

An Evaluation of Tourism Attributes Related to Satisfaction and Challenges by Foreign Tourists in Sultanate of Oman

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Abstract

Tourism economy has enhanced the employment opportunities in Oman and lot of new tourism projects are coming up throughout the country. The awareness among the Omani public has to improve to consider a future in the tourism industry. The study is attempted to understand the satisfaction level of international tourists in Oman, the factors that affects tourism and the challenges faced by the tourists. The responses were collected from 111 foreign tourists visited Oman. It was found that majority of the tourists are from France, Germany, Italy and Britain. International tourists are satisfied by the friendliness and openness of Omanis, culture and customs and have a safe feeling of security to travel in Oman. The challenges faced by foreign tourists include difficulty in language, GPS connection, lack of Wifi connectivity, problems in walking alone, more time at the airport to exit, time for visa processing, bad driving, expensive ticket charges, taxi and hotel charges, crowded and traffic jam and language difficulties.

Keywords: tourism, inbound visitors, foreign tourists, tourism, satisfaction levels, challenges, tourism attributes

1. Introduction

Oman is one of the popular attraction for tourists among gulf nations and is a tourist favourite destination. Tourism is fast growing in Oman and has a great impact on the economy. Tourism industry is the main source of economic development and income generation. Oman is the second largest country in the Middle East processing wealth in terms of tourism. Oman is one among the best countries of the world for tourism industry (Syed, 2016). Oman's development plan concerning tourism is focused on attracting foreign investment in projects such as hotels, golf courses, and theme parks. This industry would offer a variety of employment opportunities for the rapidly expanding Omani workforce who is dependent on developing education and training institutions to support growth. The visa restrictions on tourists were eased starting in 1987 as the Omani government has sought to slowly expand tourist numbers as infrastructure and facilities are expanded to meet increased demand. The current limit on tourists is set at 50,000 a year and the government plans to increase this number to 100,000 in ten years, and to 728,000 by 2020 (Neeta, 2012). According to Kubler (2014) In the Middle East, Oman will lead in tourism growth which is found in the increase of numbers of airports, hotels, resorts and other accommodates and that the industry is going to attract 12 million visitors by the year 2020. The total number of visitors arriving to the Sultanate of Oman during the month of November 2018 is 268,000 (2.6 million). The Gulf visitors come at the first place, where their number reached 105,000 visitors forming 39% during November, 2018. The Indian, British and German nationalities came at the second, third and fourth place consecutively where they formed 13.4%, 5.7% and 3.6% during the month of November, 2018 (Tourism Index Report, November, 2018). In the year 2018 the number of foreign tourists dropped to 2.8 million tourists. The tourism sector in Oman contributed 2.9 per cent to the GDP in 2018, compared to 2.6 in 2017, according to the Minister of Tourism, Ahmed bin Nasser Al Mehrzi. "The Ninth Five-Year Plan (2016-2020) aims to diversify the economic base and reduce the dependence on oil as a prime sector in the country and reduce the impact of the negative effects of the volatility of its prices in the global market, in addition to maximizing interest from the tourism sector, and to create direct employment opportunities for nationals." (Times News Service, June 2019).

According to the Ministry of Tourism report (2019), in the year 2011 the number of foreign tourist to Oman were 660,397 tourists, which increased to 1,491,844 million, in the year 2018. This shows a 126% increase of foreign tourists to Sultanate of Oman during the last decade. (Al Watan, January 3, 2019).

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Tourism contributed 2.6% in the GDP of the Sultanate in 2017, compared to 2.8% in the previous year. From the period between 2008 to 2017, there is a continuous rise in statistics on foreign tourists as the number of visitors rose to double. In 2008, the number of visitors reached 1.5 million, and the number rose to 1.7 million in 2012, and the number continued to rise to reach 3.2 million in 2017, but in 2018 the number of foreign tourists dropped to 2.8 million tourists (Al Watan, January 3, 2019). But comparing the last one decade there is 126% increase of foreign tourists to Sultanate of Oman from 2011 till 2018. The focus of the study is to look into the satisfaction and challenges that are faced by tourists in Oman.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

1. To know the most attractive tourist place by the foreign tourists.
2. To determine the satisfaction level of the international tourists.
3. To identify the major factors that influence the tourists in Oman.
4. To analyze the challenges faced by the foreign tourists.

