, blockchain, and smart tourism solutions) in enhancing Oman's competitiveness.
- A comparative analysis with global tourism leaders to identify best practices that Oman can adopt.

By addressing these research areas and implementing effective policy interventions, Oman can establish itself as a leading tourism investment hub in the Middle East, unlocking new economic opportunities and fostering sustainable development for future generations.

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