2. Literature Review

Tourism in Oman faces some challenges that the government and the private tourist operators must analyze and solve it. The main challenge is non-cooperation by private operators and government sector (40%). According to 55%, there is no promotion for tourism that can attract the tourists from abroad. Communicating in English is one of the difficulties for the Omanis to manage the tourists. The government should concentrate on the price of the hotels in Oman (32%) compared to the other countries and the need for modern transportation and accessibility to reach locations (74%). The infrastructure in Oman (52%) need to be modern and attractive. The lack of commitment by Tourist operators discourages tourists to Oman (Syed, 2016). Mohammed and Angelo (2016) accessed the general perception of Oman's attributes, their importance and their influences among U.S tourists among 522 American travelers. 36 attributes were used on a 5 point Likert scale. The attributes are; Beautiful architecture and buildings, Interesting customs and cultures, Cultural and historical attractions, Friendly people, Scenic and natural beauty, Availability of quality accommodation, A variety of cuisines, Opportunity for adventure, Restful and relaxing places, Beautiful beaches and islands, Safe place to travel, Opportunity for shopping, Lack of pollution, Pleasant climate, Language difficulties, Efficient local transportation services, Opportunity for learning experience, Variety of outdoor activities, Friendly destination for ecotourism, Crowded and traffic jam, Cleanliness, Easy access to Oman, Modern cities, Diving and snorkeling sites, family and children destination, adult oriented destination, nightlife and adults entertainment, stable political situation, risk of acquiring disease, quality golf courses, good value for money, easy access to alcoholics, traditional festivities, romantic places for newlyweds and couples, availability of English signs and directions. Oman's destination attributes for U.S travelers consisted of multiple positive, neutral and negative features in terms of destination selection. The strongest attributes representing Oman as a destination found in the study were related to recreational attractions and cultures while the identified weaknesses were travel-environment related attributes. The awareness among the Omani public has to improve to consider a career in the tourism industry. Samaa, Maryam, Ekhlal and Marwa (2019), analysed the satisfaction level of international tourists in Oman, the factors that affects tourism and the challenges faced by the tourists from 206 foreign tourists visited Oman during February 2019. The leading tourists are from France, Germany, Italy and Britain. International tourists are satisfied by the friendliness and openness of Omanis, culture and customs and have a safe feeling of security to travel in Oman. The challenges faced by foreign tourists include difficulty in language, GPS connection, lack of Wifi connectivity, more time at the airport to exit, time for visa processing, bad driving, expensive ticket charges, taxi and hotel charges, crowded and traffic jam and language difficulties. Another study examined the residents' perceptions of tourism impacts and their willingness to support its development in the A'Dakhiliyah region of Sultanate of Oman showed that the residents' perceptions of tourism impacts were largely positive and they were highly supportive of its development. Lack of tourism infrastructure; lack of financial support; lack of tourism awareness among residents; and lack of specialized education and training in the field were some of the factors of concern for the residents (Tahani, Nasser, Saida & Mustafa, 2017). Syed and Alhakam (2015) studied how different promotional methods could be used by Oman to attract more number of tourists. 52% of the tourists have rated the accommodation as good. 60% of the tourists have

evaluated the restaurants are good. Tourists who liked Oman stated that 26% like nature, 24% mentioned about friendly people and 10% liked the culture. 60% have visited Oman before. In a recent forum attended by ministry officials and representatives working in the tourism sector, a presentation was made about the challenges in several areas, including Omanisation, services and quality, promotion, immigration and transport. Omanisation percentage needs to be revised and that there is a lack of interest by Omanis in joining the hospitality sector. Non-availability of skilled Omani staff for certain positions, turnover of local workforce, training local staff, recruitment difficulties, local labour language skills and lack of availability of professional tour guides were other issues (Elham, 2014)

2.1 Research Gaps

The researchers have identified that previous studies focused only on US travelers to Oman, visitors from Middle East exclusively. The need and satisfaction of foreign tourists are not addressed in previous studies. Few studies conducted in Oman focused only on tourism related organizations. This study focuses on diverse foreign tourist visiting Oman and various attribute affecting their tourism are addressed in this study. Moreover, such studies on tourism has not been conducted previously in Oman.

3. Research Methodology

The study area is in Ad Dhakhiliyah and the sampling frame includes the foreign tourists visiting various places in this region (Nizwa, Bahla, Adam, Izki, Samail, Bidbid and Manah). The period of study is from November 2020 to September 2020. The population for the study is the foreign tourists visiting Nizwa. The total number of foreign tourists visited Nizwa between December 1st to December 31st, 2018 is 13,073. (Nizwa Fort Management, January 2019). The average number of tourists per day is thus determined as 422. This is taken as the sampling frame. The sample size is determined as 375 (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). The Corona pandemic that affected from March 2020 influenced the data collection as it was difficult for the researchers to meet them personally. Thus the sample size collected for this study is 111 with a response rate of 30%. The sampling method adopted for the collection of samples is simple random sampling method. The data from the respondents are collected randomly from various places in Ad Dhakhiliyah like Nizwa, Bahla, Adam, Izki, Samail, Bidbid and Manah. Primary data is collected with the help of a well- structured questionnaire. Pilot study is to be conducted among 14 respondents to identify the validity of the questions.

4. Analysis of the study

Table 1. Nationality of tourists visiting Oman

Nationality	Percentage	Number of responses
Australia	4%	5
Brazil	0.9%	1
British	5%	6
Canada	0.9%	1
Denmark	2%	2
Ecuador	0.9%	1
France	17%	19
German	30%	33
Netherland	2%	2
India	5%	6
Italy	11%	12
Japan	0.9%	1
Lithuania	0.9%	1
Malaysia	0.9%	1
Norway	2%	2
Philippines	5%	6
Poland	2%	2
Rome	0.9%	1
Slovakia	4%	4
South Africa	0.9%	1
Sudan	0.9%	1
Switzerland	0.9%	1
USA	2%	2
Total	100%	111

The above result show that there are different tourists from different nationals visiting Oman. The highest percentage is 30% of tourists from Germany and 17% from France, the lowest percentage is 0.9% of tourists from Brazil, Canada, Ecuador, Japan, Lithuania, Malaysia, Rome, South Africa, Sudan and Switzerland. There are 50% males and 50% females visiting Oman during the year from different countries. The highest percentage

of the tourists' age is (30%) between 30-40 years. 28% of the tourists are above the age of 50 years. On the other hand, the lowest percentage of the tourists' age is (17%) which is between 20-30 years. 23% of the tourists are attracted by the various attractive places in Muscat. 16% of the international tourists are attracted by the places in Nizwa and 13% of the tourists like the desert places on Sharqia region. Thus souqs, places of historical importance and the naturally attractive areas like the mountains and wadis are also attracted the tourists.

Table 2. Most attractive tourist places of visit

Most attractive place	Number of responses	In percentage
Muscat	26	23%
Nizwa	18	16%
Desert, Sharqia	14	13%
Jibreen	9	8%
Jabal shams	10	9%
Jabal Akhdar	7	6.5%
Bahla	6	5.5%
Salalah	6	5.5%
Misfat	5	4.5%
Mountains	5	4.5%
Beaches	5	4.5%
Total	111	100

The level of satisfaction of the tourists is rated on a scale out of 10. The average satisfaction is calculated as 7.99 and the standard deviation is calculated as 1.49. The level of satisfaction of tourists is calculated by using the formula mean (+ or-) standard deviation. Thus the score above 9.48 is rated as High and the score less than 6.50 is rated a low level of satisfaction. This is shown in the table no.3.

Table 3. Level of satisfaction

Level of satisfaction	Low (< 6.50)	Medium (6.50 – 9.48)	High (> 9.48)	Total
Number of responses	14	75	22	111
In percentage	13%	67%	20%	100

20% of the tourists are highly satisfied by the places in Oman. 67% of the international tourists have medium level of satisfaction. Only 13% of the tourists stated that they have low level of satisfaction. Thus there is much scope for tourism potential in Oman. The potential areas are to be identified and those areas or attributes are to be focused to improve the satisfaction level of tourists.

Table 4. Tourism attributes about Oman

No	Attributes	Mean	SD	CV =(SD/Mean) x 100
1	Beautiful architecture and buildings	3.97	0.99	24.93
2	Interesting customs and cultures	4.13	0.95	23.00
3	Cultural and historical attractions	4.09	0.85	20.78
4	Friendly people	4.47	0.87	19.46
5	Scenic and natural beauty	4.33	0.89	20.55
6	Availability of quality accommodation	3.73	0.98	26.27
7	A variety of cuisines (food)	3.59	1.01	28.13
8	Opportunity for adventure	3.9	0.9	23.07
9	Restful and relaxing places	3.88	0.97	25
10	Beautiful beaches and islands	3.99	0.95	23.80
11	Safe place to travel	4.39	0.88	20.04
12	Opportunity for shopping	3.68	1.07	29.07
13	Lack of pollution	3.73	1	26.80
14	Pleasant climate	3.81	1	26.24
15	Language difficulties	3.38	1.2	35.50
16	Efficient local transportation services	3.33	1.15	34.53
17	Opportunity for learning experience	3.6	1	27.77
18	Variety of outdoor activities	3.83	0.86	22.45
19	Friendly destination for ecotourism	3.70	1.09	29.45
20	Crowded and traffic jam	3.37	1.22	36.20

21	Cleanliness	3.89	1.03	26.47
22	Easy access to Oman	3.84	1.03	26.82
23	Good value for the money	3.72	1	26.88
24	Traditional festivities	3.62	0.89	24.58
25	Romantic places for newlyweds or couples	3.55	1	28.16
26	Modern cities	3.55	1.05	29.57
27	Availability of English & direction	3.93	0.83	21.11
28	Beautiful diving and snorkeling sites	3.70	0.93	25.13
29	Family & children friendly destination	3.62	1	27.62
30	Nightlife & adults entertainment	3.16	1.3	41.13
31	Stable political situation	3.89	0.98	25.19
32	Quality golf courses	3.36	1.25	37.20
33	Quality health & wellness services	3.46	1.13	24.93
34	Easy access to alcoholics	2.44	1.35	55.32

Those variables with less coefficient of variation are the most reliable and consistent variable. The most consistent variable that affects the tourists is that they feel Omani people as friendly (19.46). The second most consistent variable is that they feel Oman as a safe place to visit (20.04). The factors that are not relevant for the tourists are accommodation, friendly place for ecotourism. From this analysis, the most relevant attributes are ranked as follows: Friendly people, safe place to travel, scenic and natural beauty, cultural and historic attractions, availability of English and proper direction.

Factor Analysis of the tourism attributes in Oman

Table 5. KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.840
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1864.123
	Df	561
	Sig.	.000

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure the sampling adequacy The KMO statistic varies between 0 and 1. A value close to 1 indicates that patterns of correlations are relatively compact and so factor analysis should yield distinct and reliable factors. The value is 0.84, which is great and factor analysis is appropriate for these data. Bartlett's measure tests the null hypothesis that the original correlation is an identity matrix. For factor analysis to work some relationships between variables and if the R-matric were an identity matrix then all correlation coefficients would be zero. For the test to be significant, the significance value should be less than 0.05. For these data, Bartlett's test is highly significant ($p < 0.001$) and therefore factor analysis is appropriate.

Table 6. Total Variance Explained

No	Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
		Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	Beautiful architecture and buildings	10.633	31.275	31.275	10.633	31.275	31.275	4.078	11.996	11.996
2	Interesting customs and cultures	2.871	8.445	39.720	2.871	8.445	39.720	3.322	9.769	21.765
3	Cultural and historical attractions	1.908	5.613	45.333	1.908	5.613	45.333	3.262	9.595	31.360
4	Friendly people	1.518	4.464	49.797	1.518	4.464	49.797	2.781	8.180	39.540
5	Scenic and natural beauty	1.437	4.226	54.023	1.437	4.226	54.023	2.318	6.819	46.359
6	Availability of quality accommodation	1.224	3.600	57.623	1.224	3.600	57.623	2.240	6.587	52.947
7	A variety of cuisines (food)	1.137	3.345	60.968	1.137	3.345	60.968	2.193	6.449	59.395
8	Opportunity for adventure	1.042	3.065	64.034	1.042	3.065	64.034	1.577	4.638	64.034
9	Restful and relaxing places	.980	2.883	66.917						
10	Beautiful beaches and islands	.958	2.818	69.735						

11	Safe place to travel	.893	2.626	72.361
12	Opportunity for shopping	.856	2.518	74.879
13	Lack of pollution	.782	2.300	77.179
14	Pleasant climate	.740	2.177	79.355
15	Language difficulties	.673	1.980	81.336
16	Efficient local transportation services	.621	1.827	83.163
17	Opportunity for learning experience	.552	1.625	84.788
18	Variety of outdoor activities	.525	1.544	86.331
19	Friendly destination for ecotourism	.498	1.465	87.796
20	Crowded and traffic jam	.471	1.385	89.181
21	Cleanliness	.463	1.362	90.543
22	Easy access to Oman	.409	1.202	91.745
23	Good value for the money	.375	1.103	92.848
24	Traditional festivities	.321	.943	93.791
25	Romantic places for newlyweds or couples	.306	.900	94.690
26	Modern cities	.295	.868	95.558
27	Availability of English & direction	.260	.765	96.323
28	Beautiful diving and snorkeling sites	.245	.721	97.044
29	Family & children friendly destination	.213	.627	97.671
30	Nightlife & adults entertainment	.203	.598	98.269
31	Stable political situation	.185	.545	98.814
32	Quality golf courses	.161	.473	99.286
33	Quality health & wellness services	.138	.407	99.693
34	Easy access to alcoholics	.104	.307	100.000

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

The table total variance lists the eigenvalues associated with each linear component or factor before extraction, after extraction. The eigenvalues associated with each factor represent the variance explained by that particular linear component and SPSS also displays the eigenvalues in terms of the percentage of variance explained. Factor 1 (Beautiful architecture and buildings) explains 31.27% of total variance. The first few attributes explain relatively large amounts of variance, especially factor 1, whereas subsequent factors explain only small amounts of variance. SPSS then extracts all factors with eigenvalues greater than 1, which leaves with eight factors. The eigenvalues associated with these factors are again displayed and the percentage of variance explained in the Extractions Sum of Squared Loadings. The values in the column are the same as the values before extraction. The values for the discarded factors are ignored and the table is blank after the eighth attribute. Similarly factor 2 'Interesting customs and culture accounts for 8.44% of variance. Thus 64.03% of the cumulative variance is contributed by the first eight variables and remaining factors contribute 35.97% of cumulative variance. In the final part of the table labelled Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings the Eigenvalues after rotation are displayed. Rotation has the effect of optimizing the factor structure and the relative importance of these eight factors are equalized. Before rotation factor 1 accounted for considerably more variance than the remaining seven (31.27% compared to 8.445, 5.613, 4.464, 4.226, 3.600, 3.345, and 3.065). However, after extraction the first factor accounts for only 11.996 of variance (compared to 9.769, 9.595, 8.180, 6.819, 6.587, 6.449 and 4.638 respectively).

Table 7. Communalities

	Attributes	Initial	Extraction
1	Beautiful architecture and buildings	1.000	.682
2	Interesting customs and cultures	1.000	.767
3	Cultural and historical attractions	1.000	.668
4	Friendly people	1.000	.716
5	Scenic and natural beauty	1.000	.720
6	Availability of quality accommodation	1.000	.517
7	A variety of cuisines (food)	1.000	.627
8	Opportunity for adventure	1.000	.686
9	Restful and relaxing places	1.000	.685
10	Beautiful beaches and islands	1.000	.681
11	Safe place to travel	1.000	.722
12	Opportunity for shopping	1.000	.523
13	Lack of pollution	1.000	.625
14	Pleasant climate	1.000	.532
15	Language difficulties	1.000	.624
16	Efficient local transportation services	1.000	.663
17	Opportunity for learning experience	1.000	.747
18	Variety of outdoor activities	1.000	.505
19	Friendly destination for ecotourism	1.000	.714
20	Crowded and traffic jam	1.000	.525
21	Cleanliness	1.000	.674
22	Easy access to Oman	1.000	.667
23	Good value for the money	1.000	.573
24	Traditional festivities	1.000	.695
25	Romantic places for newlyweds or couples	1.000	.586
26	Modern cities	1.000	.650
27	Availability of English & direction	1.000	.544
28	Beautiful diving and snorkeling sites	1.000	.627
29	Family & children friendly destination	1.000	.568
30	Nightlife & adults entertainment	1.000	.582
31	Stable political situation	1.000	.679
32	Quality golf courses	1.000	.677
33	Quality health & wellness services	1.000	.676
34	Easy access to alcoholics	1.000	.646

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

The table 7 shows the table of communalities before and after extraction. Principal component analysis works on the initial assumption that all variance is common. Therefore, before extraction the communalities are all 1. The communalities in the column labeled extraction reflect the common variance in the data structure. 68.2% of the variance is associated with factor 1 (Beautiful architecture and buildings) is common or shared variance. Similarly, 76.7% of the variance is associated with the second factor (Interesting customs and cultures) is common or shared variance. Another way to look at these communalities is in terms of the proportion of variance explained by the underlying factors. After extraction some of the factors are discarded. The amount of variance in each variable that can be explained by the retained factors is represented by the communalities after extraction.

Table 8. Component Matrix^a

No		Component							
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	Restful and relaxing places	.710							
22	Easy access to Oman	.680							
2	Interesting customs and cultures	.654							
6	Availability of quality accommodation	.651							
4	Friendly people	.647	-.458						
26	Modern cities	.630							
8	Opportunity for adventure	.628							
23	Good value for the money	.628							
1	Beautiful architecture and buildings	.614	-.400						
28	Beautiful diving and snorkeling sites	.611			-.403				
3	Cultural and historical attractions	.597							
10	Beautiful beaches and islands	.590							-.436

24	Traditional festivities	.570					
31	Stable political situation	.569					
5	Scenic and natural beauty	.563	-.425				
25	Romantic places for newlyweds or couples	.562				-.410	
11	Safe place to travel	.558					
18	Variety of outdoor activities	.548					
12	Opportunity for shopping	.537					
14	Pleasant climate	.534					
32	Quality golf courses	.533					
19	Friendly destination for ecotourism	.512				.500	
13	Lack of pollution	.512					.425
20	Crowded and traffic jam	.497					
33	Quality health & wellness services	.492				-.441	
29	Family & children friendly destination	.490		-.437			
27	Availability of English & direction	.468					
16	Efficient local transportation services	.461	.439				
7	A variety of cuisines (food)	.460					
34	Easy access to alcoholics	.461	.611				
30	Nightlife & adults entertainment	.481	.491				
15	Language difficulties	.419		.497			
21	Cleanliness	.549				.551	
17	Opportunity for learning experience	.493		-.434			.501

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
a. 8 components extracted.

The component matrix is shown in table no.8 before rotation. This matrix contains the loadings of each factor into each factor. All the loadings less than 0.4 are suppressed in the output so there are blank spaces for many of the loadings. The above table shows the loadings (extracted values of each item under 8 variables) of 34 variables on the 8 factors extracted. The higher the absolute value of the loading, the more the factor contributes to variable. 8 variables are extracted wherein the 34 items are divided into 8 variables according to the most important items with similar response in component 1 and component 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8. At this stage SPSS has extracted eight factors. By Kaiser’s criterion, eight factors are extracted and is proved accurate. The criteria is accurate when communalities after extraction is greater than 0.7. The second ground for accuracy is when the average communalities is greater than 0.6. The average of the communalities is found by adding the communalities divided by the number of factors ($19.016/34 = 0.55$). Thus on one grounds Kaiser’s rule is accurate. This is because of the sample size less than 250 and number of attributes are not less than 30. Scree plot is also used to explain this

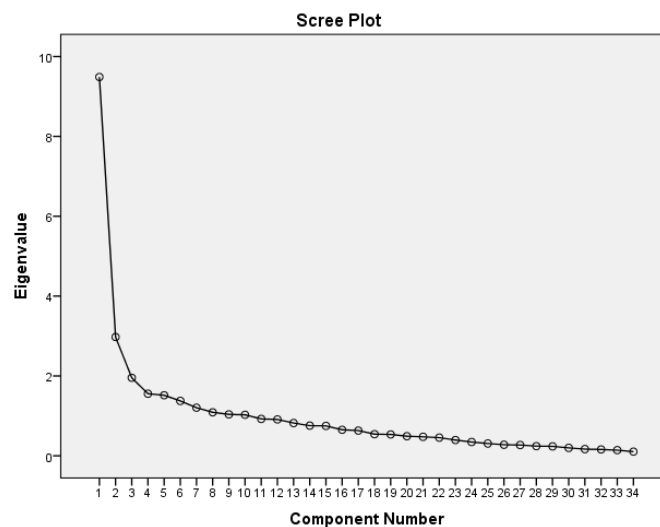


Figure 1. Scree plot of factor loadings

From the Scree plot it is clear that after the fourth factor the curve begins to tail off. But there is another drop after the sixth and then there is a stable plateau. Therefore, it is probably justifiable to retain six or eight factors.

This output shows the rotated component matrix (also called as the rotated factor matrix) which is a matrix of factor loadings for each variable onto each factor. This matrix contains the same information as the component matrix except that it is calculated after rotation. Factor loadings less than 0.4 are not loaded as it is suppressed. The variables are listed in the size of their factor loadings. Before rotation, most variables loaded highly on to the first factor. After rotation the factor structure has clarified. There are eight factors and the variables are loaded equally. The suppression of factors less than 0.4 and ordering variables by loading size also makes interpretation easier.

Table 9. Rotated Component Matrix^a

No		Component							
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
2	Interesting customs and cultures	.789							
3	Cultural and historical attractions	.765							
1	Beautiful architecture and buildings	.758							
4	Friendly people	.643	.462						
31	Stable political situation	.478					.409	.432	
10	Beautiful beaches and islands		.699						
9	Restful and relaxing places		.605						
14	Pleasant climate		.566						
21	Cleanliness		.511			.501			
5	Scenic and natural beauty		.493						.470
22	Easy access to Oman		.471	.420					
29	Family & children friendly destination		.466					.421	
32	Quality golf courses			.767					
26	Modern cities			.645					
30	Nightlife & adults entertainment			.618					
23	Good value for the money			.506					
18	Variety of outdoor activities			.490					
34	Easy access to alcoholics			.454	.402				
15	Language difficulties				.721				
12	Opportunity for shopping				.598				
7	A variety of cuisines (food)				.577				
20	Crowded and traffic jam			.413	.559				
16	Efficient local transportation services				.484			.464	
6	Availability of quality accommodation								
24	Traditional festivities					.729			
13	Lack of pollution					.635			
33	Quality health & wellness services						.672		
28	Beautiful diving and snorkeling sites						.597		
27	Availability of English & direction						.531		
25	Romantic places for newlyweds or couples						.472		
17	Opportunity for learning experience							.779	
11	Safe place to travel	.429						.419	.546
8	Opportunity for adventure								.536
19	Friendly destination for ecotourism	.519							-.523

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.
a. Rotation converged in 13 iterations.

The factors that are loaded on to factor 1 are the following variables: Interesting customs and cultures (0.789), Cultural and historical attractions (0.765), Beautiful architecture and buildings (0.758), Friendly people (0.743), stable political situation (0.478) and safe place to travel (0.429). Thus factor 1 is labelled as *Attraction to Omani culture and behavior*.

The variables that heavily load on factor 2 are related to the aspects of environment factors. The variables are: Beautiful beaches and islands (0.699), Restful and relaxing places (0.605), Pleasant climate (0.566), Cleanliness (0.511), Scenic and natural beauty (0.493), Easy access to Oman (0.471), Family & children friendly destination (0.466). Thus these factors are labelled as *Attraction towards Environment factors*.

The six variables that are loaded heavily on factor 3 are related to Entertainment facilities in Oman. The variables that are loaded on factor 3 are: Quality golf courses (0.767), Modern cities (0.645), Nightlife & adults entertainment (0.618), Good value for the money (0.506), Variety of outdoor activities (0.490) and Easy access to alcoholics (0.454). Therefore, they are labelled as *Attraction towards Entertainment factors*.

The variables that are loaded heavily on factor 4 are related to Hospitality services and Infrastructure. The variables loaded heavily on factor 4 are Language difficulties (0.721), Opportunity for shopping (0.598), A variety of cuisines (food) (0.577), Crowded and traffic jam (0.559), Efficient local transportation services (0.484). Thus factor 4 is labelled as *Attraction to Hospitality services and Infrastructure*.

The variables that are loaded heavily on factor 5 are: Traditional festivities (0.729), Lack of pollution (0.635) and Cleanliness (0.501). Therefore, they are labelled as *Attraction to festivities and ecofriendly nature*.

The attributes that are heavily loaded on to factor 6 are related to communication, health and adventurous sports. They are Quality health & wellness (0.672), Beautiful diving and snorkeling sites (0.597), Availability of English & direction (0.531), Romantic places for newlyweds or couples (0.472). They are labeled as *Attraction towards Quality services and sportive places*.

The two attributes that are heavily loaded on to factor 7 are related to safety and security to the tourists in Oman. The variables are: Opportunity for learning experience (0.779) and safe place to travel (0.419). Thus this factor is labeled as *Attraction due to safety and security*.

The attributes that are loaded on to factor 8 are related to ecotourism and adventure. The variables are: safe place to travel (0.546), opportunity for adventure (0.536) and friendly destination for ecotourism (-0.523). Thus this factor is labeled as *Attraction towards ecotourism and adventure*.

The eight sub-scales of factor analysis are: *Attraction to Omani culture and behavior*, *Attraction towards Environment factors*, *Attraction towards Entertainment factors*, *Attraction to Hospitality services and Infrastructure*, *Attraction to festivities and ecofriendly nature*, *Attraction towards Quality services and sportive places*, *Attraction due to safety and security*, and *Attraction towards ecotourism and adventure*.

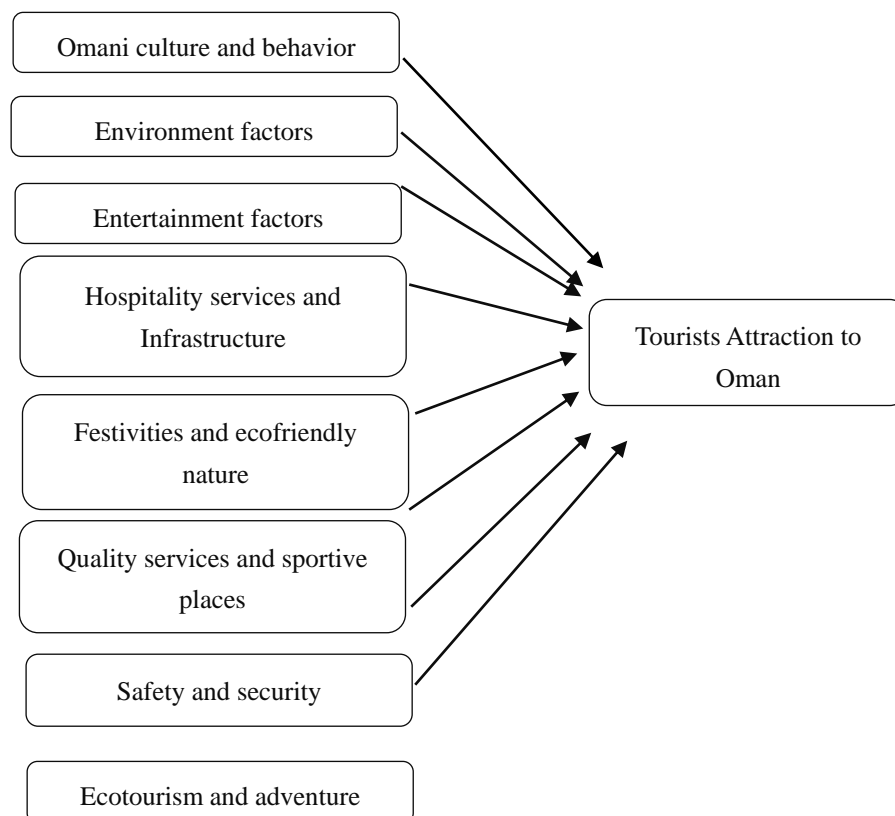


Figure 2. Eight factors that attract tourists to Oman

5. Results of the Study

1. 23% of the tourists are attracted by the various attractive places in Muscat. 16% of the international tourists are attracted by the places in Nizwa and 13% of the tourists like the desert places on Sharqia region. Thus souqs, places of historical importance and the naturally attractive areas like the mountains and wadis are also attracted the tourists.
2. The average satisfaction is calculated as 7.99 out of 10. It is found that 20% of the tourists are highly satisfied by the places in Oman. 67% of the international tourists have medium level of satisfaction. Only 13% of the tourists stated that they have low level of satisfaction. Thus there is much scope for tourism potential in Oman.
3. The most consistent variable that affects the tourists is that they feel Omani people as friendly (19.46). The second most consistent variable is that they feel Oman as a safe place to visit (20.04). The factors that are not relevant for the tourists are accommodation, friendly place for ecotourism. From this analysis, the most relevant attributes are ranked as follows: Friendly people, safe place to travel, scenic and natural beauty, cultural and historic attractions, availability of English and proper direction.
4. Factor analysis revealed the extraction of eight factors that attract the inbound of tourists to Sultanate of Oman. They are Attraction to Omani culture and behavior, Attraction towards Environment factors, Attraction towards Entertainment factors, Attraction to Hospitality services and Infrastructure, Attraction to festivities and ecofriendly nature, Attraction towards Quality services and sportive places, Attraction due to safety and security, and Attraction towards ecotourism and adventure.

6. Recommendations

1. Ministry of Tourism should take measures in tourism promotion by adding more golf courses and increasing the adults' entertainment facilities.
2. The authorities must ensure quality medical facilities for the tourists as well as improving the infrastructural facilities in the tourist places.
3. There is a need to improve the transportation sector and the tourist should be supported and guided with new booking system for the hotels.
4. In beaches, deserts and mountains, adventurous sports can be provided to attract more tourists. Diversification of outdoor activities such as mountaineering, windsurfing, scuba diving, sand skiing and professional photography.
5. Ministry of Tourism can take measures to start their own restaurant chains in major tourist places to provide different type of food appropriate for the tourists.
6. The Ministry of Tourism should increase the traditional festivities because almost of tourists like it.
7. Most of the tourists face a barrier in the language. The Ministry should develop efficient way for the tourists to understand the language

7. Conclusion

The present study was aimed to understand the satisfaction level of international tourists in Oman, the factors that affects tourism and the challenges faced by the tourists To make the tourism industry better day by day, the government must provide the needs of tourists and encourage young people to take the lead in tourism and attract the private sector in tourism projects that benefit the citizen and the city. The government should take measures by developing a strategy to improve tourism. Awareness about Oman's culture and tourism should be promoted through media for attracting internal tourists and international tourists. This study is able to provide adequate information for the Ministry of Tourism on International tourists. The Ministry of Tourism should also maintain attributes such as recreational and culturally related features, because they are considered to be Oman's strengths. Ministry of Tourism should ensure efficient allocation of resources and marketing efforts to improve and sustain tourism in the country.

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